

PREFACE

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A common refrain of Western donors is that challenges of leadership, corruption and ethnicity are major elements hindering African development work. Whether these dynamics are any less prevalent in the developed world is arguable. However, one indisputable factor is the African youth bulge with an estimated 20% of the world population to be African by 2050. How Africa's education systems nurture and accommodate the formative years will continue to affect mobility, peace and security globally.

With the premise that African universities have the responsibility to educate and train their countries' political and academic leaders, Carnegie Corporation of New York embarked on a programme to revitalise African universities in 2000. One report flowing from the programme's research component and entitled *The university in Africa and democratic citizenship: Hothouse or training ground?* concluded that 'the potential of a university to act as a training ground for democratic citizenship is best realized by supporting students' exercise of democratic leadership on campus. This in turn develops and fosters democratic leadership in civil society'. The report prompted a collaborative research project which led to the book *Student Politics in Africa: Representation and Activism* and to this issue of the *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*. The book provides a 21st-century baseline review of student governance, as well as its development, current structures and level of enforcement in a cross section of universities and countries in sub-Saharan Africa and indicates how student participation has evolved since the student movements of the 1960s. Both the book and the journal issue provide evidence that the challenges of leadership, ethnic cleavages and good governance are already evident at the level of student leadership, often reflecting a national ethos influenced by political parties. This begs the question of how institutions might look if student governance was held to standards demanded by students themselves, thus changing the mindset graduates might take to their next institutional affiliations.

The issue ‘Student Power in Africa’ of the *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa* and its companion publication, the book *Student Politics in Africa: Representation and Activism*, are especially useful resources for administrators interested in the transformation of institutional cultures, and as an orientation for new student leaders. Both publications are open access through a pioneering publisher, African Minds, another by-product of the programme support. Student leadership is one of the principal entry points where youth experience institutional governance. Vibrant universities engaged in innovative and often daring reform contribute to producing a new generation of leaders, an important route to transformative democratisation, reforming public policy and building civil society. This issue of the *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa* offers reflection on how that process could advance.

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