

The sub-Saharan African higher education market

In December 2016, investors CDC, University Ventures and Savannah announced a \$12 million investment in higher education (HE) platform UNICAF. Chief executive **Nicos Nicolaou** discusses the nuances of operating in the region

The HE market in sub-Saharan Africa is still in its infancy but fuelled by a growing demand for university places. Estimates by PwC predict that Africa will have the world's largest labour force by 2040, ahead even of India and China. However, as of today it is a labour force with some serious skills and education challenges.

China, Japan and the UK have all invested heavily in Africa and are creating significant opportunities across the continent. All are looking for skilled candidates but struggle to find Africans with qualifications they recognise.

While countries such as Japan, Finland and the UK are experiencing a greying trend, the African continent contains 28 of the world's 30 youngest populations; placing an even greater strain on already stretched educational resources. In sub-Saharan Africa, secondary school enrolment is around 40% yet only 7% of these students continue to tertiary level education.

The low enrolment figures for university are due in part to a chronic shortage of degree providers. No top 100 university is located in sub-Saharan Africa and if the public sector

were to keep up with the current demand for university places it would need to build 10 universities a week for the next 12 years in order to meet demand; a total of over 6,000 new universities.

Nigeria case study

According to *World Education News and Reviews*, Nigeria is a case in point. It reported that demographically the country is young and growing quickly, with 63% of the population under the age of 24 and a high average relative annual growth rate of 3.24%, a full half a percentage point higher than the African average.

For the Nigerian education system this means incredible new demands that the government is currently hard pressed to meet. At the tertiary level alone, the number of students has grown from under 15,000 in 1970 to approximately 1.2 million today. As a result of the huge surge in demand, hundreds of thousands of aspiring tertiary students are annually missing out on places as there are simply not enough seats to meet demand. Every year, 1.7 million ►



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