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Enhancing Tertiary Education to Help Solve Global Development Challenges

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Introduction

The availability of tertiary education, including universities, vocational schools, research laboratories, and nursing schools, is a staple of developed, high-functioning societies. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development declared that education is the key for achieving all 17 Goals outlined in the report (UN General Assembly 71st Session, 2017). The transition from developing to developed countries comes in conjunction with tertiary education, as well-educated people are more equipped to deal with economic shock, are more employable, and more likely to facilitate innovation in their home country (The World Bank, 2017). Tertiary education has proven to be essential for the sustainable development of both the individual and society by consistently fostering a higher level of civic participation, environmental consciousness, and higher tax revenues (The World Bank, 2017).

Quality education allows those in developing countries to break from the cycle of poverty and create a workforce that is capable of competing in the global knowledge-based economy. According to a report released by the World Bank Group, students in Latin America and the Caribbean who had completed a higher education program earned twice as much as students who have earned only a high school diploma (The World Bank, 2017). The issue, however, is that developing countries often lack the resources and the stability necessary to finance tertiary education in a meaningful and inclusive way (Hosni, 2004).

The high importance the international community gives to the issue is made clear in the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the guidance for coordinating all international development activity agreed in 2015. SDG Goal 4 states: "Education is the key that will allow many other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be achieved. When people are able to get quality education they can break from the cycle of poverty. Education therefore helps to reduce inequalities and to reach gender equality. It also empowers people everywhere to live more healthy and sustainable lives. Education is also crucial to fostering tolerance between people and contributes to more peaceful societies." (UN Sustainable Development Goal 4, 2015).

For UN Member States, education problems pose tricky issues of standards and sovereignty, and when aid is involved, a difficult gap between donor and recipient counties. All countries seek to improve their educational systems, but many want to maximize their sovereign freedom to make decisions and protect local decision-making. To advocates of international normative principles, however, such national sovereignty often is thin veneer to protect established interests and block change. This is clearly seen among some Non-Aligned Member states especially in parts of the Middle East, Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, but increasingly in governments in Europe and North America under the rule of strong-men governments. Many accept or even support reform, but demand it be under their personal
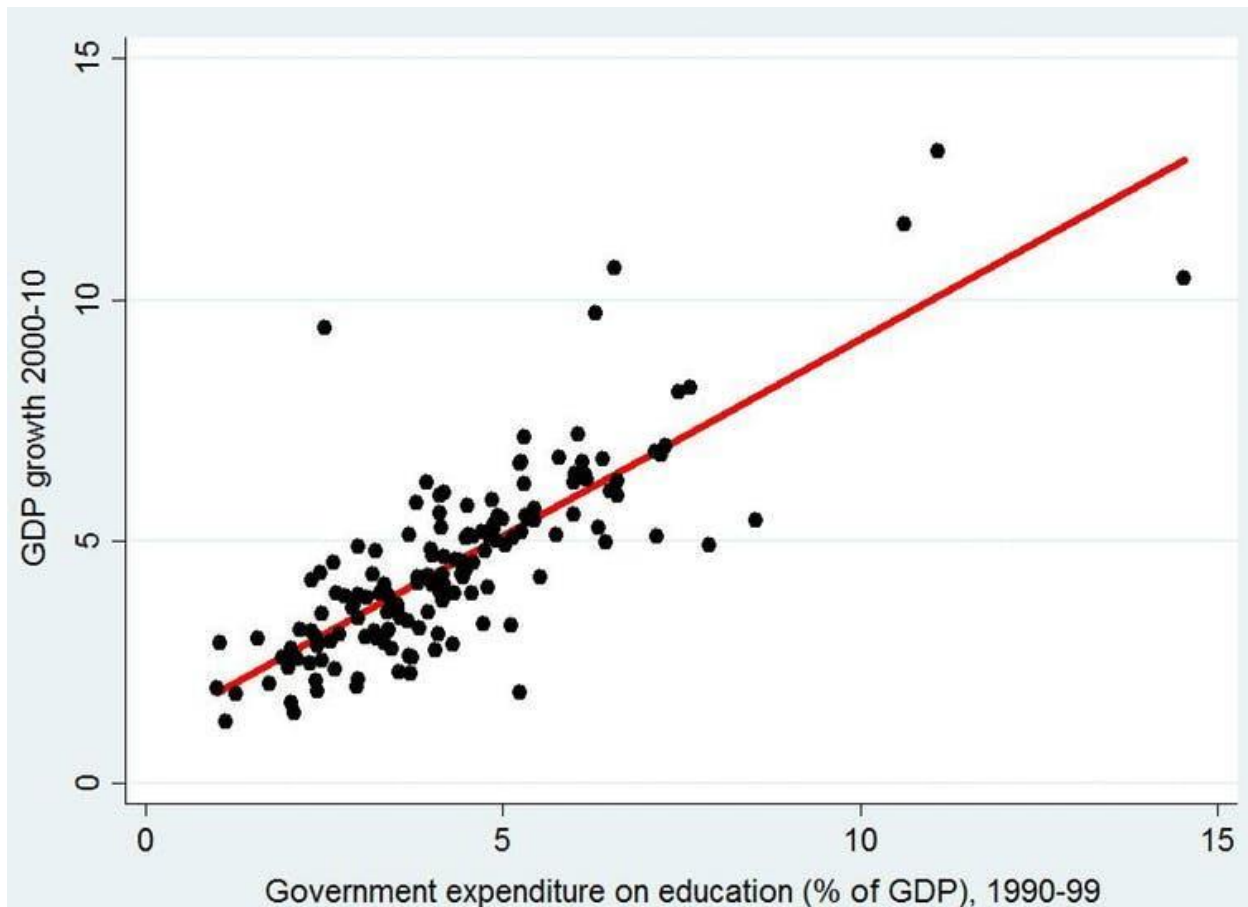
control and service their political interests, including aiding favored groups of political supporters.

When aid money is involved, the key question usually is control. Donor governments want all assistance to conform to their standards, eliminate corruption and misuse, and be distributed fairly. But recipient governments often need to maximize their own sovereign

control and serve their own political purposes, such as rewarding their supporters. The result can be a stalemate, with donors hesitant to give, and sometimes recipients resistant to accepting. Even aid channeled through independent organizations like the World Bank Group or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is vulnerable to these quarrels. Such practical problems always must be navigated, even by the best-intended plans.

Source: (Carmignani, 2016)

History and Background

The availability of higher education in developing countries has been steadily increasing over the past two decades due to heightened public and private support, an increasingly globalized economy, and research revealing the high rates of return of tertiary education. The majority of developing countries, mainly in the continent of Africa and the Latin American and Caribbean regions have voiced their support for the creation of higher education programs. Universities in these regions have historically not been sustainable because of the lack of research opportunities presented to students (De Wit, Jaramillo, Gacel-Avila, & Knight, 2005).

The largest period of growth for tertiary education in Africa arose in the post-colonial period between 1970 and 1990 (Bollag, 2004). African development plans put an emphasis on tertiary education with the purpose of alleviating poverty, closing educational gaps, and efficiently managing resources (Bollag, 2004). In Latin America, tertiary education programs put an emphasis on vocational training and tailoring education and research to the societal needs. Higher education in the Middle East historically consisted of religious universities until a shift after the Industrial Revolution, which resulted in more secular, globally applicable teaching curricula (Romani, 2009). Wealthy, oil-producing, Middle Eastern states have been able to maintain a consistent standard of higher education.

Many regard higher education as a symbol of political power or means of promoting nationalism (Romani, 2009). Economic and social development is often a result of increased access to tertiary education. The main factors that have prevented the expansion of tertiary education in these regions are lack of financing, gender disparity, political instability and 'brain drain', which refers to the significant extent of

emigration of the highly educated citizens of a region.

The Current Situation

There is widespread agreement in the UN General Assembly that the development of tertiary education programs is essential to economic and social growth. The major issues in achieving these goals are:

1. Counteracting violence and political instability: Extended crises in North Africa and West Asia discourage students from completing their tertiary education. The Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) published a technical guide promoting state intervention in preventing educational institutions from attack. Terrorist attacks against universities, such as the Taliban's attack on Bacha Khan University in Pakistan, disheartened the global higher education community and discouraged the attendance of universities in states ravaged by terrorist groups. These factors inhibit existing universities from providing a quality education, and can prevent students from degree completion (Kapit, Mazzarino, Downing, & Manivannan, 2018).

2. Closing the gender gap in education: The promotion of tertiary education for women has historically proven to be both economically and socially beneficial. Tertiary education for women creates a larger and more diverse workforce as well as solves humanitarian issues such as women's health and gender discrimination (UNESCO Secretariat, 1998). Closing the gender gap in education promotes social wellbeing and equal representation of both genders within the economic and political sectors of each

country. The education of women has proven to help women recognize their rights and the value they have to society (UNESCO Secretariat, 1998).
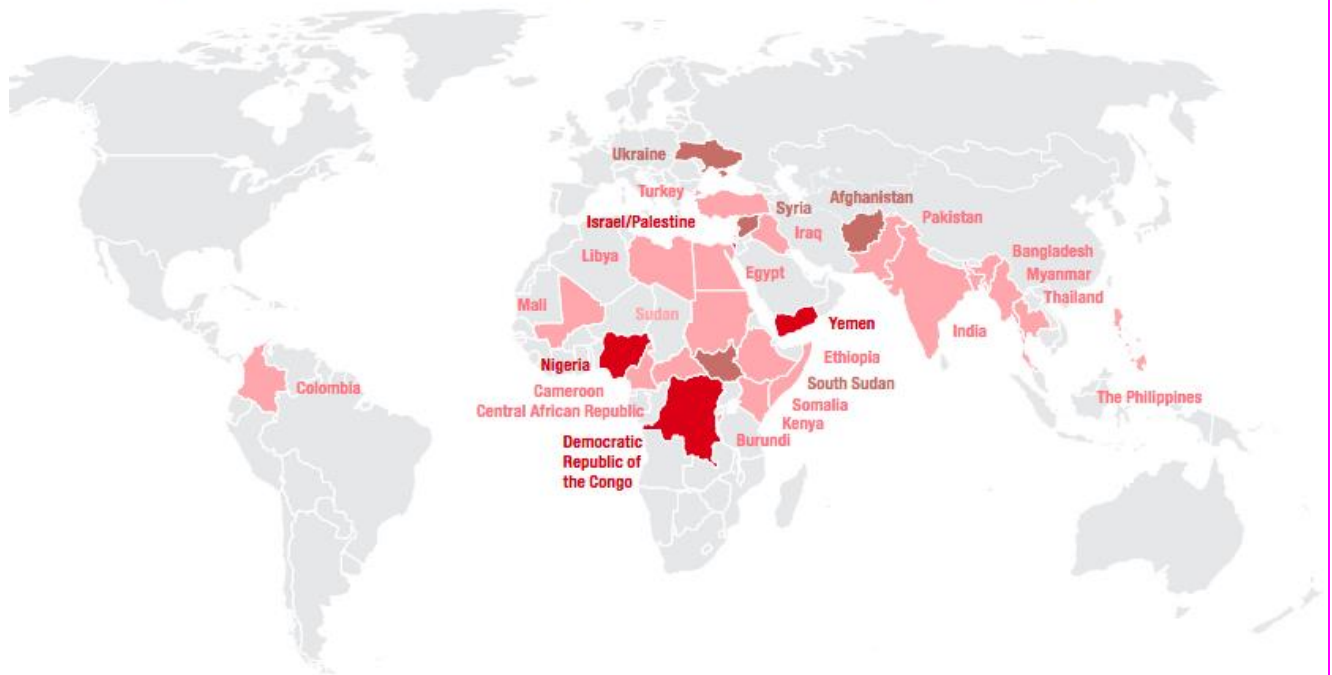
3. <u>Obtaining and sustaining financing:</u> Without the presence of sustained funding, tertiary education programs cannot be maintained. The enhancement of higher education requires participation from all parties involved, including strong support from students, families, government, teachers, and private donors. The development of tertiary education demands dependable usage of both public and private resources (World Conference on Higher Education, 1998).

4. <u>Ensuring the quality of educational programs:</u> While more people than ever are receiving a tertiary education in developing countries, only a portion of those people complete their education with the skills necessary to compete in the global economy. In order to create effective educational programs, the United Nations must ensure both the quality and relevance of education. The Task Force on Higher Education and Society, expressed the importance of higher education in stating, "Higher education is expected to embody norms of social interaction, such as open debate and argumentative reason; to emphasize the autonomy and self-reliance of its individual members; and to reject discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, religious belief, or social class. The best higher education institution is a model and an impetus for creating a modern civil society." (Hosni, 2004).

Profiled countries with reports of attacks on schools, 2013-2017

Countries where reports documented 1000 or more attacks on schools

Countries where reports documented 500-999 attacks on schools

Countries where reports documented fewer than 500 incidents of attacks on schools

Ukraine
Turkey
Israel/Palestine
Libya
Mali
Sudan
Egypt
Syria
Iraq
Afghanistan
Pakistan
Bangladesh
Myanmar
Thailand
Colombia
Nigeria
Cameroon
Central African Republic
Democratic Republic of the Congo
Burundi
Yemen
Ethiopia
South Sudan
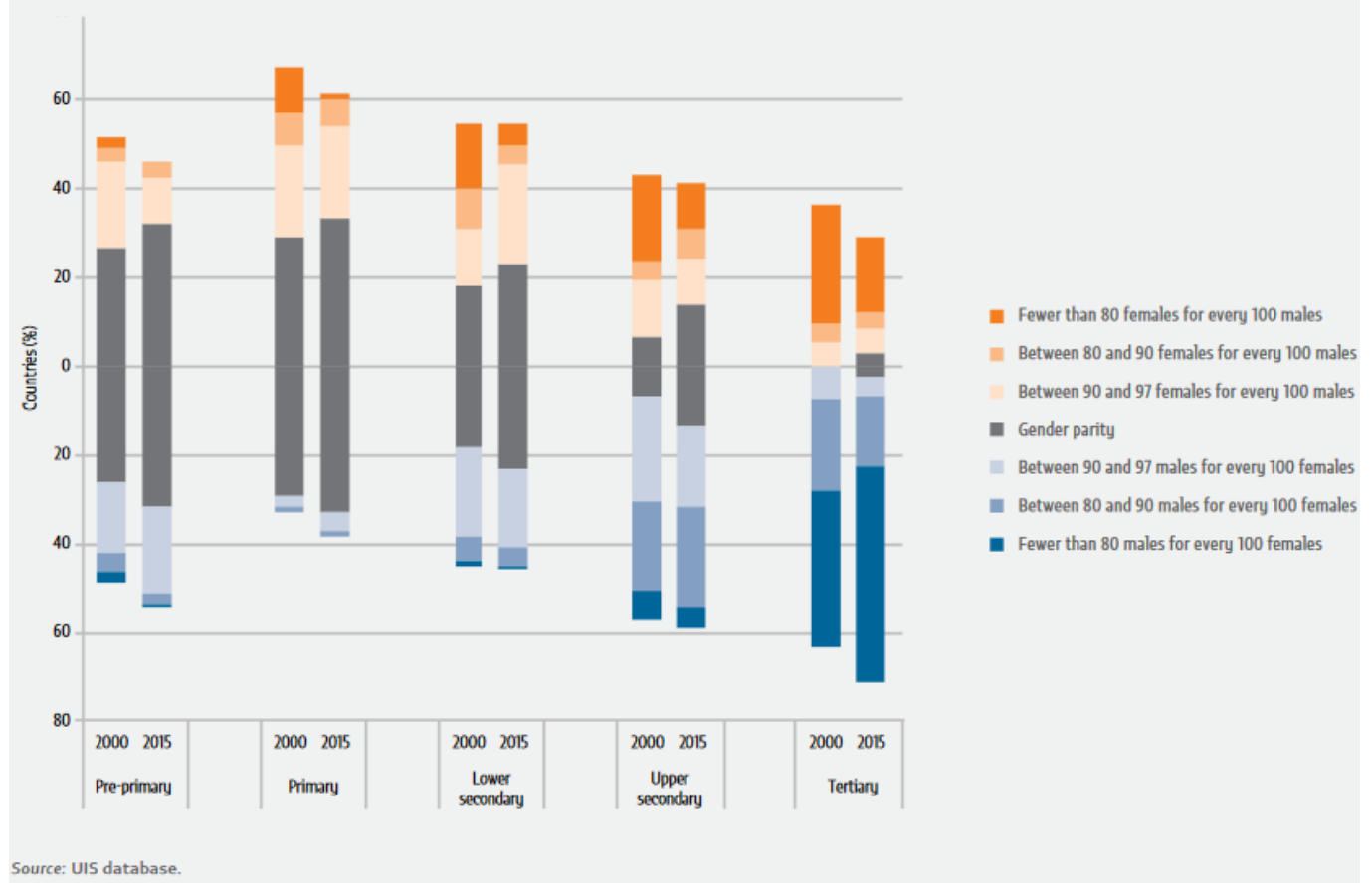Somalia
Kenya
India
The Philippines

Source: (Kapit, Mazzarino, Downing, & Manivannan, 2018)

FIGURE 1:

More countries have achieved gender parity, but disparities persist, especially at higher education levels
Percentage of countries by level of gender parity index of gross enrolment ratio, by education level, 2000 and 2015

Source: UIS database.

Source: (Schmidt, 2017)

The Role of the United Nations

The Member States of the United Nations have worked to provide financing in order to create sustainable and ultimately autonomous tertiary education programs in developing countries. Between 2014 and 2020, Member States in the European Union bloc are expected to provide funding totaling €4.7 Billion (5.4 Billion USD) (European Commission, 2018). Member States emphasize a joint response strategy in order to

facilitate development that is uniquely tailored to each Member State's own development.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has been working to create autonomous programs to promote equal access to tertiary education and free flow of scholars and ideas (Hosni, 2004). UNESCO and its body of delegates have

published resolutions outlining their primary goals and actions towards financing. While the United Nations has a great amount of power in international policy, its resolutions cannot infringe upon the sovereignty of an individual nation, nor can it restrict government autonomy or individual freedoms. The majority of the conflict that surrounds current resolutions is centered on the imposition of Western models of education in developing countries that share a dissimilar job market or cultural view of education (Leach, 2015).

Landmark UN Resolutions

UNESCO and the World Bank proposed The Task Force on Higher Education and Society, which first convened in 1998 to explore the future of higher education in developing states. In the publication *Higher Education in Developing Countries: Peril and Promise,* The Task Force outlined their arguments in favor of the development of higher education development and possible solutions to the outstanding problems (Hosni, 2004). The Task Force recommended the creation of a body of students with a flexible general education. They suggested a mixed funding model consisting of input from the private sector, philanthropic institutions, students, consistent public funding, and strong support and leadership from the international community.
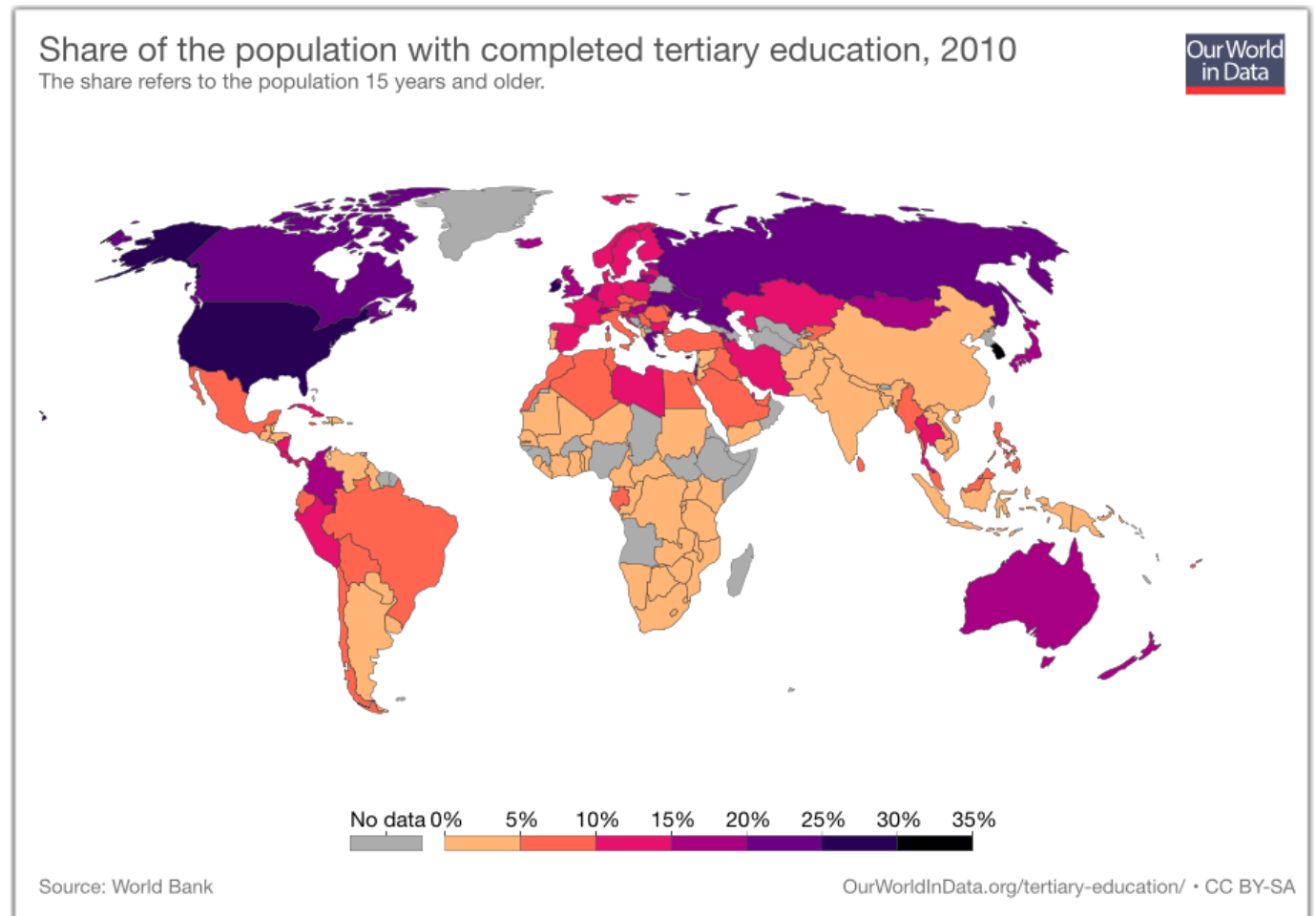
Additionally, The Task Force recommended the instatement of a holistic and adaptable system of education that will analyze which parts of higher education contribute most to the public good. In order to connect developing states to the global mainstream of education, the Task Force suggests that Member States increase access to technologies in order to facilitate high quality, low cost education. Autonomy is the ultimate goal, which the UN can only achieve by encouraging more efficient management of governance in developing countries to ensure that programs will continue to have effective returns after UN bodies become less involved (Hosni, 2004).

The participants at the World Conference on Higher Education, held in Paris in October 1998 published the UN resolution: *World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty-First Century: Vision and Action* October 1998 (UN Documents, n.d.). This resolution aims to finance higher education as a public service by rallying public support. The major focus of this resolution is to create equity of access for tertiary education with a focus on research. The importance of research in tertiary education lies in the need to create sustainable programs that are well-suited to the labor demands within the developing states in order to facilitate successful integration into the labor market. Another major issue addressed in the resolution is the integration of well-educated citizens and counteracting the 'brain drain,' without restricting freedoms of travel and emigration. Additionally, the resolution strives to eliminate gender stereotyping in education for the purpose of increasing participation of women in tertiary educational programs (UN Documents, n.d.).

Country and Bloc Positions

Share of the population with completed tertiary education, 2010
The share refers to the population 15 years and older.

Our World
in Data

No data 0%   5%   10%   15%   20%   25%   30%   35%

Source: World Bank   OurWorldInData.org/tertiary-education/ • CC BY-SA

Source: (Roser, & Ortiz-Ospina, 2018).

Asia/ Pacific Islands - Member States of the Asian region have put an emphasis on ensuring the sustainability of educational programs and agree that government policy plays a crucial role in the development of higher education. They feel that globalization presents a challenge to developing nations that are only beginning to participate in the global job market (Nomura, & Abe, 2018). Because their own universities are small and weak, their immediate goal in higher education is access to university and other educational institutions in other countries. In the

long term, regional Member States expect support for advanced universities within the region.

China - Has declared that it will maintain a major focus on development in conjunction with security (Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations, 2016). China is in favor of inclusivity and openness of development. China shares the position with the rest of the BRICS block of the UN that financing is the key to sustainable development (Jieyi,

2017). But Chinese leaders are adamant that educational reform must be supervised by the state for the good of all its people. It strongly resists ethnic pressure for education in local or ethnic languages, reforms that might weaken support throughout China for the rule of the Chinese Communist Party.

European Union - The European Union is a primary provider of funding for the development of tertiary education in developing countries. Individual countries in the EU have formed partnerships with developing countries in order to provide funding for education. For example, Norway is a primary source of funding for education in Ghana (UN General Assembly 71st Session, 2017). This bloc holds the position that, given a sufficient amount of funding and partnership with developing countries, it is possible to create autonomous and successful tertiary education programs in developing countries.

The European Union already invests extensively in educational reform, especially in Eastern Europe, Central Asia, the Middle East and North Africa. Educational reform is seen as a way tore duce pressure for migration.

Latin America/ Caribbean - Several delegates from the Latin American regions have released statements declaring their governments' plans to increase spending on tertiary education. Their primary goals are to create rapid growth in the educated population and use tertiary education as a means to prevent crime and promote development (UN General Assembly 71st Session, 2017).

Latin American strongly supports raising universal standards for all people, but it is cautious about funding reforms, and hopes new means of financial support can be found. Several Latin American Member States also expect their neighbors to open their doors for education of all

people in the region at their best educational institutions.

North Africa/Middle East - UN delegates from North Africa/Middle East and those active in combating the Syrian refugee crisis have released statements emphasizing the gravity of attacks on education by non-state actors as a primary inhibitor of the development of tertiary education programs (UN General Assembly 71st Session, 2017).

Some Middle Eastern governments are suspicious of global mandates with might affect their societies. They support higher standards but seek to avoid social disruption. Reforms that could challenge national and religious traditions may arouse their opposition.

Russia - The majority of the Russian Federation's actions to provide tertiary education have been specific to creating educational programs within the Russian Federation. The country shares the view that education is essential to facilitating innovation and economic growth, however, the country has not made efforts toward providing education in developing countries (Higher School of Economics, 2016). Russian delegates to the UN hope to use this topic to build support for Russian universities, attracting a fairer share of global educational funding and prominence.

Sub-Saharan Africa - views higher education as a gateway to economic and social development (Ogom, 2007). Many African nations have looked to Ethiopia as a model for sustainable growth of and sufficient investment in tertiary education. Select African countries have partnered with other UN Member States to receive funding in order to grow their tertiary education programs. Many fear that a Western model of education will not suit the needs of current developing nations (Leach, 2015).
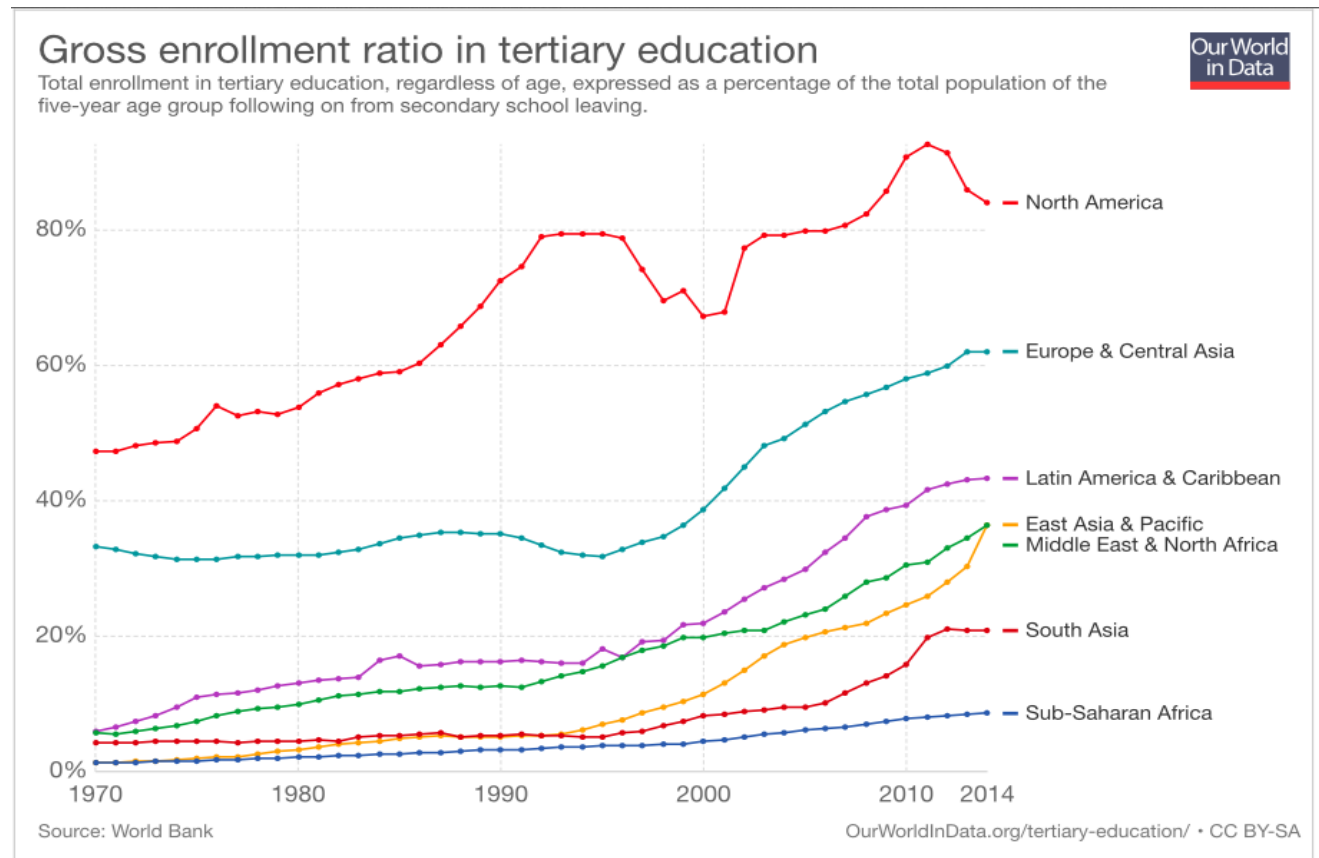
African countries also demand that support for education come with foreign economic support to make it possible, or changes in international trade that provide them with the funding they require.

United States - The United States Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, is a controversial figure known for her support of school choice and charter schools. The United States encourages economic competitiveness and believes that by elevating the economies of other nations by providing education for high-skilled jobs, the global economy will benefit. In an increasingly knowledge-based economy, the

United States believes that tertiary education is necessary for any nation to compete in the global economy and promote social equality (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

The United States encourages all countries to work for progress within their own sovereign political systems. It does not support mandates from the UN that bind sovereign nations, nor does it support resolutions that call for additional government spending, without matching cuts elsewhere.

Gross enrollment ratio in tertiary education

Total enrollment in tertiary education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the total population of the five-year age group following on from secondary school leaving.

Our World in Data

- North America
- Europe & Central Asia
- Latin America & Caribbean
- East Asia & Pacific
- Middle East & North Africa
- South Asia
- Sub-Saharan Africa

80%

60%

40%

20%

0%

1970   1980   1990   2000   2010 2014

Source: World Bank

OurWorldInData.org/tertiary-education/ • CC BY-SA

Source: (Roser, & Ortiz-Ospina, 2018).

Proposals for Action

For UN Member States, education issues pose tricky dilemmas of standards and sovereignty, and when aid is involved, a difficult gap between donor and recipient counties. All countries seek to improve their educational systems, but many want to maximize their sovereign freedom to make decisions and protect local decision-making. To advocates of international normative principles, however, such national sovereignty often is thin veneer to protect established interests and block change. This is clearly seen among some Non-Aligned Member states especially in parts of the Middle East, Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, but increasingly in governments in Europe and North America under the rule of strong-men governments. Many accept or even support reform, but demand it be under their personal control and service their political interests, including aiding favored groups of political supporters.

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Among major options under consideration:

Counteract external forces such as war, famine, and political instability that prevent completion of a tertiary education: Safety and stability drive active participation in and fulfillment of tertiary education programs. 50% of students that remain out of school are in conflict-affected areas. The UN can ensure that the world's population is able to receive quality education by first evaluating the external forces that prohibit college-ready students from obtaining a tertiary education.

Facilitate efficient and sustainable programs of funding involving both developing and developed countries: It is vital that both developing and developed countries take part in tailoring higher education programs to meet their unique budgetary and social needs. Raising the role of government in maintaining quality education is the key reducing UN engagement in order to achieve the ultimate goal of state autonomy.

Avoid solely depending on a Western model of education (Leach, 2015): Many of the early universities in African States are affiliated with or colleges of former colonist powers. Although these colonial superpowers are able to provide adequate funding, the Western format of education is not always relevant to other regions with astoundingly different job markets, which creates what is known as "jobless growth." In order to create autonomous programs, UN Member States must evaluate trends in the economic and social climates in each individual country in order to create effective programs.

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