GHANA ACADEMY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES (GAAS)
PROJECT ON MOTIVATING HIGHER EDUCATION REFORMS IN GHANA – TOWARDS EQUITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

EXPANDING PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES – EFFECT ON ACCESS, QUALITY, AND SUSTAINABILITY

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INTRODUCTION

- The current Higher Education (HE) ecosystem has been framed by various interventions, policies, and reforms, among others, introduced before and during the 4th Republic

- Higher education as a right, according to the 4th Republican Constitution implies equitable access

OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER

Objective I

Explore the implications of the expansion of public universities over the past three decades on equitable access, quality, and sustainability.

Objective 2

Explore areas of key challenges and successes resulting from both past and recent higher education reforms based on available evidence.

Objective 3

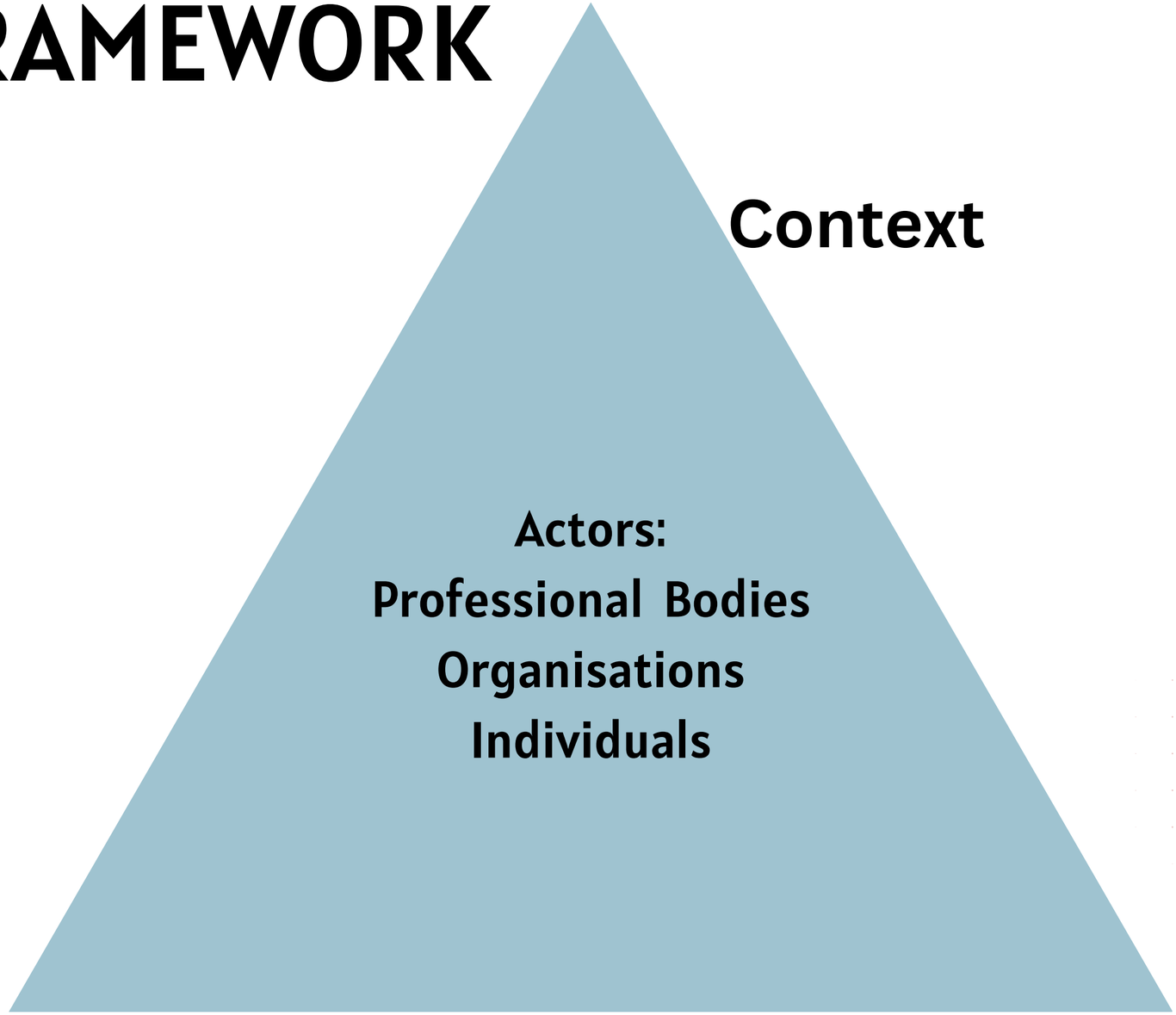
Proffer recommendations for strategic management-level decisions and future policy reforms.

METHODOLOGY

Review and analysis of documents

- Studies on public university education expansion both in and outside Ghana
- National and international education thresholds (SDGs, 1992 Constitution, etc)
- Interventions introduced into public university expansion within the context of equitable access
- Official statistics on admissions, enrolments and related data
- Informal consultations with public university administrators

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK



CONTENT AND CONTEXT OF THE REFORMS

- Some policies/reforms introduced before the 4th Republic
  - The 1961 Education Act:
    - Compulsory and tuition-free primary and middle school education
    - Nationalization of the UG and KNUST, & the establishment of UCC
    - Government had full responsibility for public university education

CONTENT AND CONTEXT OF THE REFORMS CONT'D

- The 1987 Education Reforms and outcomes:
  - University Rationalisation Committee (URC) and its proposals, leading to the Tertiary Education Reforms in 1991
  - The decline of investment in public university education due to the withdrawal of government subsidies in feeding, textbooks, etc., cost sharing, and the introduction of academic and residential user fees
  - Reduced access to public university education due to increased number of applicants and cost

CONTENT AND CONTEXT OF THE REFORMS CONT'D

- The 1992 Fourth Republican Constitution
- The Ghana Education Reform 2007
- The Education Strategy Plan (2018-2030)
    - Emphasized the duty of the state to provide higher education to all the citizenry (Articles 25 and 38).
    - Espoused ideals of equitable access, spatial balance, and the need for skills acquisition, etc.
    - Made provision for complete state funding of university education (e.g. free textbooks and feeding), to make university education accessible to all and of high quality

ISSUES AND KEY FINDINGS

Evidence of Expansion

1. Increase in the number of public universities from 5 in 1993 to 25 in 2022.

2. Diversified entry points, alternative routes, and learning modules (e.g. matured students' entry, distance, sandwich, satellite campuses, etc.).

3. Expansion in infrastructure and increase in student enrolment from 15,365 in 1993 to 361,804 in 2022 (GTEC, 2023).

Effect of Public University Expansion on access- some successes

Improved spatial balancing of public universities due to the location of new universities, and establishment of technical/specialised institutions.

Awareness and participation of minority groups in public university education

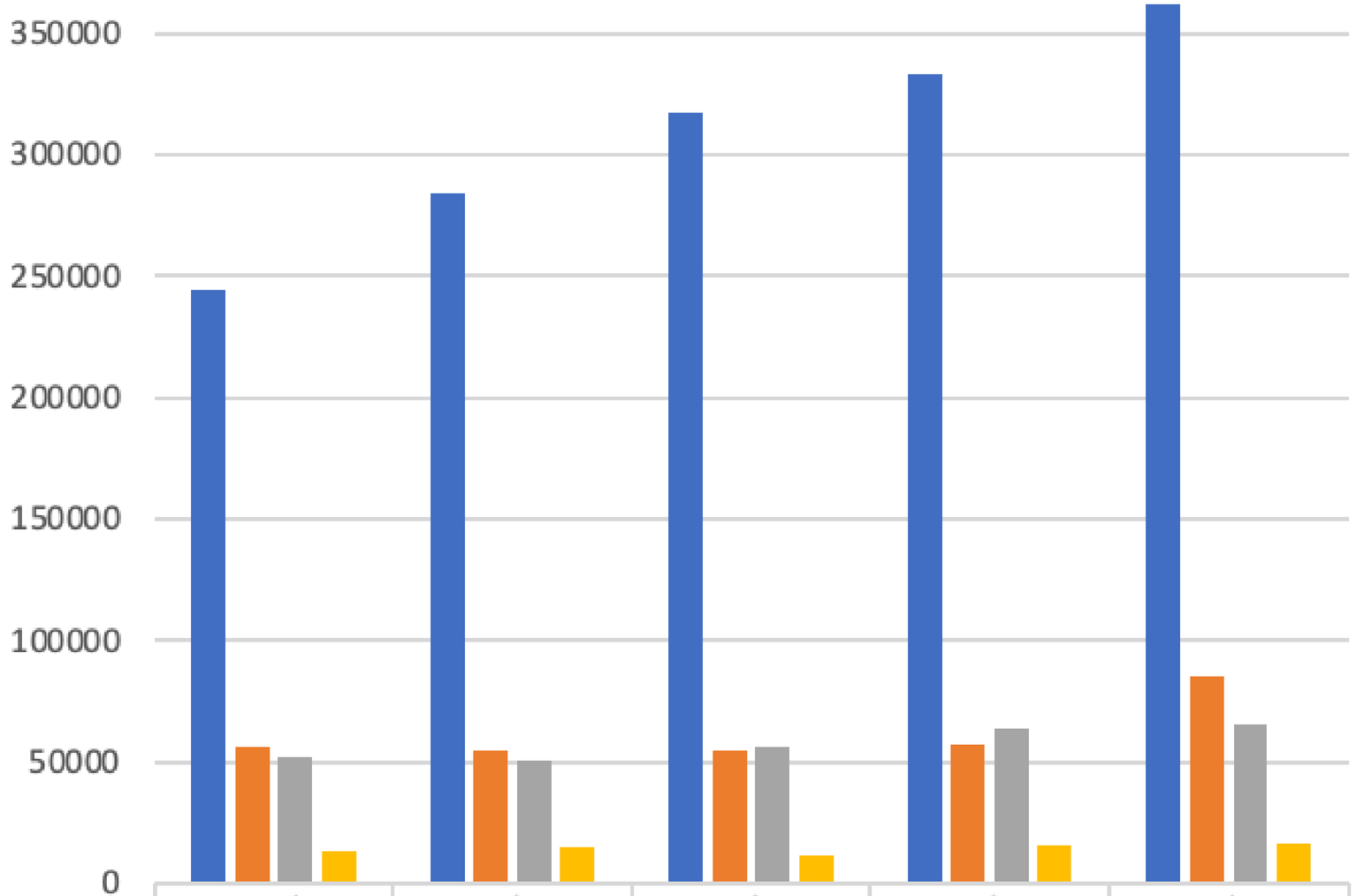
- The institution of special concessions to poor students by some public universities.
- Affirmative Action (AA) for females, leading to improvement in female enrolment with a ratio of 35:65 as of 2021.
- Legislations leading to an increase in the enrolment of persons with disabilities (PWDs), (for example, 22 at the University of Ghana in 2009 increased to 75 in 2016).

Effect of Public University Expansion on access- some challenges

Making university education accessible to all (1992 Constitution) on the availability of space and capacity makes HE participation conditional, resulting in imbalances in general access.

Inclusion and equity issues:

- The cost of public university attendance impedes equitable access by needy students (e.g., the need to pay for academic and residential facilities, meals, etc.)
- Affirmative Action and admission concessions for women not operational
- Lack of quota for people with disabilities



	2017/18	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022
Public University Enrolment	244079	284058	317027	332786	361804
Public University Graduation	56,346	54826	54267	56847	85429
Public Technical University Enrolment	52533	50839	56610	63728	65200
Public Technical University Graduation	13533	14803	11950	15868	16738

Public University Enrolment Public University Graduation

Effect of Public University Expansion on access-challenges cont'd

1. Non-availability of data on minority groups (e.g. PWDs) and dropouts for tracking the entry and exit trends of students and monitoring and supporting students who may be at risk of dropping out.

2. Programmes in STEM and Humanities: The 60:40 policy in favour of STEM-related programmes for national transformation through industrialization is yet to be realized, with current enrolment standing at 67:33.

3. Fee payment for income generation in some over-subscribed programmes leading to 'commercialisation of university education' and impedes access to such programmes by needy students.

4. Gross Tertiary Enrolment (GTE) target of 25% for 2021 achieved 20% at medium-term.

Effect of Public University Expansion on quality

The learning environment:

- Infrastructural deficits, overcrowded lecture halls and poor IT services
- Alternative routes and learning modules, i.e., through distance learning with poor learning environments and inadequate support
- Large classes (lecturer-student ratio at 39:1 instead of 27:1 for humanities and 18:1 for sciences) and delivery approaches impeding the use of pedagogies that promote problem-solving and critical thinking skills.

Some experiences of students in public universities

You see, oftentimes we learn about the theory, theory, theory, but then the practical aspect is what we are lacking. We need to garner the knowledge, yes, but then the practicality is something that we are lacking. (Students' FGD).

The practical aspect is not there. So even if someone can be a graduate and even have first class and employed, he cannot perform well in the office. Then it means all the years that you spent in school, excuse me to say, we just wasted it. (Students' FGD).

Effect of Public University Expansion on quality cont'd

Inadequate resources e.g. technology (internet provision to reach a wide spectrum of learners, projectors, smart boards)

Lack of materials for students with special needs

Irregular opportunities for staff capacity building

Some programmes appear irrelevant, given the changing needs of society and the need for a transformative university education

Effect of Public University Expansion on quality cont'd

Quality of graduates produced:

- Inadequately prepared/mismatched skills for the knowledge economy, and labour market, e.g. knowledge and use of technology, critical thinking, problem-solving, communication skills, etc.

- Lack of adequate teacher-student connections due to large classes negatively affects students' confidence to pursue challenging tasks

Concerns of a public university lecturer

Have we considered the conditions under which we work on our various campuses? Have we thought of our continuously increasing workload? Have we carefully examined the number of hours we work daily (from 6:30am to 6:30pm)? Have we critically assessed the number of colleagues who are dying and what is killing them? Are we aware that our employers expect the best from us but fail to provide simple working tools such as computers, etc.?

Concerns of a public university lecturer cont'd

Have we looked at the state of our offices? Have we taken note of the nature of lecture theatres we operate from? … we are marking scripts, attending meetings, attending workshops and conferences, teaching sandwich, assessing theses, working with our graduate students. Are we happy that one lecturer is expected to mark, score, screen and enter the scores of about 1000 students, each of which contains 3 questions within three weeks?

Effects of Public University Expansion on sustainability

- Lack of quota/data on entry and exit trends of students (including minorities) to monitor and track their access and retention
- Non-operational Affirmative Action and admission concessions for women imply a perpetuation of the gender gap
- Cost of public university education means inequitable access by needy students

Effects of Public University Expansion on sustainability cont'd

- Increase in student numbers without a corresponding expansion in infrastructure leading to overcrowding, inappropriate pedagogies, and poor development of relevant skills for industry.

- Dropout of socio-economically disadvantaged students and females, and need for tracking and retention mechanisms

Effects of Public University Expansion on sustainability cont'd

- Mismatch between industry needs and skills of university products leading to unemployment and 'under-employment'
- Inadequate academic staff to teach and supervise the academic work of a large number of students

CONCLUSIONS

1. There is evidence of expansion of public universities in terms of institutions and students

2. Institutions are not intentional about equitable access to minority groups

3. New universities are established without adequate planning of resources, and there is a lack of maintenance of existing infrastructure

4. Public university graduates seem to be inadequately prepared due to quality concerns; skills gap between industry needs and university products is partially attributable to the nature of public university curricula

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Planning of infrastructural expansion and resources in the establishment of new universities and increase in student enrolment

- Merging duplicated programmes, e.g., by different institutions in the same city/district/region under resource constraints, and few students enrolled, in the face of scarce public funds.

- Reforming curricula to meet industry needs and also, to respond to graduate unemployment

RECOMMENDATIONS CONT'D

- Partnership/engagement between government, academia and industry (triple helix model of innovation) to address the mismatch between industry needs and university products to curb graduate redundancy and unskilled labour force

- Increasing public-private partnerships for expansion of facilities (Build Operate Transfer)

RECOMMENDATIONS CONT'D

- Being more responsive to the diversity of students, and ensuring that conditions facilitate their full participation, e.g. females, poor students, PWDs

- Being intentional about affirmative action for females and concessions for PWDs and poor students by instituting and regularly reviewing quota systems

- Ensuring that statistics on all students are accurately captured and regularly updated to facilitate policy actions on relevant groups

RECOMMENDATIONS CONT'D

- Reviewing universities' cost-sharing arrangements to make other actors and beneficiaries more accountable for the use of HE facilities

- Improving retention and successful completion, such as institutional commitment to students' retention and success, student support systems, and need-based financial aid programmes

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THANK YOU