SECTION ONE

Higher Education and the Public Good

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Re-inserting the 'public good' into higher education transformation¹

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Introduction

This chapter looks at the transformation of higher education systems and institutions, which has been on the agenda of governments and other role players around the world, especially in the last two decades. Claims made about the parameters of higher education transformation have often been linked to a radical and substantive agenda of change (rather than mild reformist tinkering at the edges), but the driving forces, goals and effects of transformation have not been uniform in the different countries and regions where higher education restructuring is underway. Despite the globally homogenising pressure for conformity to particular economic principles, the significant differences in the social, political and moral demands made on the notion of transformation as invoked in the contexts where far-reaching changes in higher education are occurring cannot be ignored. Transformation has been used as much to denote the repositioning of higher education to serve as the more efficient 'handmaiden' of the economy as to signify the drive to align higher education with the democracy and social justice agenda of a new polity, as in South Africa.

An almost universal short-hand explanation for the phenomenon of dramatic change that is altering traditional understandings of the identity of higher education (as of other areas of social life) is the notion of globalisation, under-

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stood both as a set of economic imperatives as well as an 'ideology' (see Currie and Newson, 1998). As in the case of many social systems and structures, higher education institutions have been undergoing dramatic reorganisation, often in conformity with principles which converge around the economic costs and benefits of higher education. Such reorganisation is occurring within a context that principally takes the growth and competitiveness of the economy – whether local or regional or global – as its point of departure and yardstick, rather than the social histories and social development priorities of nation states or regions.

It was a long held and powerfully persuasive World Bank view that higher education offered lower individual and social returns than primary education. This led many governments and policy makers, especially in developing countries, to justify drastic reductions in public investments in higher education, with devastating consequences for once stably functioning universities. This view has now been replaced by a new 'common sense' which acknowledges the social importance and value of higher education, but primarily in its role of enhancing national economic competitiveness within a global knowledge-driven economy. The traditional knowledge responsibilities of universities – research as the production of new knowledge, teaching as the dissemination of knowledge, and community service as the applied use of knowledge for social development – are increasingly being located within the demands of economic productivity and its requirements for particular kinds of knowledge and skills. Stakeholder demands for a greater and more visible measure of social responsiveness from higher education are a feature of transformation and restructuring debates in a number of countries. However, the discourse of accountability and responsiveness in debates about the role and value of higher education is shaped primarily by the expected contribution of higher education to the development of social and economic arrangements which will give a competitive edge to country performance in the global market place.

Fiscal discipline, efficiency and cost-benefit optimisation principles from the world of business are seen as the key to the transformation of higher education in the direction of greater responsiveness to society. Within a paradigm that invokes the 'market', the notion of responsiveness is becoming emptied of most of its content, except for that which advances individual, organisational or national economic competitiveness. The concept of an autonomous intellectual or socially emancipatory role for higher education, where it still features, remains largely at the level of policy rhetoric, with little funding or other policy enabling factors in place to give substance to them. The conse-

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quences of such a one-dimensional approach to higher education responsiveness are severely impoverishing for the broader social role of higher education. Apart from the general problematic consequences of such a shift, analysts have pointed out that the university 'as business' is not even good for business in the long term if this constrains the free development of new ideas and skills which do not look promising or relevant in the short term, but which may very well turn out to hold enormous applied benefits in the future. Such analyses presuppose a complex and non-linear relationship between the generation of ideas, the production and application of 'usable' knowledge and the development of skills, as well as some appropriate accommodation of all of these in seeking to give effect to the purposes of higher education.

The current drive to make higher education more accountable is a response to a powerful and necessary social demand. Invoking notions of efficiency to make higher education less wasteful and self-indulgent may well produce important pedagogical and social benefits. The concerns expressed in this chapter are not, in principle, directed against notions of higher education responsiveness, but rather against an increasing narrowing of the contexts and contents of their usages and the disturbing implications of such trends for the broader values and purposes often associated with higher education. The university valorised by Von Humboldt or John Henry Newman in the 19th century cannot be the model of the higher education institution of the 21st century, but to lose entirely the vision which exalts intellectual life contained in their perspectives would be an impoverishment for both higher education and society. Even if the values and purposes contained in earlier conceptions of the university have been asserted only rhetorically, or benefited only an elite few, their heuristic value as a compass for the best aspirations of higher education for relevance and social accountability should not be underestimated.

I argue in this chapter that what should be a broad notion of social accountability and social responsiveness in the discourse on higher education transformation is being thinned down and reduced to the terms of market responsiveness. In many instances, this is happening in order to comply with the demands of new regulatory frameworks established by the state itself, whose own discourse of accountability is narrowly but overwhelmingly framed by the drive for economic growth and competitiveness or even economic survival within a global arena. Further, I invoke the multiple purposes of higher education and the connection between many of those purposes and the 'public good' as a means of finding a way back to the idea of social responsiveness conceptualised in a more comprehensive fashion. The idea of the

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public good clearly needs more elaboration, both at a general level and specifically in relation to higher education.

For now, it will suffice to indicate it very generally as a set of societal interests that are not reducible to the sum of interests of individuals or groups of individuals and that demarcate a common space within which the content of moral and political goals like democracy and social justice can be negotiated and collectively pursued. What this means for higher education is that transformation, in fidelity to its claimed radical roots, must incorporate goals and purposes which are linked, even if indirectly, to an emancipatory and broad-based social and political agenda. My argument proceeds from the position that the responsiveness of higher education to the general and specific needs of the economy is a subset of a more complex and multifaceted notion of responsiveness. Despite views which argue that the narrow accountability imperative will prevail over all other dimensions (Gibbons, 1998), it is vital that, in a country like South Africa where higher education transformation is part of a larger process of democratic reconstruction, we do not entirely subsume social responsiveness to economic responsiveness.

Converging trends in higher education transformation

Literature on the restructuring of higher education systems in many developed economies in the late 20th century indicates a number of common trends, converging into a new orthodoxy about the societal value of higher education and how it should be managed. Key trends which are bringing higher education in line with other social arrangements, designed to position national and regional economies for global success, include:

- the requirement of higher education to demonstrate efficiency, effectiveness and value for money through business re-engineering drives, integration into public finance management accounting systems, external quality assurance systems and other accountability frameworks designed to accommodate greater stakeholder scrutiny
- declining investments of public funds to subsidise student fees and service costs, and the requirement to 'do more with less' (eg massification of access at existing or reduced levels of funding). This trend is usually accompanied by pressure to diversify sources of operational funding, thus reducing the primary responsibility of the state for public higher education and allowing other large-scale funders to exert self-interested pressures on arrangements for research and training

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- the dominance of managerial and entrepreneurial approaches to and within higher education, resulting in the tendency to run higher education institutions like income-generating businesses. Such approaches render more vulnerable fields like the humanities, which have less income-generation potential than other business-related fields
- the privatisation of higher education in encouraged competition with public institutions or within public higher education itself (not only of service aspects like catering or cleaning but also of specialised fields of study like business studies)
- the increasing development of labour market responsive curriculum reforms intended to appeal to employers and students as 'customers' and 'clients', the shift of public and private funding from basic to applied research, increased emphasis on academic/industry links and greater concern with issues of intellectual property rights and the prioritisation of research for product development and commercialisation (including the withholding of or delay on research findings of publicly supported research from the public domain).

The convergence of such trends in new policy frameworks for the restructuring of higher education in developed economies influences more than those economies alone. The new economic responsiveness logic is functioning as a powerful and influential global paradigm which many who work in higher education instantly recognise, regardless of whether one works in Australia, Argentina or South Africa. It is a paradigm shaping higher education policies and practices in many developing country economies, despite huge social, economic and historical differences from their northern hemisphere counterparts and dramatic differences in outcomes and impact. Similar arguments are invoked that the survival of developing economies in a globalising world requires higher education in those countries to produce knowledge and skills relevant to positioning and participation in a global economy, but on a set of fiscal and social terms that largely ignore history and circumstance.

Within such a global paradigm, the efficient reconfiguration of higher education is seen as vitally necessary for the new knowledge and skills base to be produced. The role of higher education in facilitating social benefits is viewed mainly through the prism of responsiveness to the 'market'. The social, moral, political, intellectual and cultural dimensions of higher education responsiveness are coming increasingly under siege in planning for the funding, management and renewal of higher education. The facilitation by higher

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education of 'public good' benefits is receding from the scene or being given lip service only. The narrowing down of the multiple social purposes and goods of higher education to economic imperatives is particularly worrying in contexts where democratic dispensations are new or fragile. In such contexts, public institutions of higher education may have broader social development responsibilities than their counterparts in more stable political and economic systems which usually have a range of social institutions and agencies to draw on for the sustenance of a democratic culture.

The social purposes of higher education

The pervasive grip of an 'enterprise culture' on higher education restructuring is leading to an increasing focus on the private goods yielded by higher education in contrast to a range of public goods which are in the common interest of a country or society. Some of the broader social purposes of higher education which could yield public benefits include the facilitation of social justice through enhanced access to higher education for disadvantaged and excluded constituencies. The role of higher education in equalising the life chances of talented individuals irrespective of their social origin or financial capacity could be a powerful lever in the construction of a more just society. Real and substantial access to higher education opportunities will not, on its own, eliminate social stratification but it could be part of a suite of strategies to enhance social justice for increasing numbers of the formerly excluded.

The pursuit of knowledge in a variety of fields is critical to human development, as broadly understood. Undue focus only on applied fields with strong commercial possibilities will seriously threaten the arts and humanities, thus undermining the full range of insights and understandings necessary for balanced social and cultural development. The fostering of ideas in a range of basic and applied fields is a necessary public good, allowing different ideas and their applications to nourish social development in a multiplicity of tangible and intangible ways. It should be possible in higher education to pursue knowledge in ways that could extend the horizon of human understanding and the limits of human imagination without always being constrained by considerations of immediate relevance or adequate returns on investment costs.

This argument about the social necessity for knowledge development in a range of fields applies equally to the development of capacities and skills. Just, democratic and economically stable societies require a complex range of general and specialised competencies where philosophers and poets are as critical to human development as engineers and accountants. It is in the

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common interest for societies to be able to draw on a comprehensive spread of capacities from among its educated citizenry in the fashioning of a humane world that can support the pursuit of wisdom through intellectual speculation and artistic creativity as much as the pursuit of knowledge and efficiency for economic well-being.

The possibility that higher education might function as 'critic and conscience of society' has rightly been upheld in the past as being fundamental to the role of a critical citizenry in keeping democracy vibrant and substantive. Social development, especially in developing countries, could become a much more participatory venture for citizens if higher education were to produce and make critical social knowledge more widely accessible, particularly in fields linked to public policy. Such knowledge could be used by specialists and non-specialists alike to arrive at independent assessments of public policies and practices on social and economic development, to be able to engage with those policies as active and informed citizens and to intervene with appropriate social and political choices and actions (Sen, 1999; Barnett, 1997).

Many of these social purposes of higher education are losing their resonance in the rush to make higher education institutions accountable and responsive within the logic of the market. The nature and identity of public higher education institutions is changing dramatically and the possibilities are rapidly eroding for higher education accountability to be conceptualised in more complex and diverse ways. In developing country contexts with fragile public institutions and social development priorities that do not stop at market liberalisation, it is crucial that the 'public good' functions of higher education do not disappear completely. The idea of a higher education institution as a 'social institution' has to be rehabilitated to mediate the impact of the institution conceptualised as business. This is particularly urgent in societies like South Africa where far-reaching social change is underway, where there are huge issues of poverty, inequality and social injustice to be addressed and where democratic institutions and values are new or fragile and in need of reinforcement by major social institutions like those of higher education. It is wholly appropriate in countries with such enormous change agendas that accountability and responsiveness is demanded of higher education. However, the accountability imperative must address the role of higher education in ways that encompass but transcend the needs of economic development, understood in the narrowest self-interested fashion. This will be an uphill battle, since in education, as much in other spheres of social policy, neo-liberalism has re-asserted the 'possessive individualism' articulated bluntly

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by Hobbes. C.B. Macpherson (1975:3) has formulated the chilling core of such individualism as follows:

Its possessive quality is found in its conception of the individual as essentially the proprietor of his own person or capacities, owing nothing to society for them. The individual was seen neither as a moral whole, nor as part of a larger social whole, but as an owner of himself ...The human essence is freedom from dependence on the will of others, and freedom is a function of possession ... Society consists of relations of exchange between proprietors.

There has been a fair degree of focus on the rationale for, as well as the impact of, economically driven restructuring on higher education in advanced industrialised societies. A substantial body of literature is already available on the requirements and effects of the alignment of higher education with economic policy in many of those countries. The impact of the globalising economy and its neo-liberal demands on higher education in developing countries – and especially on higher education in Africa – is less well documented and analysed. Recent case studies of dramatic changes in higher education in some African countries show a sharp growth in the number of fee-paying students, the shift to qualifications and courses in fields like management, commerce and information technology and increasing emphasis on income generation strategies and cost efficiency in the restructuring of higher education (see case studies on changes in African higher education supported by Rockefeller and other foundations, Rockefeller, 2001).

More worrying are the trends which show that issues of access have become more difficult for women, minority ethnic groups and the rural poor in a context that is normalising a ‘user pays’ mindset. The line between public and private provision has become blurred, often with fee-paying and non-fee-paying students within the same institution. This causes ambiguity and a weakening commitment to the role and responsibility of higher education in the broader transformation of those societies. The quality of provision is clearly in jeopardy, as large numbers of fee-paying students are enrolled, staff-student ratios grow more unmanageable and non-fee-paying students get less and less attention from staff. The lack of time and attention to research and the shift away from certain fields of study, especially in the basic sciences and humanities, are threatening to the longer term needs of society for stable systems and capacities to generate, absorb and use knowledge in a spread of fields for the benefit of all. The ‘innovations’ which are revitalising those higher education institutions which were on the verge of collapse look largely like survival strategies in the face of fiscal austerity, with the promise

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not yet evident of the socially transformative potential of those innovations within the university or beyond.

In South Africa, a number of higher education institutions have sought to re-position themselves in response to the demands of new national regulatory frameworks. A major restructuring process has been underway in the last few years at both system and institutional levels. Within the framework of a re-constructive agenda, economic imperatives appear to have become more dominant than socio-political or intellectual ones. This clearly highlights the impact of very real fiscal constraints confronting the institutions as they seek to give effect to new policy demands. It also signals a trajectory that glosses over critical political and intellectual needs that must be addressed if social transformation is to be about more than narrow skilling or economic empowerment for a small section of the formerly disadvantaged.

Many institutions have adopted a strongly entrepreneurial approach in this restructuring, developing increasing numbers of new, more 'relevant' programmes, expanding distance provision in the attempt to increase their market share of enrolments, outsourcing various internal services to private companies, retrenching staff in the attempt to 'rightsize' the institution, increasing their focus on applications-driven research and research links to industry, converting departments, programmes and faculties into cost centres, setting up campus companies to generate income from their teaching, research and service 'products' and so on. The entry of private providers and increasing numbers of partnerships between public and private institutions has complicated the issue and raised questions about the status and role of public higher education within a broad agenda for social reconstruction as well as about the contribution of private higher education to such an agenda.

These developments mark an increasing disjuncture between efficiency and social transformation imperatives, both of which are signalled in national and institutional policy instruments. The disjuncture is also evident between entrepreneurially driven institutional restructuring and mission statements which continue to reflect a commitment to broad social transformation. The White Paper on Higher Education (Department of Education, 1997) sets out a range of different but what it terms 'related' purposes for higher education which, if achieved, will yield private as well as public benefits for different stakeholders. Labour market responsiveness and the role of higher education in the 'growth and prosperity of a modern economy' is only one among others. However, all of the purposes include a requirement to contribute to

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and support the processes of social transformation outlined in the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP).

Without enabling policy instruments – including funding and quality assurance steering – and as ongoing frank debate about whether or how entrepreneurial reconfiguration can achieve the social purposes set out in the White Paper and about the dangers of some of the trade-offs that are being made, the economic efficiency imperatives in the restructuring process are likely to predominate over the other more abstract and possibly more socially contested purposes of higher education. The effects of such a restructuring are likely to be more threatening at poorly resourced and managed institutions mainly serving poor black students and offering a generally narrow vocationalism – possibly of poor quality – for the disadvantaged. Advantaged institutions will be better able to retain and cushion fields like the humanities through some measure of cross-subsidisation, so offering students who can afford their fees more comprehensive opportunities for educational enrichment and also better professional job prospects. The challenge confronting policy and decision-makers at system and institutional levels is to negotiate a conscious and continuous balance between the diverse purposes of higher education as outlined in the White Paper, in order to ensure that higher education transformation does not become captive to the imperatives of narrow economic responsiveness alone and so lose the social justice and social transformation agenda contained in those purposes.

The re-insertion of ‘public good’ concerns into the agenda of higher education transformation, especially within initiatives concerned with the renewal of higher education on the African continent, requires the concerted attention of policymakers at systemic and institutional levels, as well as in organisations like the Association of African Universities and the Association of Commonwealth Universities. Arguments about the contribution of higher education to the public good within the framework of accountability and responsiveness, alongside the need to sustain and support with public funds certain higher education concerns and activities which are socially necessary but not necessarily cost-effective, have to be articulated more explicitly and inserted more consciously into policy planning and implementation. The strategic routes to being able to re-appropriate a broader notion of higher education have to be identified and the agencies and resources that can give effect to such a notion have to be drawn in.

An important starting point is to identify the key policy and research questions which arise with regard to the place and importance of public good

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issues in the transformation of higher education, especially in developing countries and with particular reference to higher education on the African continent. Engaging with some of the following issues may make it possible to insert more strategic policy and implementation interventions into higher education restructuring initiatives, which can support social development priorities in countries like South Africa.

The first task to facilitate more strategic action is to establish a sharper analytical foundation for the debate about higher education responsiveness. A number of concepts and ideas have been invoked in this presentation which require clarification so they can be useful to the discussion about higher education transformation. The notion of the 'public good' is, for example, not a self-evident signifier on which one can arrive at a quick and easy consensus, especially in societies divided sharply across lines of privilege, race, gender, language, etc. Calhoun's recent paper on *The Public Good as a Social and Cultural Project* (1998) asks the pertinent question about 'which public' and 'whose good', pointing to the need to problematise the different elements in this notion. Key to his position and critical to the clarification of the 'public good' in relation to higher education is the argument that the 'public' is not homogenous or a singular or 'simple unity' but may embody a number of contesting communities of interest. The 'public good' is, in reality, constantly being negotiated among different social actors with differing claims and interests.

With South Africa's legacy of race and class fragmentation, the poor and unemployed (who are mainly black) could, with powerful justification, argue that the kinds of knowledge and skills that are in the primary social interest have to do with enhancing opportunities for employment, better housing and health care – all of which constitutes a significantly large component of the public good. The more intangible aspects of the public good which are invoked in relation to higher education – for example, academic freedom and autonomy, the pursuit of wisdom and deeper human understanding or the development of self-reflexive capacities to sustain a democratic culture – might well be seen as an indulgence of the middle class or of intellectuals and academics whose life and career prospects are reasonably secure.

Showing the role of higher education in the achievement of the public good requires a demonstration of the interconnectedness and mutual dependence of tangible and less tangible dimensions of this good (even though valued by different actors), showing how the achievement of a just and humane society for all depends on the achievement of some measure of all dimensions of the

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public good. Arguing for the re-insertion of the public good into higher education transformation will clearly require a more substantive analysis of who is included and what is encapsulated by the idea of the public good. A clearer distinction will be required between higher education as a public good and the role of higher education in the achievement of the public good. The latter requires a closer identification of the different ways in which the core activities of higher education – teaching, research and community service – could yield public good benefits. Further, arguing for the social benefits that higher education could advance requires closer analysis of the private and public goods yielded by higher education and of the complex and ambiguous dynamic between the two.

Greater conceptual clarity is also needed in relation to the idea of the ‘market’ as the driver of higher education change. Does ‘market’ refer to the increasing dominance of narrowly economic cost-benefit analyses of higher education, or to an undue responsiveness to student or consumer demand which is seen to compromise higher education development? Is it a reference to creeping managerialism and the obsession with outputs within academia, to the increasing reliance on private sector contracts for operational survival or to the need to compete with aggressive for-profit providers of higher education? A better understanding of the different forms and effects of the ‘market’ in higher education – rather than a fuzzy dismissal of it – would make it possible to distinguish between what ‘market’ related dimensions are unavoidable, what should be resisted or mediated and what should be supported within an environment of radical restructuring. Such an interrogation should also include questions on competitiveness and efficiency to achieve what ends and at what costs.

Assuming that the meaning and importance of public good issues in higher education has been more persuasively established, it becomes necessary to identify real strategic possibilities to counterbalance the weakening or disappearance of the public good from higher education transformation. The question that arises here is similar to the one asked more generally in debates about globalisation: is there an alternative route to what appears to be the dominant trajectory of higher education as it seeks to enhance its responsiveness to the knowledge and human resource needs of the 21st century? Is the hegemony of the market paradigm inevitable or can a more complex notion of higher education transformation be meaningfully and realistically asserted, especially within African higher education where political and financial crises as well as a disabling global balance of forces pose almost intractable problems?

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Accepting the inevitability thesis undermines the capacity to identify other choices and take appropriate action in order to produce more acceptable social outcomes. If higher education policy and practice are to be coherent and consistent, a rigorous analysis of whether and how it is possible to balance the different requirements of good scholarship, entrepreneurial efficiency and social justice commitments within a broader notion of transformation is absolutely necessary. The other side of this dilemma is about the consequences of not aspiring to a comprehensive notion of transformation, thus courting the dangers of a narrowly economic view of higher education responsiveness, especially for societies still grappling with broader issues of democracy and social justice. On the premise that a more encompassing notion of higher education responsiveness is not only necessary but possible, an exploration is needed of the systemic and/or institutional forms which could support such a notion. How can a 'thicker' notion of responsiveness be operationalised in terms of the real constraints that stem from funding and fiscal sustainability, capacity with regard to programme spread, quality assurance demands, graduate employability and mobility? Proponents of a diversified system argue for the co-existence of different institutional missions within a single higher education system, as a mechanism which could yield a fuller range of the different social, intellectual and economic benefits that higher education is expected to provide. Such views also bear close interrogation to address the following questions: how might the continued dangers of inequality through different elite and mass access routes be offset within a single differentiated system of higher education? And how can the different expected benefits be achieved in small, poor countries where there is only one or two higher education institutions?

The implications of retaining or inserting public good concerns into higher education transformation for leadership, management and governance at different levels of higher education need to be explored in some depth. Can an entrepreneurial and managerialist leadership facilitate the achievement of curriculum related aspects of the public good through, for example, deliberate cross-subsidisation policies which allow for the survival of research and teaching activities which do not lend themselves to income-generation and commercialisation? Strategies also have to be identified to draw in the appropriate social forces, agencies and constituencies which have an interest in, could benefit from and be mobilised on behalf of a more encompassing conception of higher education accountability.

Although there may not be many, it would be instructive to study successful and innovative examples of higher education responsiveness which have

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sought to hold on to a broader social notion of accountability. What internal and external factors or preconditions have made their success possible? This question would have to consider the necessary and sufficient conditions for the operationalisation of a comprehensive notion of higher education responsiveness and confront the possibility that some of the necessary conditions may be provided by the choices and decisions of national governments while some of the sufficient conditions may indicate the need for a different global balance of forces. Closer study of the restructuring of South African higher education could yield information about whether there are possibilities or lessons for conceptualising higher education accountability and responsiveness in a way that balances private and public goods and holds together the often conflicting imperatives of social justice and the market. The issues of what further policy or other interventions are necessary within the processes of higher education transformation, by which actors and at what levels will need careful analysis if the primacy of social imperatives in the higher education change agenda is to be re-asserted.

A presumption in my argument is that national states, especially those which are developing, have an irreplaceable role to play in ensuring that the connection is not severed between higher education transformation and issues of public good. This presumption may be naïve or over-optimistic within the framework of the global economy. The extent to which poor countries can mediate the worst effects of globalisation through national policy choices and interventions designed to protect the worst-off and most vulnerable in their societies is not clear. It is equally unclear as to which social force or agency will be able to regulate the worst effects of the market if the state fails or withdraws as the primary guardian of the public good. A small first step in thinking through the connection between the role of the state, higher education transformation and the public good is to interrogate the nature and reality of policy commitment to the public good in the development agenda of the state and its major social institutions. This includes a study of what policy levers and incentives, if any, have been put in place to steer higher education institutions towards a broader notion of social transformation. Such scrutiny may enable us to judge whether the state is fully utilising all options to pursue its own social justice related development priorities while enduring the pressures exerted by a globalised world.

What is the role and responsibility of the donor community and of international agencies in ensuring that 'public good' issues continue to be an integral part of higher education reform on the African continent? The revitalisation of higher education is crucial to the new agenda for social and

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political development of Africa. However, supporting 'innovations' which are largely fiscally driven and upholding them as models for higher education reform will be selling short the aspirations on the continent for substantial social and political change that goes beyond market liberalisation. Again, the idea of higher education innovation has to be framed within a larger social development canvas.

Conclusion

The re-insertion of public good issues into the notion of higher education responsiveness requires the identification of a series of strategic choices for higher education. These go far beyond the expression of nostalgia for some romanticised past. Choosing between justified cost efficiency imperatives and broader social development priorities should not be the only option for countries like South Africa, which is in the process of reconstructing a new social order that is not only economically more enabling than its predecessor but also socio-politically more emancipatory. Making social justice issues explicit and real within the notions of higher education responsiveness and accountability is likely to prove enormously difficult if not impossible. The task requires not only tenacious commitment but also clarity of conception about what is required and the mobilisation of a range of role players around it.

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