

**A Policy Agenda Setting Analysis of Free Higher Education in a Post-Apartheid
South Africa.**

By

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DECLARATION

I, ~~Letlisa Molantsoa Edward~~, declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. All citations, references and borrowed ideas have been duly acknowledged. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Social Science (Policy and Development Studies) in the Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. None of the present work has been submitted previously for any degree or examination in any other University.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ANC	African National Congress
ACF	Advocacy Coalition Framework
CHE	Council on Higher Education
CTP	Committee of Technikon Principals
DoE	Department of Education
HBU	Historical Black Universities
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HESA	Higher Education South Africa
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
HWUs	Historically White Universities
MoE	Ministry of Education
NCHE	National Commission on Higher Education
NFF	New Funding Framework
NPHE	National Plan for Higher Education
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
NUSAS	National Union of South African Students
PASO	Pan Africanist Student Organisation
PRSA	Parliament of the Republic of South Africa
SANSCO	South African National Students Congress
SAPSE	South African Post-Secondary Education
SAQA	South African Qualification Authority
SASCO	South African Students' Congress
SAUSRCs	South African Universities Students Representative Councils
SAUVCA	South African Universities Vice Chancellor's Association
SETAs	Sector Education and Training Authorities
USA	United States of America

ABSTRACT

This study presents and applies Agenda Setting theory or the Multiple Stream model by Kingdon on the free higher education policy proposal in post-apartheid South Africa. The aim was to uncover how and why free higher education has been elevated onto the agenda of decision-makers; and why it is not yet an accepted policy proposal.

Kingdon argued that for a policy proposal to be considered, it must be technically feasible, anticipate future constraints and receive enough political support or consensus. Apart from that, the following streams of action must converge: the problem must be clearly defined, feasible solutions offered and political consensus obtained. Using qualitative methods such as thematic and documentary analysis to collect and analyse data, the study has discovered that free higher education has been pushed onto the agenda because it was aimed at addressing the problem of unequal access to higher education. Mechanisms such as continual marches and protests by South African Students' Congress (SASCO) have been used to push this policy proposal onto the government and decision agenda.

The study has also discovered that it is not yet an accepted policy proposal primarily because it is considered to be not feasible by decision-makers. Furthermore, it has not received enough political support or consensus. Lastly, it is not yet an accepted policy proposal because the streams of action have not yet converged. The study shows that the events in the policy and political streams have been the major hindrances for these streams to meet despite a clear indication that the problem in question is significant: South African higher education is still confronted by high university dropout rates.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

~~This study is an agenda setting analysis of free higher education in post-apartheid South Africa. The theory underpinning this study is Kingdon's Agenda Setting theory or the Multiple Streams Model. This theory seeks to understand how and why certain issues receive attention from decision-makers while others do not, and why certain policy proposals come to be selected while others are rejected or ignored. In the light of this theory therefore, this study aims to understand how and why free higher education has been pushed onto the agenda of decision-makers in order to be considered and why is it not yet an accepted policy proposal.~~

This chapter seeks to introduce and establish the policy context of free higher education in South Africa. This will be done by giving a brief background of higher education during the apartheid era. From there the context of free higher education will be established within the policy developments in higher education after the end of the apartheid regime. This will be done by discussing major policy documents that have determined the current state of South African higher education.

1.1 Historical Background: Higher Education During the Apartheid Era

Free Higher Education, as an alternative policy solution to address the issue of unequal access to higher education in South Africa, has a long history spanning more than a decade. Its emergence and objectives can be contextualised within the spectrum of educational developments during and since apartheid rule. This is because it is, in a general sense, meant to redress the historical inequalities such as unequal access to higher education that were intentionally created by the National Party (NP) during apartheid. It is also seen as an alternative to other policies that were promoted to address the same inequalities.

Tertiary education in South Africa during the apartheid system was characterised by racial and ethnic separation in which Black students were the most affected. Black students were excluded from quality education and training (Bunting, 1994; DoE, 1995; Reddy, 2004: 8). This was facilitated by the University Education Act of 1959 on higher education which provided assistance for the creation of new universities that separated Black, Coloured, Indian, and White students (DoF, 1995; cf. Reddy, 2004: 9, 10; Barnes, 2005: 210-211). This

further facilitated ethnic separation according to universities: ethnic groups were admissible only to the universities dedicated to them. For example, the University of Fort Hare was meant for Xhosa speaking students and the University of Zululand was intended to service Zulu and Swazi speaking students (Nyaggah, 1980: In Mugomba and Nyaggah, 1980: 75).

These institutions of higher learning were run and managed by racially separated departments (Reddy, 2004: 9-10). On one hand, Whites had their own department responsible for their education – the Department of Education and Culture, while on the other hand non-white education matters were handled by the Department of Education and Training (MacKenzie, 1993: 287; Reddy, 2004: 9).

This discriminatory education system was characterised by an unequal allocation of financial resources among the Departments of Education and institutions of higher learning (CHE, 2010: 2). For example, 'the estimated education expenditures for the financial year 1966–1967 according to race were as follows: R27, 156, 500 for Bantu; R32, 383, 350 for Coloureds; R168, 000, 000 for Whites (Europeans)' (Maarman et al., 2006: 298). It can be inferred that, because of unequal allocation of financial resources, access to higher education for Black students became difficult if not impossible for many. It is this area of contestation which set the scene for the development of the policy proposal touting free higher education as a policy of redress.

During the apartheid period, the allocation of funds to universities was in two sets, namely, *formula funding* which mainly benefited historically white universities (HWUs); *negotiated budgets* which was associated with historically black universities (HBUs) and technikons (CHE, 2004: 188; Bunting, 2004: In Cloete et al., 2004: 73). In formula funding, funds were allocated in terms of the formula which contained full-time student enrolments and success rates, and publication of research. This type of funding gave the HWUs the power to determine how the funds received from the government were spent (Bunting, 2004: In Cloete et al., 2004: 73). Concerning the negotiated funding, allocation of funds was in terms of the application by the HBUs and approval by the Department of Education in line with its budget. Thus, such funding did not allow the HBUs to determine the manner in which funds were spent (Bunting, 2004: In Cloete et al., 2004: 74), and as such this meant that they could not build financial reserves since funding was not linked to student enrolments, throughput

or graduation rates and publication of research (CHE, 2004: 188). The finances of HBUs only became critical when they were brought onto the SASPE system as it will be seen in the below.

As the negotiated funding model could not satisfy the needs of the HBUs, pressure from them to be funded and receive the same level of autonomy in the 1980s as the HWUs forced the apartheid government to develop the South African Post-Secondary Education (SAPSE) funding formula (Bunting, 2004: In Cloete et al., 2004: 75; Steyn and de Villers, 2007: In CHE, 2007: 16). The SAPSE funding formula was based on the idea that students are the ones to decide the costs of their welfare which are informed by choices of programs for which they enroll (Bunting, 2004: In Cloete et al., 2004: 77; Steyn and de Villers, 2007: In CHE, 2007: 16). The SAPSE formula was therefore only enrolment-driven following students enrolment into the institutions and programs of their choices unlike the formula funding which also connected students enrolment and graduation rates. This funding formula was applied to all South African universities in 1988, but later revised as the SAPSE subsidy formula in 1993. This revised formula was inherited and used by the new ANC-led government until 2003 (Steyn and de Villers, 2007: In CHE, 2007: 19).

The aim of the then National Party government was to use education as a tool for social control. This was facilitated by the fact that 'each ethnic group was given its own department, thereby creating a massive managerial and policing bureaucracy' (Reddy, 2004: 8). Reddy (2004: 9) clarifies this by indicating that since each ethnic group had its own department to deliver services such as education and health among others; Blacks furthered this bureaucratic network to their communities. Therefore, such an extension meant the facilitation of social control by the state.

The other objective of the apartheid government was to make it possible at all costs for White people to become a dominating force over other races. The type of education that Black people received facilitated this. This is because, since it lacked sufficient human and financial resources, Black people on the whole became part of the unskilled labour force meant to serve White people (Reddy, 2004: 8). As Nyaggah (1980: In Mugomba and Nyaggah, 1980: 59) holds:

“Apartheid education has been part of an overall, well-conceived doctrinaire policy of systematically maintaining white hegemony over the blacks so that the former may perpetually exploit the latter.”

The post-apartheid period in South Africa has seen the reconstruction of the educational system as a whole and higher education in particular. In 1995, the African National Congress (ANC) government appointed National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) to uncover among other things, the manner in which students can be assisted financially in order to improve equal access to higher education (DoE, 1995; cf. Luescher and Symes, 2003: 6). This is because the SAPSE subsidy formula was considered flawed as it was originally developed for the HWUs only even though it was later applied to other universities (Bunting, 1994:141–149 cited in Bunting, 2004: In Cloete et al., 2004: 82). It was considered to be a technique used by the apartheid government to leverage unequal allocation of funds which prevented Black students from equally accessing quality higher education (CHE, 2004: 188). On the basis of the NCHE’s 1996 recommendations, the Green Paper of 1997, the White Paper of 1997 and the Higher Education Bill of 1997 came into existence in order to establish guiding principles to address the issue of lack of access as well as that of unequal opportunity in education among other issues through governmental regulation of institutions of higher learning and financial assistance (DoE, 1996; Luescher and Symes, 2003: 7). Even though these documents came into being so that the issue of unequal access to higher education could be dealt with through governmental financial aid, there was some opposition from other policy participants such as the South African Student Congress (SASCO) which proposed free higher education as a policy solution. This policy proposal by SASCO was opposed to the Green Paper of 1997 (Odhav, 2009: 43). The following sections will expand on this particular debate and will deal specifically with the NCHE report, the Green and White Papers, SASCO’s policy proposal and Higher Education Bill and Act and the National Plan for Higher Education.

1.2 Policy Developments: Law-making and Reconstruction of Higher Education in the Post-Apartheid Era

1.2.1 The National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) Report of 1996

Appointed by the ANC-led government, the NCHE was operational in 1995 , “...with the broad mandate to advise the Minister of Education on restructuring higher education to contribute towards reconstruction and development” Reddy (2004: 34). The underlying assumption that informed the NCHE’s approach to its research was that, “higher education can play a pivotal role in the political, economic and cultural reconstruction and development of South Africa” (NCHE, 1996) as it moves through the transitional process away from apartheid inequalities. According to the NCHE, this could be achieved by maintaining valuable practices and remedying impediments in order to attain transformation (NCHE, 1996). Moreover, since higher education policy was related to imbalanced access to higher education, the NCHE’s central objective was to try to resolve equity-development tension. Therefore, in its final report, the NCHE proposed that higher education should be *massified* in order to resolve equity tensions under the following principles:

- ‘Equal allocation of resources and opportunities in higher education and rectification of historical inequities,
- Democratic, representative and participatory governance (of the system and individual and institutions),
- Balanced advancement of material and human resources,
- Quality in higher education services and products,
- Academic freedom and institutional autonomy,
- Increased efficiency and productivity’ (NCHE, 1996).

Having laid down these principles, the NCHE proposed three important areas which were to be the pillars of redress of historical inequalities and development. These areas are namely:

- Participation: The rationale was to improve access to higher education through increased students’ enrolments especially of those who have been historically excluded from quality education. This required “different programmes, curricula

and qualifications; multiple entry and exit points; new relations between study and the workplace; and shifts in institutional functions and missions” (NCHE, 1994) so that increased participation would not mean mere increased student numbers.

- Responsiveness: This had to do with responding to the South African societal needs and interests on the basis of its apartheid history and the transition period within the global economic challenges. Accordingly, in the NCHE’s view, dealing with problems and challenges in the South African context ‘would therefore be reflected in the course content, focus and the manner in which higher education programmes are offered’ (NCHE, 1996).
- Co-operative governance between government and universities as a mechanism to ensure greater responsiveness. The state would play a “steering and co-ordinating” (NCHE, 1996) role since it would provide financial aid and other steering mechanisms as opposed to a top-down approach to ensure accountability. However, such financial aid by the government in the NCHE’s view, should be goal-oriented in that it has to be “...sensitive to, and able to address, the demands of redress and the challenges of development” if it is to be responsive at all. The goal-oriented funding is opposed to the SAPSE subsidy formula which only emphasised students’ enrolments in that it is seen by the NCHE as in line with the principles of “equity, redress, development, democracy, efficiency, effectiveness, financial sustainability and shared costs” (NCHE, 1996). The NCHE (1996) held that the SAPSE formula would inhibit “the planning and administration of a single, co-ordinated system...” and ...” promotion of increased participation and equal opportunities for all deserving students as a means of redress and development through planned and responsible growth policies” among other education goals.

Within this framework of increased participation, greater responsiveness and increased co-operation and partnerships, the NCHE’s key proposals were to:

- ‘Provide expanded access to higher education over the next decade, within a context of limited increases in public expenditure.
- Propose the development of a single co-ordinated system of higher education encompassing universities, technikons, colleges and private providers.

- Envisage the incorporation of colleges of education, nursing and agriculture into universities and technikons, and the development of a new further education sector spanning general, further and higher education.
- Suggest an expanded role for distance education and for high quality 'resource-based' learning.
- Propose a rolling three-year national higher education plan. Propose the inclusion of higher education programs in the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), and in a new quality assurance system to be developed within the broad ambit of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA).
- Stress the fundamental importance of research within higher education and its vital contribution to a National System of Innovation. Identify key areas of capacity development.
- Recommend the establishment of a National Higher Education Information and Admissions Service, improved student selection instruments and the provision and funding of programs to bridge the gap between further and higher education'(NCHE, 1996).

1.2.2 The Green Paper of 1996: Higher Education Transformation

Responding to the NCHE report, the Ministry and Department of Education released the Green Paper of 1996. Broadly, the Green Paper used the elements of the NCHE's report as its point of departure hence one is urged in the Green Paper to study the NCHE report in order to make sense of and understand it (DoE, 1996). This being the case, it is worth pointing out that the Green Paper focused on the question of transformation in order to redress the historical inequalities and to develop a higher education system which has the capacity to contribute to social, economic, and political development (DoE, 1996).

That said, one of the major points to be considered about the Green Paper is that it identifies the purposes of higher education. These purposes include:

- "To meet the learning needs and aspirations of individuals through the development of their intellectual abilities and aptitudes.

- To provide the labour market, in a knowledge-driven and knowledge-dependent society, with the high-level competencies and expertise necessary for the growth and prosperity of a modern economy.
- To be responsible for the socialisation of enlightened, responsible and constructively critical citizens.
- To engage itself in the creation, transmission and evaluation of knowledge” (DoE, 1996).

With these purposes in mind, the Green Paper goes on to show the vision of the Ministry of Education to attain comprehensive transformation in higher education. The focus of the Green Paper was mainly on reforming higher education to promote economic development. This is reflected in the elements of this vision which aim to:

- “Ensure equity of access and the possibility of success to those - irrespective of race, colour, gender, creed, age or class - seeking to realise their potential through higher-level education and learning.
- Meet, through well-planned and coordinated teaching and learning programmes, as many as possible of the high-skilled vocational and employment needs presented by a growing economy which aspires to global competitiveness.
- Support a democratic ethos and a culture of human rights by educational programmes and practices conducive to critical discourse and experimental thinking, cultural tolerance, and a common commitment to a humane, nonracist and non-sexist social order.
- Contribute to the advancement of all forms of knowledge and scholarship, in keeping with internationally observed standards of academic quality, and with sensitivity to the diverse problems and demands of the local, national, southern African and African contexts” (DoE, 1996).

Because the transformation of higher education in South Africa is mainly informed by historical inequalities of access to higher education, the Green paper assumes that in order to achieve the vision of the Ministry of Education, higher education should be directed by three features within the transformation framework, namely:

- Increased participation of historically disadvantaged students: This would be achieved through the goal-oriented government funding “...using explicit incentives to steer the development of the higher education system in accordance with national goals” and limited resources (DoE, 1996). This implies that increased access to higher education will be limited according to the needs and interests of the nation. Any additional places for the targeted students will not be publicly funded.
- Greater responsiveness which would be guided by the socio-economic context under which South Africa finds itself and globalisation.
- Increased co-operation and partnerships under a single coordinated higher education system in which the state would assume a steering and co-ordinating role as proposed by the NCHE report. (DoE, 1996).

1.2.3 South African Students’ Congress (SASCO) Policy Proposal: Free Higher Education

SASCO was formed in 1991 through the integration of the South African National Students Congress (SANSCO)-a revolutionary black student organisation and the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS)-a predominantly white liberal student organisation (Stiff, 1991; Miller, 1991). The new student organisation was founded on five principles, namely, African leadership, working-class leadership, democracy, non-racism and non-sexism (Miller, 1991). These were opposed to the apartheid principles that perpetuated inequalities of access to higher education.

SASCO was mainly formed to fight for transformation in institutions of higher learning as the historical inequalities were experienced by students. As SASCO (1991) (cited in Stiff 1991) argues, the new organisation “...will focus on democratisation of tertiary education and defending students’ rights.”

The political climate of that period and especially post-1994 provided SASCO with the opportunity of becoming the largest student organisation in South Africa. For example, SASCO is reported to have indicated that at the time it was formed, it already had 125 branches (Stiff, 1991). Koen et al (2006: 409) adds that SASCO as the ANC’s students’ support base has a membership that includes some 70% of (students at) higher education institutions and 54% at other institutions. Even presently, SASCO is the dominating student

organisation especially at the universities. As the ANC's support base, it sometimes influences education policies in higher education as will be seen in Chapter 4.

SASCO opposed both the NCHE report and the Green Paper in general. Odhav (2009: 43) notes that in response to the Green Paper's articulations on equity and democracy discussed earlier, 'SASCO saw it to be lacking principles of non-racialism and non-sexism and had no policy on language and curriculum, and no vision of a societally contextualised transformation.' In principle, SASCO's point seems to be that the Green Paper lacked redress principles and appropriate mechanisms to address transformation in higher education as a whole.

On the basis of the above general perception of the Green Paper, SASCO, while acknowledging its strengths "such as its attempt at aligning student numbers with national targets" (DoE, 1996) criticised the Green Paper's funding policy. As Odhav (2009: 43) indicates, according to SASCO the goal-oriented funding model proposed in the NCHE report and later endorsed in the 'Green Paper' does not constitute financial alleviation for historically disadvantaged students and it does not regard institutional inequalities between historically advantaged and disadvantaged institutions.' Therefore, as an alternative to goal-oriented funding, SASCO called for free higher education. According to SASCO, free higher education means higher education in the form of "...non-repayment of student loans" (Odhav, 2009: 43). In principle, SASCO's opinion is that free higher education should be fully controlled and funded by the state just as it was in the apartheid period, ensuring access to higher education by White students or as it is in countries such as Brazil (SASCO, n.d: 2-3). This means that according to SASCO, higher education should be heavily subsidised like it was the case during apartheid in order to ensure that Black students access it like their counterparts.

SASCO proposed that free higher education should be characterised by:

- "An education system that is more accessible especially by the marginalised and the poor.
- An education system that would be underpinned by the most progressive values of democracy (a system which would be democratic and encourage broad participation).

- An education system whose value system would reflect the aspirations of the people including embracing the rich diversity of our country.
- An education system that would ultimately narrow the divide between intellectual and manual labour.
- An education system that would serve the social and economic needs of our future peaceful and stable democratic society. Meaning that the content of what is taught would not be left to chance but defined to suit the needs of the time" (SASCO, 2007: 5).

In relation to how free higher education will be funded, SASCO proposes that funds could be leveraged from:

- An "education-specific tax base;
- State-owned mines;
- The Private sector;
- Increasing fees and taking from the rich to subsidise the poor" (SASCO, 2007: 5-6).

SASCO argues that free higher education can be achieved through "...comprehensive institutional planning, affirmative action, remedial programmes, monitored academic development funds, resistance to privatisation, and more clarification of the definition of the notion of 'higher education massification' to be underpinned by access and guided by the RDP, especially for rural communities" (Odhav, 2009: 43-44).

SASCO's proposal for free higher education has been criticised for many reasons. For example, Odhav (2009: 44) argues that the call for free higher education is problematic in the sense that it implies redirecting resources from dysfunctional constituencies which might still not be enough for the implementation of universal free higher education. Odhav (2009: 44) also notes that free higher education is attractive in the short term but is problematic because it threatens institutional autonomy in the long term. The White Paper 3 of 1997 responded in part to SASCO's call for free higher education. This is the focus of the following subsection.

1.2.4 The White Paper 3 of 1997: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education

~~Building on the Green Paper and the influence of the NCHE report, the White Paper~~ conceded several purposes of higher education, but notably it proposed that higher education should "...contribute to and support the process of societal transformation outlined in the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), with its compelling vision of people-driven development leading to the building of a better quality of life for all" (DoE, 1997). Even though this is the case, the White Paper realised that, inasmuch as transformation of higher education is a necessity for the post-apartheid South Africa, competitive markets and the demands of globalisation informed some objectives. As the White Paper notes:

"The transformation of higher education is part of the broader process of South Africa's political, social and economic transition, which includes political democratisation, economic reconstruction and development, and redistributive social policies aimed at equity. This national agenda is being pursued within a distinctive set of pressures and demands characteristic of the late twentieth century, often typified as globalisation. This term refers to multiple, inter-related changes in social, cultural and economic relations, linked to the widespread impact of the information and communications revolution, the growth of trans-national scholarly and scientific networks, the accelerating integration of the world economy and intense competition among nations for markets" (DoE, 1997).

Within this context, the White Paper therefore identified the following higher education goals:

- 'To develop human resources so that individuals can contribute to the social, economic, cultural and intellectual life of a rapidly changing society.
- To develop a highly skilled workforce that can strengthen South Africa's enterprises, services and infrastructure.
- To produce, acquire and apply knowledge because the country's development and competitiveness depends on constant scientific enhancement and innovation driven by a well-ordered, vivacious research and development system' (DoE, 1997).

Having laid down these objectives, it will be noticed that it was the White Paper's expectation that 'higher education should offer training, skills, improvement and knowledge so that the South African economy, despite its history, can act together with other leading global economies on a competitive level' (DoE, 1997: cited in Reddy, 2004: 38). It is within this context that the White Paper in light of the three features of the transformation framework, namely; increased participation, greater responsiveness and increased co-operation and partnership, further shows how a successful higher education policy would be like. With regard to increased participation, it argued that a 'successful policy would be that which overcomes historically determined patterns of disintegration, inequality and inefficiency by ensuring access to higher education for Black people, women, disabled and mature students' (DoE, 1997). It must also 'create new curriculum and supple models of learning, teaching and modes of delivery so as to accommodate a larger and more culturally diverse student population' (DoE, 1997).

When it comes to greater responsiveness, the White Paper argues that a "successful policy must restructure the higher education system and its institutions to meet the needs of an increasingly technologically-oriented economy. It must also deliver the requisite research, the highly trained people and the knowledge to equip a developing society with the capacity to address national needs and to participate in a rapidly changing and competitive global context" (DoE, 1997).

Lastly, in relation to increased co-operation and partnerships, the White Paper holds that a "successful policy must re-conceptualize the relationship between higher education and the state, civil society, and stakeholders, and among institutions. It must also create an enabling institutional environment and culture that is sensitive to and affirms diversity, promotes reconciliation and respect for human life, protects the dignity of individuals from racial and sexual harassment, and rejects all other forms of violent behaviour" (DoE, 1997).

In order to achieve a transformed higher education system at all, the White Paper notes that such a vision should be guided by the principles of equity and redress, democracy, development, quality, effectiveness and efficiency, academic freedom, institutional autonomy and public accountability (DoE, 1997). The principle of equity and redress recognizes that higher education can be transformed by giving students equal opportunity

both at the point of entering into higher education programmes and successfully completing them (DOE, 1997). However, emphasising this point, the White Paper indicates that: "Such transformation involves not only abolishing all existing forms of unjust differentiation, but also measures of empowerment, including financial support to bring about equal opportunity for individuals and institutions" (DoE, 1997).

While the White Paper conceded that the three features of the higher education transformation framework as recommended by NCHE are consistent with the above principles, it does not accept that increased participation can be achieved by *massification*. According to the White Paper, increased participation can instead be arrived at through planned expansion (DoE, 1997). This must be achieved even though there are "...fiscal constraints and the need for greater responsiveness of the higher education system to the national development agenda" (DoE, 1997). However, Greenstein (2003: In Chisholm et al., 2003: 380) notes that even though the White Paper argues for planned expansion as opposed to massification, 'the rationale behind it is still prominent.' This is based on the fact that the end result of, and the major focal point of any expansion and equity approach must be increased participation of historically excluded students in general (Greenstein, 2003: In Chisholm et al., 2003: 380). The White Paper emphasizes that in order for this planned-expansion of higher education to be actualised, higher education must be programme-based and "take place in a multiplicity of institutions and sites of learning, using a variety of methods..." (DoE, 1997). Some of the key objectives that underlie this assumption include 'to increase equal access to higher education with no unfair discrimination while advancing redress over the past inequalities; to develop a diversified flexible system with regard to institutional missions and programme mixes; to improve responsiveness in relation to the social and economic needs; and to support teaching, learning and research so as to meet national and regional needs' (DoE, 1997).

The White Paper further notes that the accomplishment of a transformed programme-based higher education system is possible if it is planned, funded, and governed as a single co-ordinated system (DoE, 1997). In this form, the higher education system will be able to 'attract a progressively more varied body of students and assist in accomplishing an array of key objectives' some of which were shown previously (DoE, 1997). As the White Paper indicates: "A key feature of a single co-ordinated system will be the broadening of the social

base of the higher education system in terms of race, class, gender age... and disability” (DoE, 1997). According to the White Paper, this would be facilitated by ‘a nationwide higher education plan which would include standards for transformation and a system of three-year rolling institutional plans linked to sustainability as opposed to massive expansion (DoE, 1997). This is advantageous in that it will help to “...avoid inherent defects of the old top-down central budgeting system” (DoE, 1997). It must be noted that the national plan, together with institutional plans, will, according to the White Paper, be developed in light of the advice of The Council on Higher Education (CHE) (DoE, 1997). This will help to make it possible to establish ‘coherence between institutional plans and national policy together with its goals, as well as reliability with institutional missions and capabilities’ (DoE, 1997).

The above being the case, the White Paper further notes that in order to achieve a transformed higher education systems, goal-oriented and performance-related redress funding will have to be made available by the state among other stakeholders (DoE, 1997). This kind of funding will be given to institutions in order to enable them to “...offer the agreed programme mix in an effective manner” (DoE, 1997). In this context, the White Paper acknowledges that a system of cooperative democratic governance would help the state to play a steering and coordinating role while the institutions of higher education will retain their autonomous authority over their resources while being accountable to the public at large for their utility (DoE, 1997).

Redressing funding is one of the highly contested issues in relation to increased participation in higher education among the policy participants. However, because of fiscal constraints, the White Paper rejected free higher education as proposed by SASCO. As it holds, “fee-free higher education for students is not an affordable or sustainable option for South Africa” (DoE, 1997). This is informed by the fact that as Greenstein (2003: in Chisholm, 2003: 380) notes, ‘such a position which has been taken by some African and other developing countries has led to a practical crumble of the higher education system.’ Therefore, the White Paper acknowledges the need for private funding and efficiency in savings because the higher education budget cannot be substantially increased (DoE, 1997). The White Paper proposes that existing financial resources would be allocated to institutions in the form of block grants based on planned enrolments of full-time students and allocated funds for specific purposes and programmes (as suggested in the Green

Paper) (DoE, 1997). With this in mind, the White Paper argues that while the point is to improve equity, access and output, any additional spaces for full-time students will be sponsored by the institutions themselves and not the state (DoE, 1997). These debates in the formative democratic era informed the policy formation adopted by the South African government. This will be the focus of the following sub-section.

1.2.5 The Higher Education Bill and Higher Education Act 101 of 1997: Redress Funding as Law

Given the pressures on parliament to have a new legislation on higher education passed in 1997, the Higher Education Bill was realised at the same time as the White Paper (Schoole, 2001: 9). Schoole indicates that 'a Bill should be understood to mean translation of policy into law and as such it deals with official structures and agencies as well as the powers bestowed on them for the implementation of the policy' (Schoole, 2001: 9).

On the basis of the NCHES governance proposals, the ANC-led government enacted the Higher Education Act of 1997. This Act provided a legal framework for the principles and vision of the White Paper to be realised. The vision of the Higher Education Act was a single coordinated system that nationally responds to human resource, economic and development needs. Most importantly, 'it seeks to redress apartheid prejudices and ensure representativeness and equal access to higher education' (Odhav, 2009: 40).

In order to ensure a transformed higher education system, this Act gave the Minister and Department of Education the powers to play a leading role in the transformation of higher education. It gave the Minister of Education the authority to make decisions on higher education on the basis of advice from the Council for Higher Education (CHE) (Act, 101. 1997: 5. (1)). Advice that the CHE could give to the minister included advice on:

- "The structure of the higher education system;
- Planning of the higher education system;
- A mechanism for the allocation of public funds;
- Student financial aid;
- Student support services;
- Governance of higher education institutions; and

- Higher education system, and language policy” (Act, 101. 1997: 5. (2). (c)-(j)).

The Higher Education Act also discusses the establishment of institutions of higher learning.

For example, it indicates that the minister, after consulting the CHE, may establish a university, technikon or college (Act, 101. 1997: 20. (1)). It adds that a university may also be established by an act of parliament and such a university will in that case become a public higher education institution (Act, 101. 1997: 20. (2)). However, this Act allows that some of these institutions may be merged or closed. For example, it argues that the minister may, after consulting the CHE, merge two or more institutions into a single public higher education institution (Act, 101. 1997: 23. (1)). With regard to the closure of an institution, the Act says ‘that the minister, after consulting the CHE, may close an institution and its assets and liabilities will be dealt with after the closure, according to the law by the minister’ (Act, 101. 1997: 25. (1)-(2)). The rationale behind the merger or closure of institutions is the cutting of costs as the government was faced with fiscal constraints while the aim was increased participation in higher education by historically disadvantaged students, especially Black students.

One of the important points aimed at improving access to higher education is the allocation of funds that the Act addresses. The Act holds that the minister can determine the ways in which funds are allocated to higher education after consulting the CHE (Act, 101. 1997: 39. (1)). Allocations of funds would include fairness, transparency, redress and a differentiation of functions for a modern economy (Act, 101. 1997: 39. (1)-(3)). Funds of public higher education institutions would include allocations from the ministry, investment returns, donations, fund-raising, student fees and funds from services rendered (Act, 101. 1997: 40. (a)-(h)). The Act warns that ‘any failure by the council of higher education institutions (HEIs) to comply with these provisions would result in the minister calling upon such a council to comply with them or withhold payment of any proportionate portion of any allocation appropriated by parliament in respect of the institution concerned’ (Act, 101. 1997: 42. (1)-(2)).

Furthermore, this Act on higher education also provides for the establishment of private institutions of higher learning. According to this Act, anyone with the intention to provide private higher education must apply and be registered as such by the registrar appointed by

the director-general of the DoE (Act, 101. 1997: 51-52). The requirements for registration as a private higher education institution include; the financial capacity to offer it, maintenance of standards of higher education and quality assurance as accredited by South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) (Act, 101. 1997: 53. (a)-(b).(i)-(ii)).

These principles were not left unchallenged by other policy actors notably some opposition political parties. For example, students from Afrikaans-medium universities provoked by the Bill on higher education, disrupted parliamentary proceedings in protest against these powers bestowed on the Minister of Education (Barnes, 2005: 224; cf. Sehoole, 2001: 10). As Barnes (2005: 223-224) indicates, "...the contention was that the explicit connection of funding with performance and achievement of various goals conflicted with the principles of institutional autonomy and academic freedom." Despite these protests the Bill was enacted and as such goal-oriented and performance-related redress funding by the government and other relevant stakeholders in order to improve equal access to higher education was made law.

1.2.6 The National Plan on higher education (NPHE)

The National Plan on higher education (NPHE) was released in 2001 following the CHE report entitled "Towards a New Higher Education Landscape: Meeting the Equity, Quality and Social Development imperatives of South Africa in the 21st Century" which was released in June 2000. The aim of the National Plan was to outline the framework and mechanisms for implementing the policy goals and objectives of the White Paper (DoE, 2001). As the then Minister of Education put it: "it establishes indicative targets for the size and shape of the higher education system, including overall growth and participation rates, institutional and programme mixes and equity and efficiency goals" (DoE, 2001).

Central to the National Plan is increased participation of historically disadvantaged students. However, given the financial constraints and crisis that higher education institutions were faced with at that time due to the SAPSE funding model, the Plan seeks to connect student enrolments (numbers) with their success rates (throughput) as per the goals of the White Paper. So, the Plan indicates that increased participation of historically disadvantaged students will be achieved through the new funding framework (NFF) (goal-oriented and performance-related funding model) to be finalised in 2003 and this model will be in line

with the three-year “rolling” plan process for the success rates (DoE, 2001). This increased participation rate was planned to be from 15% to 20% within a ten to fifteen year timeframe. However, the Plan held that, in order to achieve such participation, the size and coverage of National Student Financial Aid (NSFA) would need to be reviewed (DoE, 2001). The National Plan states that in order realise this, the following strategies would have to be adopted:

- ‘Allocate funded student places on the proposed planning grid.
- Reduce funded student places in institutions whose equity plans are not satisfactory.
- Include funding for academic development with priority given to programme areas.
- Monitor the selection criteria and practices of institutions.
- Ensure institutional diversity through mission and programme.
- Ensure diversity through programme grid.
- Ensure diversity through institutional programme mix.
- Reduce the size and shape of higher education system through mergers’ (DoE, 2001)

In order for all these mechanisms to be fulfilled, the Plan argues that the Ministry of Education will use limited interference where necessary (DoE, 2001). The Plan clarifies this by positing that the institutions would have ‘conditional autonomy’ which allows the state to use procedural controls in order to ensure that autonomy is not used to prevent change and transformation (DoE, 2001). This being the case, Johnson (2006: 126-131), maintains that the state moved to the *interference model* in order to play its steering and coordinated role as opposed to the *state control model* that was used during the apartheid period and *the supervisory model* that the state started with since the implementation of White Paper policies between 1998 and 2001.

1.3 The Current State of South African Higher Education

South African higher education is currently characterised by some of the elements that appear in the NCHE report of 1996, the Green Paper of 1996, the White Paper of 1997, the Higher Education Act of 1997 and the National Plan of 2001 discussed previously. These include the single coordinated and differentiated education system; merged and incorporated universities, technikons and colleges; and the new funding framework (NFF) that is goal-oriented and performance-related. These elements were actualised following

the release of the National Plan. With regard to the element of a single coordinated and differentiated higher education system insofar as governance is concerned, the South African government is using the interference model. Therefore, conditional autonomy is maintained and this allows the state to use procedural controls in order to fulfil its role of directing higher education in the interests of development while the institutions retain their substantive autonomy to teach and conduct research without external interference (CHE, 2004: 180).

Higher education is currently provided by merged and incorporated universities, technikons and colleges. The mergers and incorporations were approved by Cabinet in December 2002 and were implemented in two phases with effect from 1 January 2004 and 1 January 2005 respectively (cf. Jansen, 2003: In Chisholm 2003: 295-296). The mergers and incorporations started with 72 institutions of higher education which comprised 22 public higher education institutions (11 were universities, 5 technikons and 6 comprehensive institutions); and 50 merged technical colleges (Jansen, 2003: In Chisholm 2003: 296). Currently, there are 133 institutions of higher education: These include 23 public higher education institutions (11 universities, 6 comprehensive universities and 6 universities of technology); and 78 registered and 22 temporarily registered private higher education institutions.¹

Again, South African higher education is characterised by the single coordinated funding model which is the NFF or goal-oriented and performance-related funding model. This funding model is opposed to the fragmented funding model (SAPSE) of the apartheid period which was particularly aimed at developing White students and historically white universities (HWUs) more than other races and institutions of higher education. Aiming at improved equal access to higher education, the NFF is in three sets, namely the funding of students (student bursaries and loans) administered by National Student Financial Aid Scheme of South Africa (NSFAS); public funding of higher education institutions (HEIs), and the models and mechanisms used for this; and the private income earned by HEIs through a range of channels such as student fees, investments, fund-raising through grants and donations, and various entrepreneurial activities" (CHE, 2004: 193-199). Under this framework, the "...government grants cover on average 50% of public higher education

¹ CHE: An Overview of Higher Education in South Africa. <http://www.che.ac.za/heinsa/overview/>

funding, with 25% from fee income and 25% from other private income sources" (CHE, 2004: 201). In this case, "the government higher education budget is divided into two main sections, namely, earmarked grants (13% of the total, with 5% of this in special earmarked funds for institutional restructuring) and block grants (87%)" (CHE, 2004: 201).

Since the implementation of the NFF, student enrolment has increased. This increase is partly due to the involvement of The National Student Financial Aid Services (NSFAS) in higher education since its establishment in 1999. In its study of three universities, namely, University of Pretoria, University of the Western Cape and University of the Witwatersrand, the CHE facilitates this. For example, the CHE (2010: 10) indicates that "in 2000 there were 28,093 contact students at The University of Pretoria's various campuses; by 2006, this number had increased to 38,389."

Despite these developments, there are still a number of challenges facing higher education in South Africa. For example, one of the challenges is that even though the enrolment of historically disadvantaged students has increased, it masks inequalities across academic programs such as science, engineering and technology (SET), business and management (CHE, 2004: 235). Large proportions of historically disadvantaged students especially the Black students are enrolled in humanities programs (CHE, 2004: 235).

The other challenge that higher education in the post-apartheid period is facing, is the growing financial burden carried by students especially those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who rely mainly on their inadequate family incomes to pay for tuition fees, accommodation and living expenditure (HESA, 2008:10). This is exacerbated by limited public funds to support higher education. While there is a dramatic annual increase in tuition fees, living expenditure and accommodation at public higher education institutions (HEIs), the allocations given to NSFAS by the state are limited and these allocations appear to be steadily decreasing in the last few years (HESA, 2008: 10, 13).

In the context of the discussed historical background during apartheid, policy developments in post-apartheid and the current state of higher education, the purpose of this study is to uncover how and why free higher education policy proposal to address the problem of unequal access to higher education has been pushed onto the agenda of decision-makers. Also, this study proposes to explain why this policy proposal is not yet accepted as the

problem of unequal access to higher education seems not to have been adequately addressed by the existing policies. This is mainly because within this context of positive developments, challenges and implied problems in higher education, SASCO has not stopped pushing for free higher education as means to address unequal access to higher education as it will be seen in Chapter 4. Some authors even provoke this debate even more because they consider the present higher education policies as inappropriate to address the problem in question. For example, de Clercq (1997: 127) even argued that the nature of “...South African educational restructuring policy proposals...” is a hindrance to “...bringing about greater development, equity, participation and redress.” According to de Clercq, the major problem is that they are “...flawed in their conceptualization of the problems and misjudge the educational context and dynamics on the ground”: They appear to “...favour the interests of the more organized and privileged sections of society and only indirectly address the needs of the excluded and disadvantaged” (de Clercq, 1997: 127). Therefore, this context makes it worthy to explore why free higher education is not an accepted policy as it seems a more appropriate way to address the problem in question.

In the light of this context and in an attempt to achieve the previously stated objectives, this study will be guided by the following broad question:

How has free higher been put on the agenda of decision-makers?

Why has free higher being consistently pushed onto the agenda of decision-makers?

But then, why is free higher education not yet an accepted policy proposal?

Summary:

Generally, this chapter has established the policy context of free higher education by showing the historical background of the problem of unequal access to higher education. As has been indicated, the problem started during the apartheid era when access to higher education was determined by racial discrimination both in entry to and funding of higher education through the SAPSE funding formula. During the post-apartheid era, things changed as higher education had to be transformed to address the problem in question. The goal-oriented and performance-related funding model (now known as the NFF) was developed by the government as an alternative to address the unequal access to higher education.

During its development stages from the NCHE report of 1996 to the National Plan of 2001 and since its implementation in 2003, free higher education was proposed by SASCO to address the same problem. However, this free higher education is not yet an accepted policy proposal. Kingdon's Agenda Setting theory (or the Multiple Stream Model) has been identified as appropriate in order to address the purposes of this study. The next chapter seeks to contextualise this theory clarify why it was seen to be appropriate for this study.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter seeks to contextualise and discuss Kingdon's Agenda Setting theory which guides and underpins this study. Before doing so, broader issues such as policy studies as a field of inquiry, public policy as a concept, the policy cycle as a process, and agenda setting theories as analytical models will be discussed. The aim is to show how this theory is a useful and appropriate tool to examine the progression of free higher education as a policy proposal in South Africa.

2.1 Policy Studies

Policy studies came into being as an important subfield within political science in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Nagel, 1980: 392; Sabatier, 1992: In Dunn and Kelly, 1992: 27; Parsons, 1995: 457). The stimulus was failure in the implementation of policies and programmes (Parsons, 1995: 457). This generated an interest among the policy analysts and actors to understand what went wrong, why and how best-laid policy plans brought unintended outcomes (Parsons, 1995: 457; Radin, 2000: 46).

The 1980s saw the reconceptualisation of epistemological and ontological foundations of policy studies as there existed inherited limitations in the creation of viable policy solutions and understanding of basic public problems (Dunn and Kelly, 1992: In Dunn and Kelly, 1992: 12-13). However, in this period also, policy studies (as well as other social science disciplines) experienced crises as their "...empirical foundation grounded in positivism seemed defeated, the liberal political theory on which democracy rested appeared discredited, and capitalism seemed morally tainted" (Dunn and Kelly, 1992: In Dunn and Kelly, 1992: 14). The 1990s provided a new hope for the policy studies field to reaffirm itself as an independent discipline since this period "...opened with a renewed potential vitality of democratic-capitalist societies" (Dunn and Kelly, 1992: In Dunn and Kelly, 1992: 14). This period granted the field of policy studies an opportunity to reassess itself in terms of its core assumptions about theory, methods, problems, interrelationships with other social sciences and impact on society (Dunn and Kelly, 1992: In Dunn and Kelly, 1992: 16).

Presently, the policy studies field is an independent subfield of the social sciences. Given the changes it has passed through in its history, it could be defined as the blend of policy

analysis and programme evaluation (Sabatier, 1992: In Dunn and Kelly, 1992: 27). It “involves systematically studying the nature, causes, and effects of alternative public policies, with particular emphasis on determining the policies that will achieve given goals” (Nagel, 1980: 391). Policy studies also scrutinises the conflicts and conflict resolutions that come into view from the policy-making process in civil societies, the private sector and more commonly, in the public sector, that is, the government. In order to differentiate it from other social sciences such as political science, policy scholars have highlighted a number of phenomena in policy process which include among others:

- “The importance of policy communities/networks/subsystems involving actors ranging from the numerous public and private institutions, and from multiple levels of government
- The importance of substantive policy information
- The significant role of policy elites *vis-a-vis* the general public
- And differences in political behaviour across policy types” (Sabatier, 1992: In Dunn and Kelly, 1992: 33).

In light of the above elements emphasised by policy scholars, Kingdon’s Agenda Setting theory which is central to this study readily fits in the field of policy studies. This is because it deals with the involvement of policy communities including those within government as well as those outside of it, as will be seen later in this chapter when discussing this theory in detail. The emergence of this theory, like other agenda setting studies, can be traced back to the traditional debates between the elites and pluralists about “...why some problems reach the government agenda while others do not” (den Bak, 2008: 6). In the context of these debates in relation to this question, the issue of agenda setting was eventually recognised (den Bak, 2008: 6). Even though this is the case, much of the focus of traditional political scientists that were engaged in such debates was mainly on governmental policy participants (Sabatier, 1992: In Dunn and Kelly, 1992: 33). The role of agenda setting in this regard shall be fully explored later in the chapter.

2.2 Public Policy

We have seen that the policy studies field deals with the nature, causes, and effects of alternative public policies, but then the question is: What is public policy? With regard to clearly defining public policy, the only clear consensus is that there is no comprehensive definition of public policy (Lowi, 1970: 317-318). This is mainly because different public policy analysts define it differently on the basis of their subjective observations. As Hogwood and Gunn (1984: 23-24) argue, a policy is subjectively defined by an observer on the basis of personal experiences of different circumstances.

Some scholars define public policy in terms of general intentions of stakeholders among which the noticeable ones are government, governmental officials and bureaucrats, the public at large and interest groups. For example, Frobock (1979: 11) (cited in Iannantuono and Eyles, 1997: 1611), holds that public policy refers to "the pattern of actions that resolves conflicting claims or provides incentives for cooperation." In addition, Anderson (1984: 3) (cited in Iannantuono and Eyles, 1997: 1611), sees public policy as "a purposive course of action followed by an actor or a set of actors in dealing with a problem or matter of concern." What can be noted from these definitions is that public policy is about means and ends so that it appears that a policy is made as a means intended to address issues of concern.

Other scholars define public policy in terms of a collection of activities or a web of decisions and actions by policy or decision makers. For example, for Wildavsky (in Ham and Hill, 1993: 14) (cited in Booyesen and Erasmus, 1998: In Venter, 1998: 222), "public policy is a process as well as a product" of policy-making that concerns both governmental "courses of actions" and "webs of decisions" Theunissen (1998: In Venter, 1998: 109) attempts to combine these different definitions of public policy by maintaining that, "public policy is a product of policy making and can be viewed as a plan of action to achieve a preferred outcome within the overall purposes of government."

The latter definition of public policy as expanded by Theunissen is not only important to this study in relation to what public policy is in a general sense but also because of the fact that it seeks to indicate that these courses of action and decisions by the government are a product of policy-making. It is within the context of policy-making that agenda setting as a

process and theory can be situated. As Kingdon (1995: 2-3) notes, policy making is a process which comprise agenda setting; specification of alternative solutions; the official selection of one solution or a combination of solutions among those that are specified; and the implementation of the chosen alternative or set alternatives to address public concerns.

2.3 The Policy Cycle

Since the early 1970s, policy scholars have used the policy cycle model to provide an analytical basis for public-policy analysis (Sabatier, 1992: In Dunn and Kelly, 1992: 31). Normally, this framework consists of discrete phases or stages linked with the policy process. It should be noted that some of these scholars have identified as many as seven stages in the policy process, but the most conservative cite only four (Skok, 1995: 326; Jenkins-Smith and Sabatier, 1993: 2; Cochran et al., 2009: 8-11). The first stage of the policy process in these models is agenda setting in which a problem is recognised and defined. In this stage some problems and policy alternatives make it onto the agenda of decision-makers while others do not. The second stage is the decision-making process which is characterised by possible policy alternatives being identified, the options evaluated and the emergence of a policy. The third stage is the implementation of a selected policy option. The last stage is evaluation of the policy program in order to understand policy outputs and impacts.

This model of public policy analysis has been attacked by a number of scholars for various reasons. For example, Jenkins-Smith and Sabatier (1993: In Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993: 3) argue that the heuristic model lacks causal mechanisms and descriptive accuracy to test empirically the policy process between stages. This is to say that it does not explain the forces driving the policy process from one stage to another (Sabatier, 1992: In Dunn and Kelly, 1992: 31). Also Skok, (1995: 326) accuses this model of 'lacking common definitions of a variety of roles and knowledge of which partakers perform which roles.' Even though these are some of the weaknesses that can be perceived, the policy cycle model is pertinent to this study. This is because this study places emphasis on the agenda setting stage; that is, the stage in which possible policy options are considered or deserted by decision-makers. It is from this agenda setting stage that Kingdon's Agenda Setting theory which will be applied

in this study, finds its starting point. But then, the question is: What is agenda setting? What does agenda setting mean? This is the focus of the next section of this chapter.

2.4 Agenda Setting

As has previously been indicated, the policy analysis technique central to this study is that of policy agenda setting. But in order to make sense of what agenda setting is, agenda as a term must be defined. As a concept, an agenda refers to "...a general set of all political controversies that will be viewed at any point in time as falling within the range of legitimate concerns meriting the attention of the polity" or "...specific items scheduled for active and serious consideration by a particular institutional decision-making body" (Cobb and Elder, 1976: 14). Kingdon (1995: 3) reiterates this as he sees 'agenda' as a list of issues or problems to which governmental administration and people outside of the government are paying serious attention because of being affected by them. But Kingdon goes further to note that out of the set all issues or problems receiving serious attention, some are selected while others are rejected or shelved away (Kingdon, 1993: 3). In this way then, agenda is not only about a list of specific issues or problems to be seriously attended to by decision-makers and other affected or interested people from outside the government, but rather it is also about some issues or problems being selected and others being neglected or rejected in the course of decision-making.

This being the context then, the question that still remains is: what does agenda setting mean? Offering a more general sense of agenda setting, Meyer and Cloete (2000: 98) (cited in Ndlovu, 2008: 32) describe it as "an intentional process of planning and acting that defines and prioritises policy issues and problems, mobilises support and lobbies decision-makers to take appropriate action." For Cobb and Elder (1976: 126) agenda setting refers to "the process by which demands of various groups in the population are translated into items contesting for the serious attention of public officials." From a different perspective, McCombs (2004: 36) argues that "agenda setting is a robust and widespread effect of mass communication, an effect that results from specific content of media."

If one looks at the above definitions of agenda setting, it can be discovered that some are too broad and others too narrow. For example, McCombs' definition is too narrow because it focuses on the role the media plays in agenda setting. In this context then, it can be

claimed that these definitions seem to imply that the definition of agenda setting is nebulous. Therefore, one may even conclude that these definitions have what Howell and Ramess (1995: 105) (cited in Ndlovu, 2008: 33) call theoretical biasness and as such Kingdon's definition is seen as lacking biasness by these authors. According to Kingdon (1995: 3), agenda setting is 'the process of narrowing sets of subjects to the set that actually becomes the focus of attention of decision-makers.' The advantage this definition has over the previous ones is that it sticks to what is happening during agenda setting. Kingdon (1995: 3-4) emphasises that there are many issues and alternatives to address, but that only a few make it onto the agenda of decision-makers. It is for this reason that as a theory, agenda setting according to Kingdon (1995) seeks to understand how and why certain issues and alternatives become more seriously considered than others. It is tempting to see if this theory is important at all at this point, but this will be dealt with later in this chapter because it still needs to be scrutinised. This will be after Kingdon's theory has been thoroughly discussed so that it will make sense as to why it was seen as appropriate to this study. Although this study will be based only on this theory, it is important to give a brief survey of relevant agenda-formation literature so as to provide a useful context and clarify some of the contributions that underlie and have been subsumed by Kingdon.

2.5 Agenda Setting Theories

2.5.1 Schattschneider's Conflict Expansion Model

Schattschneider is regarded as one of the pioneers of agenda setting studies as Nelson (1984: 3) (cited in Eustis, 2000: 10) refers to Schattschneider as "dean of agenda-setting studies" because of his classical work of 1975-*The Semi-Sovereign People*. Schattschneider (1975) in an attempt to explain how policy issues receive the public attention basically described the USA democratic governmental system in terms of conflict over issues related to the interest of the public. Schattschneider establishes his argument by indicating that a democratic (free) society is centrally characterised by a "...tremendous contagiousness of conflict" (1975: 2). According to Schattschneider (1975: 2), this conflict involves two parts: The first part is "the few individuals who are engaged at the centre" and the second part is "the audience that is irresistibly attracted to the scene." For Schattschneider, the latter are

important not only because of their number but also because they can determine the outcome of a conflict (1975: 2).

In relation to setting the policy agenda, it is Schattschneider's argument that the public—"the crowd" has a limited role in agenda setting. As Schattschneider (1975: 76) indicates, the community only makes "a general, overall judgment about the broad tendency of government and the general results of public policy." Schattschneider argues that the manner in which ordinary citizens are excluded from participation is through invisible processes (Schattschneider, 1975: 105). This being the case then, the community's role in agenda setting is limited to choosing among the policy alternatives proposed by political elites. According to Schattschneider, normally, it is through the processes such as paying taxes and voting as an involvement in governance, that the ordinary citizens have the ultimate authority to acknowledge, alter or reject decisions made by their political leaders (Schattschneider, 1975: 75).

Another point by Schattschneider is that conflicts that dominate at the end of the day become issues that receive the attention of political elites and thereby get agenda status. For Schattschneider, there are many potential conflicts but only a few gain serious attention because in a democratic society priorities are set to determine those that are significant among the multitude of potential conflicts (Schattschneider, 1975: 64, 66). Therefore, major conflicts receive more attention because they overwhelm and subordinate or even blot out the large number of less important ones (Schattschneider, 1975: 65).

In his Agenda Setting theory which underlies this study, Kingdon considers Schattschneider's conflict expansion model in a footnote whereby he indicates that policy-making is a process that includes "...the specification of alternatives from which a choice is to be made..."(Kingdon, 1995: 2-3). Kingdon uses Schattschneider's famous phrase "the definition of alternatives is the supreme instrument of power" (Schattschneider, 1975: 66). To support his idea, one of the basic assumptions in Kingdon's theory is that 'before any subject can rise to the decision agenda, a viable policy alternative solution must be presented to decision-makers to be considered' (Kingdon, 1995: 142). Therefore, what is most relevant to this study in this context is the definition of alternatives presented to decision-makers in order to make a policy to address the problem. To be more specific, it will be seen how Free

Higher Education is defined by SASCO and how it presents this policy proposal as an alternative to decision-makers.

2.5.2 Cobb and Elder's Issue Definition Model

One of the major contributions to agenda setting literature is Roger Cobb and Charles Elder's work, *Participation in American Politics: The Dynamics of Agenda Building*. The important issue to note is that Cobb and Elders (1976: 44) use Schattschneider's "redefinition" as their point of departure in analysing how and why certain issues reach the agenda of decision-makers and why certain policy alternatives receive serious attention by decision-makers while others do not.

Cobb and Elder's view is that under normal circumstances, a problem is raised onto the governmental agenda only if its proponents engage additional advocates to confront their opponents and thereby redefine the issue of concern (Cobb and Elder, 1976: 45). But Cobb and Elder hold that language is a very important tool that is often used by opposing groups in order to gain recognition and garner support (Cobb and Elder, 1983: 56-62). Therefore, the process of issue definition makes it possible for policy entrepreneurs to gain the attention of new groups by intensifying the conflict associated with a certain policy issue or problem (Cobb and Elder, 1983: 52).

Furthermore, Cobb and Elder emphasise that problems are socially constructed and as such this may lead to a number of various possible definitions coming to the surface (Cobb and Elder, 1983: 172-173). This is because for Cobb and Elder, "...problems are not simply matters of fact of a situation" but rather "they are matters of interpretation and social definition" (Cobb and Elder, 1983: 172). Cobb and Elder further indicate that problem definition presupposes its solution and as such the manner in which a problem is defined has an effect on the manner in which solutions circumscribed to it are chosen (Cobb and Elder, 1983: 174, 175). Therefore, their argument is that only problems with feasible solutions within the bounds of available resources, accepted values and beliefs rise into the formal policy agenda (Cobb and Elder, 1983: 176). Therefore, for Cobb and Elder it is very important that even if definitions of a particular problem may conflict since policy problems are socially constructed, they must be probable at all times (Cobb and Elder, 1983: 177). In a situation whereby conflicting definitions may confront each other, it is unlikely that

problems involving such definitions can rise into the governmental agenda unless as Cobb and Elder (1983: 178) argue, "...the mobilisation of bias is distinctly one-sided in both scope and intensity."

Again Cobb and Elder emphasise the involvement of mass media in the agenda setting process in order for issues to be expanded and attract public attention through the usage of symbols. It is their opinion that policy entrepreneurs depend on public attention created by the mass media. These authors facilitate this by describing the strategic use of symbols to arouse public attention, to provoke political decision-makers, to discourage the public, to demonstrate and affirm the strength of commitment of governmental officials and general public, with the mass media as a tool to disseminate information, expand the conflict and then attract new policy actors (Cobb and Elder, 1983: 142-150). While acknowledging that the involvement of media is important in agenda setting, Kingdon argues that the role of media is not as significant as that of governmental officials such as presidents because among others media only report what is going on in the government instead of bringing ideas onto decision-agenda (1995: 59).

Public participation in the agenda setting process is seen as important in Cobb and Elder's argument. In their view, modern democracy allows mass participation insofar as accountability to the public is concerned and it insists on providing the opportunity for mass participation insofar as decision-making is concerned even though it recognises that direct mass participation is necessarily limited (Cobb and Elder, 1983: 162-163). For Cobb and Elder (1983: 181-182) the public is very important in agenda setting because most of the issues raised by presidents originate from it. While acknowledging this view, Kingdon's critique is that quite often issues of governmental agenda originate from governmental officials such as presidents, senators and cabinet secretaries (Kingdon, 1995: 67). Agenda may be set first by the presidents and then garner public support afterwards (Kingdon, 1995: 67).

2.5.3 Stone's Problem Definition Model

So far we have seen that there is a general view amongst agenda setting scholars that the problem definition is very important in agenda setting because it determines whether or not issues make it into the governmental agenda. Deborah Stone's *"Policy Paradox: The Art of*

Political Decision Making” is one of the key contributions in this regard. In the discussion of problem definition, much of Stone’s argument rejects the rational decision-making model which generally argues that policy decisions are made through a series of rational steps. Stone proposes instead a rather different alternative, but one which recognises an essential paradox in policy making. This being the case, Stone posits that “problem definition is a matter of representation because the description of a situation is a portrayal from only one of many points of view” (Stone, 1989: 133). For Stone this is because conditions or issues do not have intrinsic characteristics that make them more or less of a problem, but rather policy actors such as individuals, interest groups, and government bureaucracies deliberately and strategically portray them in ways that will support their points of view. Stone explains this by indicating that these political actors use causal stories and rhetorical language to define policy issues and thereby claim the right to appeal to the government to solve them (cf. Stone, 1989: 282). In principle these political actors use the language of problem or issue definition.

The central theory of this study, that is, Agenda Setting theory by Kingdon does emphasise the importance of problem definition in the agenda setting process. For Kingdon, problems are identified, recognised and defined through indicators such as crises for example, whereby certain issues get out of control (Kingdon, 1995: 95). What is even more relevant to this study is that unlike Stone, Kingdon goes even further to explain why some problems drop from the agenda of decision-makers. It is Kingdon’s argument that some problems fade because sometimes people get used to the problem or the attention itself is faddish (Kingdon, 1995: 113).

2.5.4 Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith’s Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF)

The Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) was proposed by Paul Sabatier and Hank Jenkins-Smith in response to what they call the inadequacies of *stages heuristic* model to the analysis of public policy process. It is important to note that the ACF does not only deal with agenda setting but with the entire policy process (Sabatier, 1993: In Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993: 14). However, ACF fits in the agenda setting literature because it gives some light to complex policy processes such as the universal service debate which is characterised by shifting dimensions and policy-oriented learning across the subsystems.

The ACF proposes that what explains change in the policy agenda are individuals who have core beliefs about policy areas, the severity of the problem as well as its causes, community's capability to solve the problem and feasible solutions to address it. In this context, it is Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith's belief that policy change takes place through synchronised action of individuals with similar policy core beliefs (Jenkins-Smith and Sabatier, 1993: In Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993: 5; Sabatier, 1993: In Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993: 25). These individuals organise themselves into "advocacy coalition" groups in order to affect change. According to Sabatier (1993: In Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993: 23-25) 'advocacy coalitions involve groups of individuals such as elected and agency officials, interest group leaders, researchers, journalists, analysts and other policy actors who play a significant role in creating, disseminating and evaluating policy proposals.'

The ACF's argument is that policy change is to a greater extent determined by policy-oriented learning. For Sabatier (1993: In Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993: 19), 'policy learning refers to a reasonably enduring change of thought or behavioural intentions that are concerned with the attainment (or revision) of the precepts of a policy belief system.' But then, Sabatier (1993: In Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993: 19) notes that this type of learning is 'an important aspect of policy change because among other things, it can alter secondary aspects of a coalition's belief system and aspects of policy core beliefs.' Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith hold that this type of learning is facilitated by "moderate levels of conflict; an issue that is analytically tractable; and the presence of a professionalised forum in which experts from competing coalitions must justify their claims before peers" (Jenkins-Smith and Sabatier, 1993: In Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993: 55). Therefore, the basic outcome of this learning is a "new systematic governing coalition" with a particular approach to address problems of concern (Sabatier, 1993: In Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993: 19).

Credit must be given to ACF because it extends some elements brought up in Kingdon's Multiple Stream model. For example, the ACF spots that individuals in order to affect agenda setting must organise themselves into advocacy coalition groups. Elsewhere Kingdon mentions that individuals only form coalitions during the bargaining process in order to garner support for items to be considered (1995: 159). Also, the ACF points that policy-oriented learning within the coalitions does affect aspects of policy core beliefs of coalition

groups and consequently policy change becomes inevitable. Kingdon (1995: 17) also sees 'policy learning (accumulation of knowledge) especially among specialists in a particular policy area as a contributor to governmental agendas and alternatives; and the generation of policy proposals by such specialists.' This depends on how information is diffused among them. For example, it can be disseminated through research studies, discussions, speeches, hearings, and bill introductions (Kingdon: 1995: 17).

2.5.5 Cook's News Media as a Political Institution Model

While some of the agenda-formation literature we have seen so far do acknowledge the importance of mass media in agenda setting, Cook's *"Governing with the News"* specifically focusing on the media offers a different perspective about the role of media in agenda setting. Acknowledging that media is an influential force in agenda setting and public policy process, Cook holds that "the American news media can and do directly influence perceptions of public moods, and in other ways shape the context of one legislator asking another for support, whether or not the public was involved, had chosen sides or was even aware of the issue" (Cook, 1998: 11). Cook describes the role of the media as that of a filter because it selectively informs the public as well as governmental officials about issues of concern. One of the important elements of Cook's argument is the use of the term "negotiation of newsworthiness" in order to describe the relationship between the media and political processes in agenda setting. It is Cook's observation that there is an ongoing interaction between governmental officials and members of media houses that has a great degree of effect on agenda setting. As Cook writes, "Politicians dictate conditions and rules of access and designate certain events and issues as important by providing an arena for them. Journalists, in turn, decide whether something is interesting enough to cover, the context in which to place it, and the prominence the story receives" (Cook, 1998: 12).

Although acknowledging the importance of the media in the agenda setting process as we have seen previously, Kingdon's view unlike Cook's as it will be seen in Kingdon's theory is that the media have a very limited role in directly affecting governmental agenda. However, whether limited or not the role of the media is very important and it is worth mentioning in this study. This is because policy entrepreneurs whether unsuccessfully or not, use it to mobilise and gain support from the public.

2.5.6 Baumgartner and Jones's Punctuated Equilibrium Model

One of the major contributions to agenda-formation literature is Baumgartner and Jones's book, *"Agendas and Instability in American Politics."* In this book, Baumgartner and Jones analyse agenda setting through a model called *Punctuated Equilibrium*. The general argument of Baumgartner and Jones in this model is that both change and stability are the essential features of the agenda setting process. In order to clarify this, one of the important elements that Baumgartner and Jones emphasise is that the development of "new alternatives" and policy change is a result of the redefinition of old issues (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993: 11). Now for Baumgartner and Jones, policy issues within the patterns of stability over a period of time receive little attention but then they are disrupted by brief periods of turmoil. This process of stability and dramatic change are what Baumgartner and Jones call "punctuated equilibrium" (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993: 18-21).

Issue definition is according to Baumgartner and Jones, a determining factor of both stability and policy change. This is because it has the potential capacity to contribute to the mobilisation of previously disinterested groups (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993: 16). However, Baumgartner and Jones indicate that the structure of political institutions limit the raising of new issues or the redefining of old ones, but then issue definition together with institutional control make it possible for the alternation between stability and dramatic change in policy process (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993: 16).

Baumgartner and Jones also emphasise that the media, interest groups and the public play an important role in the agenda setting process. According to Baumgartner and Jones (1993: 103) "...the media play an integral role in the policy process by directing attention alternately toward different aspects of the same issues over time and by shifting attention from one issue to another." With regard to interest groups, Baumgartner and Jones (1993: 190) posit that, they "...play an important role in formulating questions and defining the terms of the public debate." Baumgartner and Jones further indicate that 'interest groups also structure the policy choices presented to decision-makers and the public's understanding about the issues that affect it' (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993: 190). However, 'whenever interests become well mobilised on one side while inadequately organised on the other', "...conflict and political debate are unlikely" to take place (Baumgartner and

Jones, 1993: 190). Lastly, Baumgartner and Jones in relation to the role of the public in agenda setting note that the public opinion can lag behind government actions especially in cases whereby the public would call for actions opposed to what the government does: For example, 'when the government spends too much the public may call for less or call for more when the government spends less' (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993: 247). However, for Baumgartner and Jones the public opinion is reactive in the sense that public reactions only occur late after important issues have already been debated upon by policy elites (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993: 248).

Despite some notable differences Kingdon's Agenda Setting theory has some similarities to Baumgartner and Jones's Punctuated Equilibrium model. Eustis (2000) shows a number of these similarities and differences because both theories were central to her thesis. However, it is not the aim of this study to particularly discuss these differences in order to contextualise Kingdon's theory. Time, purpose and space do not allow for this.

2.5.7 Kingdon's Multiple Stream Approach

The general overview of the previously discussed theories is that the agenda setting process is affected by the interaction of various policy actors and processes. Indeed, all the above theories give some insight into the features of the agenda setting process as they mention that in agenda setting there is conflict expansion, problem redefinition, public and officials' influence and policy learning (cf. Eustis, 2000: 21). However it is the work of Kingdon that will be examined in detail because it underlies this study.

According to Kingdon as it has been previously shown, an agenda is a list of issues or problems to which people both inside the government (governmental officials) and those outside the government (interest groups) are paying serious attention because they are affected by the agenda (Kingdon, 1995: 3). Within this agenda setting process, there are some policy issues or problems which rise into and are placed on the decision agenda, but equally so, there are those to which attention is not given. According to Kingdon, the purpose of the agenda setting process is to narrow down the range of issues to those that actually turn out to be the focus of the attention of policy-makers (Kingdon, 1995: 3). Kingdon divides agenda setting into two sections, namely:

- 'Governmental agenda- a list of subjects that are brought in so as to receive attention from governmental officials and those around them; and
- Decision agenda- a list of subjects within the government that are considered to be activated' (Kingdon, 1995: 4).

Kingdon argues that there are two categories of factors, which might affect the agenda setting process and specification of alternatives. These factors will be used in order to analyse the case of the Free Higher Education proposal in South Africa. These factors according to Kingdon are:

- 'Participants who are active;
- Processes by which agenda items takes place and alternatives come into prominence' (Kingdon, 1995: 15-16)

These categories will be discussed in detail below. However, it is also important to note that for Kingdon these participants and processes are inseparable from each other. This is because the participants that contribute to the movement of a policy issue onto governmental or decision agenda are the same participants that get involved in the processes that make it possible for a policy proposal to either become an accepted policy or not.

2.5.7.1 Participants of Agenda Setting

In Kingdon's view it is imperative to determine the importance of policy participants in the agenda setting process before discussing the process itself so as to understand their role and influence in the agenda setting process (Kingdon, 1995: 21). According to Kingdon (1995: 15-16) these participants in agenda setting include the president, presidential staff, bureaucrats, and various policy actors outside of the government which comprise media, interest groups, political appointees and the public at large. It is Kingdon's opinion that all these participants can be the sources of agenda issues and policy alternative proposals (Kingdon, 1995: 16). These participants can be divided into two groups. These are:

- 'Those *inside of the government* who are normally known as governmental administration. Governmental administration includes president, presidential staff, political appointees and civil servants; and

- Those *outside of the government* comprised of interest groups, businesses and industries, researchers, academics, consultants, media, political parties and the public at large' (Kingdon, 1995: 21-68).

While some of these participants may dominate in the bringing of policy issues into the formal governmental agenda, others may dominate in the creation of alternatives. As Kingdon argues, while the people in the administration dominate agenda setting itself, those outside the government normally dominate in the creation of policy alternatives (Kingdon, 1995: 69).

According to Kingdon, in these categories of participants, policy issues may reach agenda in two ways. Firstly, 'participants may transfer policy items from the non-governmental agenda to the governmental formal agenda by mobilisation of the relevant public by leaders. Secondly, policy issues may reach the agenda through diffusion of ideas in professional circles or among policy elites, particularly the bureaucrats' (Kingdon, 1995: 16).

2.5.7.1.1 Participants Inside of the Government

As has been shown, participants inside of the government include president, presidential staff, political appointees and civil servants. It was also indicated that these participants, according to Kingdon, dominate the agenda setting process itself. It is now important to go into the details of the role each plays in the agenda setting process. This is because for an issue to reach the decision agenda, it must be considered a top-priority by the people in the administration (Kingdon, 1995: 21).

The first participant of governmental administration is the president. Now, according to Kingdon (1995: 23) even though the president cannot wholly control policy agendas, the president is nevertheless a dominant or powerful figure in agenda setting as compared to other participants. The prominence of the president in agenda setting follows from a number of resources which include institution or organisation and the office he/she occupies (Kingdon, 1995: 24-26).

The other component of governmental administration that plays an important role in agenda setting is presidential staffers. According to Kingdon, while presidential staffers are not among the most discussed agenda setters, they play an important role in agenda setting

(Kingdon, 1995: 27). This is because from Kingdon's point of view, some agenda items of great importance reach the president for example, through presidential advisors (Kingdon 1995: 27).

Apart from that, there are political appointees as part of governmental administration. According to Kingdon (1995: 27) these are the people appointed by the president. They range "...from cabinet secretaries and undersecretaries to heads of bureaus, administrations or other agencies" (Kingdon, 1995: 27-28). In relation to agenda setting, Kingdon argues that 'they do not originate policy ideas, but rather play a significant role in placing them on the agenda of important people both within and outside of their agencies' (Kingdon, 1995: 28). It is Kingdon's observation that 'quite frequently policy proposals and ideas float around without seriously being considered for sometime within the agencies that these political appointees work in, but once the political appointees have interest in them, these issues normally attain serious consideration' (Kingdon, 1995: 28). However, Kingdon notes that a fundamental problem with political appointees is their impermanence: they do not stay for a long time in administration, yet they aim at bringing about change while still in office (Kingdon, 1995: 29-30).

With regard to the role of the civil servants or bureaucrats in agenda setting, Kingdon posits that they play a crucial role in the specification of policy alternatives (Kingdon, 1995: 32). This is based on the fact that the major preoccupation of civil servants is policy implementation which makes them concentrate on the already existing agenda items rather than creating the new ones (Kingdon, 1995: 31). Kingdon (1995: 32) clarifies this by indicating that, "civil servants in locations like planning and evaluation offices continue to work on proposals of various kinds, keeping them ready for the opportunity that will be provided by a receptive administration to push the idea into prominence." The sources of their influence comprise their longevity in areas of occupation, expertise and relationship with other people in administration and interest groups (Kingdon, 1995: 33).

2.5.7.1.2 Participants Outside of the Government

As indicated earlier, participants outside of the government include "...interest groups, businesses and industries, researchers, academics, consultants, media, political parties and the public at large" (Kingdon, 1995: 45). Interest groups affect agenda setting in two ways:

on one hand they create new ideas and promote them to be governmental courses of action and on the other hand they advocate alternatives considered by policy-makers (Kingdon, 1995: 49). However, interest groups dominate the latter; that is, they affect policy alternatives more than creating agenda items. As Kingdon writes, "...the actual creation of policy agenda items by interest groups may be a less frequent activity than blocking agenda items or proposing (alternatives) and for proposals already on the agenda" (Kingdon, 1995: 51). Resources the interest groups use in order to play an important role in affecting agendas and alternatives include 'political affiliations, capability to mobilise their members and sympathisers; and their numbers, status or wealth' (Kingdon, 1995: 51).

Besides the interest groups, the collection of academics, researchers, and consultants constitute one of the most important groups of participants outside of government (Kingdon, 1995: 53). Just like the interest groups, the central activity of academics, researchers, and consultants is to affect policy alternatives for governmental agenda (Kingdon, 1995: 55). Indeed, Kingdon notes that politicians normally turn to these policy actors for relevant proposals to address their concerns and problems (Kingdon, 1995: 55). Furthermore, these participants have more impact on agenda setting in both the short-term and long-term. Kingdon's observation in this regard is that for the short term, policy-makers normally turn to academics as they provide analyses and proposals related to issues of concern, but for the long term policy-makers turn to researchers (Kingdon, 1995: 56). However, it is Kingdon's view that academics, researchers, and consultants "...affect long-term directions more than short-term outcomes" (Kingdon, 1995: 68).

With regard to the media, Kingdon indicates that they are normally portrayed as powerful agenda setters, but actually they are less important than expected (Kingdon, 1995: 58, 68). This is because mass media in Kingdon's view are more preoccupied with reporting events than with influencing governmental agenda (Kingdon, 1995: 59, 68). 'One of the contributing factors for media's less-than-anticipated on the policy agenda is the tendencies of the press to cover prominent stories for a short period of time and then turn to the next story, therefore weakening its impact' (Kingdon, 1995: 58-59). However, Kingdon notes that the media is important in many ways under some circumstances. For example, the media serves as a tool for communication between all the categories of policy participants; acts as

the magnifier of moments that have already started elsewhere; and affects public opinion (Kingdon, 1995: 59-60).

Other participants outside of the government that also have an important role in agenda setting are election-related participants, namely, campaigners and political parties. In this context, Kingdon shows that the promises made by politicians during campaigns for elections affect an agenda once they occupy public office (Kingdon, 1995: 61). However, Kingdon says that campaign promises can gain policy agenda status only if they are accompanied by a firm presidential dedication or an electorate that pushes the idea and tries to hold the president to his promises (Kingdon, 1995: 63). In the case of political parties, Kingdon insists that they can affect policy agendas through the content of their platforms, the impact of their leadership, their adherents and ideologies (Kingdon, 1995: 63-64).

The last component of participants outside of the government that Kingdon suggests is public opinion. According to Kingdon, public opinion can affect the agenda setting process either positively or negatively (Kingdon, 1995: 65). Positively, the public opinion may affect agenda setting by pushing some agenda items onto the governmental agenda and negatively, it may constrain or block a governmental course of action. Kingdon writes, "public opinion may sometimes direct government *to* do something but it more often constrains government *from* doing something" (Kingdon, 1995: 65). Another important element that Kingdon raises is that "mass public opinion affects agenda more than the alternatives" (Kingdon, 1995: 66, 68). Kingdon justifies this by indicating that public opinion does not directly affect debates over policy alternatives because it is not well informed like the policy specialists (Kingdon, 1995: 66).

2.5.7.2 Processes of Agenda Setting

With regard to processes that affect agenda setting, Kingdon identifies streams of problems, policies and politics and shows that, in order for a public policy to come into existence, these three different streams have to converge. When this happens, it is because there are enough policy-makers who are convinced that a certain problem should be addressed by a certain policy alternative. These processes are discussed in detail below.

2.5.7.2.1 The Problem Stream

According to Kingdon, the problem stream concerns various problems that may capture the attention of governmental officials and interest groups. These problems are identified, recognised and defined through indicators such as crises for example, whereby certain issues get out of control (Kingdon, 1995: 95). A good example is that of a dramatic car accident that captures the attention of the media and gets to be widely reported and discussed in various social sectors. Central to the indicators is the ability to cast the magnitude of a problem (Kingdon, 1995: 91). So, if conditions are indeed bad enough or circumstances have changed drastically, policy-makers come to recognise a condition as a problem to be attended to. However, indicators are not self-evident even though they have powerful implications: They are subject to interpretations even though this can sometimes be complicated (Kingdon, 1995: 94). In that case, Kingdon notes that governmental and nongovernmental agencies routinely monitor various activities and events so as to understand the indicators of a particular problem (Kingdon, 1995: 90-91). Kingdon further indicates that "important people in and around government also look for changes in such indicators" (Kingdon, 1995: 91). And therefore, any change in an indicator is considered by policy-makers as change in the state of affairs even though this can be a problem in the sense that it can sometimes be exaggerated and thereby create exaggerated effects on policy agenda (Kingdon, 1995: 92-93).

Besides using indicators to define problems, Kingdon also notes that there are a number of ways to define policy problems. According to Kingdon (1995: 110) problems can sometimes be defined by attaching values to them. Apart from that, problems can be defined by way of comparison which involves looking for similarities or differences in problems (Kingdon, 1995: 111). In this regard, Kingdon shows that comparisons can be made among others, across different countries and this can be such that living in a certain country can be a problem in itself (Kingdon, 1995: 111). Lastly, according to Kingdon (1995: 111) problems can be defined through categorisation. Despite the fact that it might be difficult to define a problem by its category, it is Kingdon's belief that categories help to "...structure people's perceptions of a problem in many important aspects" (Kingdon, 1995: 111, 112-113).

Moreover, Kingdon's observation is that even though indicators play an important role in showing the existence of a problem and its magnitude, "problems are not as such self-evident by indicators" (Kingdon, 1995: 94). According to Kingdon (1995: 94) 'problems need a *little push* in order to gain the attention of people in and around the government.' And as such Kingdon argues that that push is sometimes provided by among others, events like crises or disasters or the personal experience of a policy-maker (Kingdon, 1995: 95).

Another way that problems gain the attention of policy participants is through feedback. As Kingdon (1995: 100) states, the feedback about already existing programs which indicates implementation setbacks can bring the problem to the attention of governmental officials. The feedback can reach the officials in a number of ways. Kingdon argues that sometimes feedback come to officials in the form of systematic monitoring and evaluation of implemented programs (Kingdon, 1995: 101). But he notes that quite often, it comes to officials more informally in the form of complaints and caseworks (Kingdon, 1995: 101).

2.5.7.2.2 The Policy Stream

The policy stream should be understood to refer to the selection process over the alternative solutions for resolving societal problems or issues. This involves the generation and specification of policy alternatives by policy communities or policy entrepreneurs to address problems (Kingdon, 1995: 116). According to Kingdon, these communities are composed of specialists who might be in or outside of government: they include participants such as researchers, academics, interest groups, analysts and congressional staffers who interact with each other, exchange ideas, and formulate and reformulate policy alternatives (Kingdon, 1995: 116, 117, 122). These are people who actively invest resources to advocate particular proposals because they see a need to solve a problem that is in one way or another affecting them (Kingdon, 1995: 123). These communities could be fragmented or closed and tightly knit. A fragmented community can be highly unstable and as such produce fragmented policy in the sense that there will be no common knowledge of policy issues and proposals; and a closely knit community on the other hand, generates shared viewpoints, points of reference and ways of thinking (Kingdon, 1995: 119).

This stream is characterised by a 'primeval soup' in which ideas float around looking for opportunities to recombine as solutions to policy problems or issues (Kingdon, 1995: 116).

Many of these ideas have the possibility to solve the problems, but selection must be made. It is in this case that some become prominent (or survive) while others fade (Kingdon, 1995: 117, 122). It is for this reason that for Kingdon, the advantage of having policy entrepreneurs becomes evident in this context so that some proposals become prominent. Accordingly, policy entrepreneurs build acceptance for their policy proposal by softening up the policy communities and the public at large by introducing bills, making speeches, amending proposals, and issuing researches and reports (Kingdon, 1995: 128-130).

Apart from that, policy proposals also become prominent and accepted because of anticipated future constraints which include fiscal constraints. As Kingdon (1995: 131) argues, some policy proposals become accepted because of being perceived as technically feasible if implemented. In principle, some ideas become prominent because they seem not to be difficult and costly if implemented. Therefore, in some cases as Kingdon observes, “without that belief in its technical feasibility, the proposal is not likely to survive to the point of serious consideration” (Kingdon, 1995: 132). Moreover, Kingdon (1995: 132) insists that ‘some policy proposals survive because of being compatible with the values of specialists.’ Kingdon acknowledges that specialists do not share similar values, but in some respects, the bulk of them see the world in similar ways and therefore approve or disapprove of similar approaches to policy problems (Kingdon, 1995: 132-133).

Therefore, Kingdon argues that in order for a problem to be seriously considered, there must be viable solution attached to it. However, Kingdon acknowledges that the availability of a viable solution might not be enough to affect the agenda because many solutions usually take a long time before they can be considered, but then problems on the other hand need solutions attached to them in order to reach both governmental and decision agenda (Kingdon, 1995: 142-143).

2.5.7.2.3 The Political Stream

According to Kingdon (1995) the political stream also explains the relative prominence of policy issues on the official agenda. ‘This stream is composed of things such as public mood, pressure groups, campaigns and election results, partisan or ideological distributions in Congress and changes in the governmental administration’ (Kingdon, 1995: 145). According to Kingdon “these developments or processes in the political stream have a powerful effect”

on agenda setting-whether governmental or decision agenda (Kingdon, 1995: 145). This is because new ideas may become prominent while others might be shelved (Kingdon, 1995: 145). The important thing to note if this is the case is that the developments in this political stream affect both the problem and policy streams; that is, both problem recognition and definition; and also selection and specification of alternatives.

Among these developments in the political stream, the public or national mood seems to be very important for Kingdon. This is because politicians and other policy actors believe that they can sense the right time (for example, the national mood and changes in it) to push items onto the agenda of decision-makers (Kingdon, 1995: 146-147). It must be noted that according to Kingdon (1995: 148-149, 162) "the national mood does not reside in the mass public but it is instead perceived in the attitudes of various more active sectors of the public." As such, the process of sensing the national mood works in two ways in Kingdon's view. In the first place, "elected politicians judge their constituents' mood from communications such as mails, town meetings, smaller gatherings, and delegations of people or individuals coming to them during their office hours...;" and in the second place, "neglected officials tend to sense the national mood from what they hear from politicians" (Kingdon, 1995: 149). But overall, the national mood can be seen to create a "fertile ground" for the promotion and receptivity of new agenda items onto official agenda (Kingdon, 1995: 147). However, Kingdon (1995: 147) notes that even though this is the case, 'the national mood can sometimes constrain some items from reaching governmental or decision agenda' and thereby "...push others into relative obscurity."

The interest groups (organised forces) are also important in this stream. According to Kingdon, governmental officials normally observe developments within organised forces by judging the degree of consensus among them (Kingdon, 1995: 150). "If there is a widespread consensus among organised forces, the officials either move along with them or at least know what they are up against. If there is a disagreement among these forces, officials judge the balance of power among them (Kingdon, 1995: 163). Therefore, change in this case is assisted by organised forces that favour it while those opposed to it are its impediments. But according to Kingdon, change can still take place even when there is opposition to it: this takes place when powerful interests overcome the opposing side (Kingdon, 1995: 163).

The third component of the political stream is composed of events within government itself and these include turnover of key personnel most commonly through election results (Kingdon, 1995: 153). Change in positions of authority or personnel in those positions brings with it new items or priorities onto the agenda by virtue of the turnover itself (Kingdon, 1995: 153). For example, during election campaigns campaigners make a lot of promises and when elected into office- (hence turnover), they bring with them new agenda items or priorities and thereby come to be in a position to push these onto the official agenda. Presidents are a good example of this because that is how they normally affect agenda setting. Furthermore, agendas may also be affected by jurisdictional boundaries even if change might be brought in by turnover of key personnel in government or those already in government. As Kingdon notes, while at times jurisdiction competition may result in deadlock, at other times it brings about greater movement and thereby enhances the chance of an issue to rise onto the agenda (Kingdon, 1995: 158). The deadlock may exist when certain agenda items do not fall under a relevant jurisdiction which may lead to certain potential agenda items not making it onto official agenda (Kingdon, 1995: 158).

The above being the case, Kingdon emphasises that it is important to build consensus in this stream. Kingdon (1995: 159) argues that in the political stream, consensus building involves a lot of bargaining as opposed to persuasion among specialists in the policy stream. As the bargaining process takes place, coalitions are built so as to gain more support for an agenda item to receive the serious attention of decision-makers (Kingdon, 1995: 159). Any failure to join a coalition would mean segregation from the benefits of participation and since many people would like to be included, they will choose a coalition to which they would like to belong (Kingdon, 1995: 159-160).

2.5.7.2.4 Policy Windows and Coupling Process

While the previously discussed processes may shed some light on how and why certain agenda items or proposals receive serious attention by policy-makers, Kingdon also explains this in the light of policy windows and the coupling process. But then the important question here is: how can a public policy result from all these streams if they are necessary for setting the agenda at all?

In an attempt to also address this question, Kingdon (1995: 165) first of all describes 'policy windows as the chances or opportunities for advocates of proposals to push their pet solutions' onto the decision agenda rather than governmental agenda. Policy windows open and close at different times and for different reasons. Notably, policy windows do not open for a long period of time, but for a short period of time (Kingdon, 1995: 166). On top of opening for a short period, policy windows open infrequently; that is, they rarely open (Kingdon, 1995: 166). Now in agenda setting what is important is the opening of these windows. Of course by nature they are opportunities for proposals to be pushed into the agenda of decision-makers. Therefore, as Kingdon argues, the advocates should always take the opportunity when windows are open in order to push their proposals, alternatives or solutions into the decision agenda of policy-makers (Kingdon, 1995: 175).

It was indicated earlier that policy windows open for a number of reasons. Now Kingdon maintains that these windows generally open because of changes in the political stream and so particularly, they open when there is a change in the national mood usually triggered by transformative elections, the occurrence of disasters and changes of administration (Kingdon, 1995: 168). These windows also close but do so for a number of reasons such as the feeling amongst the stakeholders that they have addressed the problem through decision; when there is a failure of participants to get action; change in personnel; and when there are no alternatives available to address the issues of concern (Kingdon, 1995: 169-170). However, a policy window may open and then end up closing without action being taken. According to Kingdon, this may happen when there are misperceptions about or misestimating whether or not policy windows are open or closed (Kingdon, 1995: 170). So, policy participants, if this is the case, need to be cautious at all times in order not to miss opportunities for action.

So far Kingdon has been showing us that policy windows open and close but then the question which remains is; how, when or why does a policy come into being? Kingdon (1995) explains this in the light of the coupling process. Before going into details of coupling process, it is worth noting that Kingdon (1995) conceptualises each of the three streams as following its own rules and dynamics. That is, these streams are separate or independent of each other. But then, Kingdon indicates that at critical times, a policy window for a short time opens in the problem and political windows and thereby creates an opportunity for the

three separate streams to come together (Kingdon, 1995: 165). In this case then, the coupling process appears as a process whereby the problem is recognised, a solution developed and made available in the policy community, and a political change makes it the right time for policy change (Kingdon, 1995: 172-173). During this period, policy entrepreneurs (advocates) couple their solutions to the problem, proposals to political climate, and political events to policy problems and thereby bring about the convergence of all three streams, which pushes an issue to higher agenda prominence and onto the decision agenda (Kingdon, 1995: 182). It should be noted that without the involvement of policy entrepreneurs, the coming together of these three streams is unlikely (Kingdon, 1995: 182). So if a policy alternative is coupled to a problem and a solution and that combination finds enough support in the political stream, the proposal is therefore likely to be an accepted policy. This implies that without the convergence of these streams, a policy proposal cannot become an accepted policy to address the problem at hand.

2.5.7.3 Critique of Kingdon's Multiple Stream Model

Having laid down Kingdon's Agenda Setting theory quite extensively within the context of other theories, one may still ask whether or not it is important at all. This is because like any other theory, Kingdon's theory is not immune to limitations. For example, Tiernan and Burke (2002: 88) argue that this theory "...has inevitable limitations of models that seek to impose order on dynamic events." However, Tiernan and Burke (2002: 88) admit that even though this is the case, Kingdon's theory is useful because it "...provides an accessible general framework in describing and explaining policy processes and forces at work in competition for agenda status." In this way, it is believed that this theory brings to light the fact that 'problems and policy solutions (in the light of the three streams) have a loose relationship and as such this can help participants and stakeholders to be more informed and better equipped to pursue a more genuine problem-solving approach' (Tiernan and Burke, 2002: 88).

Sabatier (1988) (cited in Sabatier, 1991: 151) argues that the Agenda Setting theory by Kingdon is limited in that it portrays "...policy analysts and researchers as too apolitical, thus neglecting the role of advocacy analysis and putting too much distance between the policy and political streams." This means that Kingdon has ignored the fact that policy actors such

as policy analysts and researchers are in fact political: their views and ideas do contain political perceptions. It is for this reason that Sabatier (1991: 151) would argue that 'if this theory can be expanded, attention must be given to bureaucracies and courts of law in implementing reforms and also recognition must be given to the fact that there is an intergovernmental dimension in both policy formulation and implementation.'

Despite these limitations, Kingdon's theory is pertinent to this study. The most important aspect of this theory is that it seeks to understand how and why certain issues and policy alternatives get the serious attention of decision-makers while others do not. This theory attempts to address this by focusing on the events and actions of policy participants either from the inside or outside of government. The objective of the study fits in this theory because it mainly seeks to understand how and why free higher education as an alternative solution for access to higher education by all has risen into the agenda of decision-makers in South Africa. It seeks to understand the events and actions of the participants in higher education policy in general and in this policy alternative in particular that might have contributed to its gaining prominence on the agenda of policy-makers or being neglected at times.

Moreover, this theory is seen as important for this study on the basis of a number of advantages noted by Sabatier. Sabatier (1991: 151) maintains that this theory is advantageous in that "it incorporates an enlarged policy community; gives an important role to substantive policy information about real world problems and impacts of previous governmental interventions; and acknowledges the role of serendipity in the policy process." In a wider sense that engulfs these advantages, Ndlovu's (2008: 33) opinion seems to emphasise this as she holds that, "Kingdon's theory provides a good example of a policy theory that explains how the policy process, the problem, policy and politics are working together to achieve a plan." Indeed, if Ndlovu is well interpreted, all these elements contained in Kingdon's theory explain how and why policies come into being. This fits in well with the fact that the study also seeks to understand and explain why free higher education is not an accepted policy.

Lastly, even though there are some limitations to Kingdon's theory, the researcher believes it is important because as noted by Howlett (1998: 518) it can be applicable not only in the

American context, but also in other countries as well. Howlett applied it in Canada and found that many of the findings facilitate its applicability (Howlett, 1998: 515). Furthermore, it has been applied in many countries which include Britain, France and Germany in order to analyse the politics of privatisation (Howlett, 1998: 497). In this study, this theory is going to be applied on free higher education in the South African context. Therefore, it seems applicable to this study because there is a perception that the present government financial aid is failing to improve access to higher education since its implementation. However, it should be noted that the researcher is not going to test its applicability, but rather apply it. Testing its applicability could be a study in its own right.

Summary:

This chapter has established the theoretical framework of this study. Kingdon's Agenda Setting theory which underpins this study was therefore contextualised within the range of policy studies, public policy, policy cycle model and other agenda setting theories. Policy studies as a subfield of social sciences systematically deals with the nature, causes, and effects of alternative public policies, with particular emphasis on determining the policies that will achieve given goals. Policy studies also scrutinises the conflicts and conflict resolutions that come from the policy-making process which involves a number of policy actors that range from the civil societies to the government itself. Even though there is no consensus about how to define public policy, generally it appears to be the plan of action to achieve a preferred outcome within the overall purposes of government and as such it is the product of the policy-making process. The policy-making process involves the agenda setting process which Kingdon's Agenda Setting theory focuses on in order to understand how and why certain issues receive more attention than others; and why certain policy alternatives are selected while others are rejected. This process is identified as the first step in the policy-making process by the policy cycle model. But the critics of this model show that policy-making is not linear like the model in question suggests. It can start anywhere within the policy process, but not necessarily from agenda setting. However, even though the policy cycle model has been criticised for its limitations, it is important for this study because the theory that underpins it was founded on that "first step" in policy-making, namely, agenda setting.

Most of the agenda theories discussed in this chapter focused on the particular elements of agenda setting such as the involvement of certain policy actors that include government officials or the media among others. Their weaknesses were that they treated agenda setting in terms of focusing on the specific roles of each of these actors. For example, Schattschneider focused on the role of government and the public and Cook on the media. Kingdon's theory transcended them because it does not only deal with the specific roles of each of these policy participants, but also shows how a policy comes into existence. According to Kingdon, the three streams, namely the problem, policy and political streams have to merge so that any policy can be a reality. This process does not only show how policy alternatives are generated and specified, but also how they are selected after they have been pushed onto the agenda of decision-makers. It extends beyond agenda setting (problem identification and definition) to other steps in the policy cycle model such as the decision-making process. Therefore, according to him, a problem coupled with a feasible solution receives the serious attention of decision-makers and a feasible alternative is selected by decision-makers to address that problem.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

In this study, a qualitative methodology was employed. According to Babbie and Mouton (2001a: 270), qualitative methodology refers to a generic research approach that allows the researcher to obtain an "...insider perspective on social action." Strauss and Corbin (1998: 10), see it as any type of research that produces findings without arriving at statistical procedures or any of the means that has to do with quantification. That being the case, Babbie and Mouton (2001a: 270), state that, in the qualitative approach, the researcher attempts to study actions from the perspective of the social context in which they occur. Babbie and Mouton (2004b: 207) further maintain that qualitative research unlike quantitative research often focuses on processes and actions rather than outcomes. Neuman (2000b: 87) adds that qualitative research methods display, analyse, summarise and interpret data that are based on information rather than a generalisation of results (Neuman, 2000b: 87). Furthermore, in qualitative research the focus is not ensuring representativeness of the sample but rather on collecting data that is context specific in order to give insight into a particular research topic (Neuman, 2000b: 211). It was with this in mind that the qualitative approach seemed appropriate to the study at hand.

The particular qualitative method employed in this study is qualitative thematic analysis. First of all, qualitative data analysis refers to all forms of analysis of data that was specifically collected through qualitative research techniques (Babbie and Mouton, 2001a: 400). Data analysis in qualitative research proceeds by extracting themes or generalisations from evidence and organising data to present a coherent and consistent picture (Neuman, 1997a: 419). This being the case then, Boyatzis (1998: 4) sees thematic analysis as the method of encoding qualitative data. Complementing this, Braun and Clark (2006: 79) state that thematic analysis refers to 'a technique for categorising, analysing and reporting patterns or themes within the data subject to the analysis.'

Central to thematic analysis as Daly et al., (1997: cited in Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006: 82) notes, is the search for themes that are considered as imperative to the phenomena described. Rice & Ezzy (1999: 258: cited in Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006: 82) indicate that this process involves the identification of themes by "careful reading and rereading of data." In any case, a theme should be understood to mean "...a pattern found in the

information that at minimum describes and organises the possible observations and at maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon” (Boyatzis, 1998: 4). However, it should be noted that a theme can be either explicitly observable or latent in the information to be analysed (Boyatzis, 1998: 4). Apart from that, a theme can be deductively generated from a theory and/or prior to conducting research or inductively generated from the unprocessed data (Boyatzis, 1998: 4). Therefore, any thorough compilation of a number of themes requires that there be what Boyatzis calls a *codebook* (1998: 4).

Thematic analysis also involves coding and encoding the information. According to Coffey and Atkinson (1996: 27) (cited in Boyatzis, 1998: 5), coding is a way of relating data to one’s ideas about these data. This helps to properly organise, process and analyse qualitative data (Boyatzis, 1998: 5) in relation to the research questions, objectives and theoretical framework. Encoding the information is about organising the data to identify and develop themes from them (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006: 83).

In this study, the themes and codes were deductively generated from research questions based on Kingdon’s factors that affect agenda setting especially the processes-policy streams. Therefore, they were developed a priori on the basis of Kingdon’s Agenda Setting theory. Boyatzis (1998: 33) holds that theory-driven codes are driven by elements of the theory. This was the case with the themes and codes in the data studied in this research.

Thematic analysis was seen as fitting for this study on the basis of its different advantages. For Braun and Clark (2006: 78) one of the advantages of using thematic analysis is its flexibility. It is applicable across various instances without essentially being limited or constrained by theoretical and epistemological approaches (Braun and Clark, 2006: 78). Boyatzis (1998) identifies a number of these advantages. Among them are the following:

- ‘Enables researchers to systematically use multiple types of data in a way that enhances accuracy and sensitivity in understanding and interpreting observations about the subjects of research
- Can be used at all stages of the research.
- Allows researchers to capture multiple forms of data and even guides the researcher to their usage.

- Permits the collection and usage of qualitative data in a way that makes communication with a broad audience possible
- Can be a bridge between researchers of different orientations and fields' (Boyatzis, 1998: 5-6).

The above being the case, the thematic analysis technique is seen as appropriate for this study because the primary aim is to understand events and actions of participants in higher education in general and free higher education in particular as an alternative to other policy proposals to address unequal access to higher education. Explanation and analysis of the developments in this policy issue have been guided by Kingdon's theory of agenda setting.

The sampling strategy used in this study is purposive sampling. Generally, sampling is a procedure of selecting population eligible for the research (Babbie and Mouton, 2001a: 192). Purposive sampling in particular is sampling done with purpose (judgement) in mind especially "...for understanding the processes and actions..." of the subjects of research (Babbie, 1992: 98). In purposive sampling strategy, the sample is assembled according to pre-defined requirements designed for data compilation.

The data for this study was collected through documentary analysis. Documentary analysis has to do with collecting data by analysing primary sources which include letters and reports; and secondary sources which are transcribed or edited from primary sources and these include books, journals, transcripts or summaries (Burgess, 1984: 123-124). Moreover, documentary analysis has to do with analysing public documents which comprise newsletters, official documents and records or published books and journals; and private documents which include letters and diaries written by relevant participants (Burgess, 1984: 124).

The documents that were purposively selected for this study include the following:

- Government policy documents such as the Green Papers, the White Papers, Presidential and Ministerial Speeches and reports.
- Higher educational reports written or published by various independent academics and research organisations.

- Books and journals that focus on South African education policies in general and higher education in particular.
- Internet articles written to analyse policy developments in higher education in South Africa.
- Media articles that have focused on the events in higher education.
- Policy documents from relevant stakeholders in higher education.

As it was indicated earlier, these sources were purposively selected on the basis of the themes that were guided by the research questions developed from Kingdon's Agenda Setting theory. Themes related to the problem stream comprised problem recognition, indicators and definition; with regard to the policy stream the themes were various policy alternatives, mechanisms used to push these alternatives onto the decision agenda and criteria for the selection of any of these alternatives; and lastly, the themes developed from the political stream included activities of major policy actors and political events.

CHAPTER 4: AGENDA SETTING POLICY PROCESSES AND FREE HIGHER EDUCATION

This chapter will seek to understand how and why free higher education as an alternative solution to improve equal access to higher education by all South Africans has or has not risen into the agenda of decision-makers. This will be addressed in the light of Kingdon's multiple stream model comprising the problem, policy and political streams. The discussion will start with the problem stream which is intended to indicate the problem of the study, that is, unequal access to higher education. It is within this context that it will be shown how this problem is recognised and defined. This will show why free higher education was proposed to address the problem in question. From there the focus will turn to the policy stream. This stream is aimed at showing other policy alternatives that competed or still compete with free higher education to address the problem in question. And finally, the discussion will deal with the political stream. In this stream, the activities of policy actors and political events in South African higher education policy-making will be mentioned.

4.1 The Problem Stream and Free Higher Education

As previously indicated in Kingdon's theory, for a social condition to be seen as a problem, people in and around the government must perceive it as such and also see it as a condition requiring governmental action. In South African higher education after the fall of apartheid, one of the issues identified by policy actors both in and outside the government as a problem was a lack of equal access to higher education and training (NCHE, 1996; DoE, 1996; Reddy, 2004: 34). Now, higher education in South Africa is seen as 'inequitable and inaccessible to both the poor, women and historically disadvantaged communities in general and individuals in particular' (DoE, 1996; PRSA, 2006: 5). The access issue is related to access to participation in; retention and success of students leaving; and epistemological quality of higher education reflecting broader South African societal composition (DoE, 1996; Cele and Menon, 2006: 38; CHE, 2010: 1-6). Therefore, in principle, the problem is lack of participation and success in, and gaining quality skills from higher education institutions by those that were marginalised, relegated and excluded through the apartheid policies.

The above being the case then, the question is: Why would policy-makers in the context of the South African post-apartheid era pay serious attention to unequal access to higher

education in the first place while there are many other problems such as high poverty and a high crime rate? It is Kingdon's (1995) argument that problems come to the attention of policy-makers through indicators, focusing events or crises, and feedback. Indicators can illuminate the scope and severity of a problem through monitoring of social (or natural) processes, activities and events. These indicators arise through both routine monitoring and special studies.

In the case of higher education in South Africa, the issue of unequal access was sparked by the effects of apartheid policies and practices that led to the majority of Black students being unable to access higher education and training because of racial and ethnic segregation. Racial and ethnic segregation was brought about by the establishment of departments of education and universities dedicated to serving a particular race and/or ethnic group; and unequal allocation of funds to these departments and universities. Therefore, Blacks "...as the largest South African demographic group had the lowest participation rate in higher education" (CHE, 2004: 230).

At the beginning of the post-apartheid era, the issue of unequal access to higher education was brought to the attention of policy-makers (and other stakeholders) through lack of participation in terms of decline of student enrolments. This is because while in the mid 1980s to the mid-late 1990s student enrolments for the historically disadvantaged increased, the late 1990s (especially from 1998) to 2000 saw a decline in this regard especially in historically disadvantaged universities. As the Star (22/2/99) (cited in Chisholm and Petersen 2003: In Chisholm et al., 2003: 555-556) indicated:

"...enrolments have fallen at the University of Fort Hare from 5,000 to 2000; at the University of the North from 9,000 to 5,000; at the University of Zululand from 6,600 to 5,300; at the University of the North West from 11,203 to 6,011; and at the University of Durban-Westville from 8,859 to about 7,000."

This period was dominated by a mood of expecting higher enrolments of historically disadvantaged students. A good example in this case is the NCHC report of 1996 which expressed the need to increase participation rate through "massification". However, this is not to imply that increased participation was disconnected from success rates. In fact, it has been the position of ANC-led alliance that increased participation has to be related to the

success rates (throughput) among others if the transformation of higher education in particular has to be a reality (Bunting 1994, pp. 224-227 cited in Waghid, 2002: 459).

Currently, the problem of unequal access to higher education has not only come to the attention of policy-makers through lack of mere participation (increased enrolments), but also through lack of students' throughput or dropouts. As Cosser and Letseka (2010: In Letseka et al., 2010: 2) indicate: "Graduation and success rates are the motivating factors behind the DoE's concern about dropout." This is grounded in the White Paper 3 of 1997 and the National Plan on Higher Education of 2001 because their emphasis on the relation between increased participation and throughput still dominates the debate on transformed higher education. This being the case then, Cosser and Letseka (2010: In Letseka et al., 2010: 5) mention that in 2005, the DoE's Directorate on Higher Education Planning reported that 60 000 (50%) of 120 000 students that were enrolled in higher education in 2000 to 2003 period dropped out and of the remaining 60 000 (50%), 22% graduated (cf. Letseka, and Maile, 2008). Badat (2009: In HESA, 2009: 11) adds that recent HESA studies indicate that the overall attrition rate taking into account the issue of black participation is above 50% "...and below-average black completion rates." This means that the issue of university dropout is very acute in South Africa and therefore, this implies that the problem of unequal access to higher education is still immense. Lack of financial support is identified as a major impediment by Letseka et al. (2010). This is despite the fact that NSFAS is seen to have successfully facilitated access to higher education. As such the Minister of Higher Education and Training has indicated that NSFAS's capacity needs to be re-evaluated so that it can be strengthened.

In this context of decline in student enrolments and rise in the number of dropouts because of a lack of financial support, SASCO is at all times calling for free higher education as an alternative to address this problem. For example, earlier in 2010, SASCO performed a series of marches and protests demanding free higher education (Mabandla, 2010; Fredericks, 2010; Hans and Sokopo, 2010). However, this has become a regular pattern every academic year when fee defaulters are not allowed to return to universities and new entrants fail to find registration fees (Witness, 06/03/2010).

Policy-makers also learn about problems through feedback on current policy programs. This has to do with negative feedback generated by monitoring and evaluation studies as well as complaints from the targets, bureaucrats or policy-makers themselves who report the failures or unintended consequences. The South African higher education is not an exception in this regard. Even though monitoring and evaluation studies can be done by different research organisations and individual academics, much of the work in this regard appears to be conducted by the CHE and HESA. One of the recent studies by the CHE on the relation between input and throughput as per the objective of the new funding framework (NFF) gives a negative indication that this objective is not effectively attained and suggests the strategies for possibility of free higher education (CHE, 2010: 182). Also, HESA in one of its recent studies (shown earlier) indicates that access in terms of throughput is still a problem that is mainly perpetuated by high dropout rates on the basis of a lack of financial support for the students (HESA, 2009).

SASCO, which represents the majority of the targets, that is, Black students, normally bemoans the failures of the goal-oriented and performance-related funding model in improving access to higher education. SASCO argues that this model still perpetuates the disparities between historically white and black institutions; does not efficiently and effectively counter university dropouts; and as such it undermines access, redress and equity values (2007: 2-3). The reason for these complaints is based on the fact that financial support by the government to universities has been declining since 2000 and after the implementation of the NFF. This has led to the increase of tuition fees as universities implemented other alternative mechanisms such as publications of research to generate income. Responses to high tuition fees then include decline in the enrolments of poor students, university dropouts and protests at various university campuses (Wangenge-Ouma, 2010: 491).

Policy-makers have also come to notice a problem with budgetary constraints. This is because as Kingdon (1995: 106) puts it, "budgetary considerations prevent policy makers and those close to them from seriously contemplating some alternatives..." In the context of South African higher education, financial constraints are always cited as the challenge to addressing the issue of unequal access to higher education. The issue of dropouts that was mentioned earlier as an indicator of the problem in question is normally attributed to

financial constraints. Additionally, some researchers have noticed that there is a decline in the general expenditure on higher education. For example, in 1996, the expenditure on higher education reached $\pm 82\%$, but by 2006 this has decreased to $\pm 66\%$ (HESA, 2008: 17).

Free higher education has not been seriously considered on the basis of these financial constraints. For example, when SASCO demanded free higher education as opposed to the goal-oriented model proposed by the NCHE, the Minister of Education at the time rejected it indicating that the government cannot afford to adequately finance basic education let alone free higher education. The White Paper rejected it on the same principle. Even some scholars who believe that free higher education is possible have noted that to make it an actuality would need massive financial support. For example, Badat (2010) holds that free higher education is possible only if it is introduced progressively because if it can be implemented immediately, it would require R17.5 billion and this would compromise the development in other national priority areas such as health and housing among others.

Kingdon (1995), as was previously shown, also argues that after the problem has been identified and captured the attention of decision-makers, policy participants tend to define the problem so that an appropriate policy alternative to address it can be identified. On the basis of how this problem is perceived, it can be inferred that unequal access to higher education refers to a lack of representation of the historically disadvantaged students in terms of participating and succeeding to acquire undergraduate degrees in particular in higher education, and actually obtaining quality skills to meet the challenges of labour market globally and nationally.

Kingdon (1995) also mentions that values play a substantial role in problem definition and this definition of unequal access to higher education is not an exception in this regard. Political and socio-economic values are at the centre of how this problem is perceived. For example, most of the cited challenges facing higher education in South Africa include redressing the enforced political, social and economic inequalities of the apartheid policies and responding to the demands of global and local economic competition (NCHE, 1996; Essack and Quayle, 2007; Ntshoe and de Villiers, 2008; le Grange, 2009). While this is the case, the dominating "perceptual" definition in this regard is that of the ANC-led alliance government. For example, the Green Paper of 1996, White Paper of 1997, Higher Education

Act of 1997, National Plan on Higher Education of 2001 and National Qualification Framework 2003, emphasise the need to redress the effects of apartheid and creation of skills appropriate to the labour market so as to respond to the socio-economic challenges posed by globalisation and national needs.

Summary:

The general feature of this section was to show what the problem is in South African higher education. On the basis of the documents used to compile this study, there seems to be a general view that the problem is unequal access to higher education especially by the historically disadvantaged students (non-whites) among which the majority are Black students. The indicators of this problem include declines in student enrolments and university dropouts particularly at the undergraduate level; decline of budgets to finance higher education; negative reports from monitoring and evaluation studies conducted by research organisations such as the CHE and HESA; and complaints by student organisations which include SASCO as the beneficiaries of higher education policies. These indicators substantiate the claim that this problem is still immense, which is why SASCO continues to call for free higher education even at present.

The indicators in question demonstrate that the problem of unequal access to higher education is not only understood in terms of decline in student enrolments or lack of their retention but also lack of success rates. Therefore, even though there are no specific definitions from the policy participants in this context, the problem can be defined as lack of representation by the historically disadvantaged with regard to both student enrolments and success rates particularly at the undergraduate level. One might argue that historically disadvantaged students specifically Black students and women currently constitute the majority of students enrolled in higher education institutions. However, while that is true, large proportions of these students are enrolled in humanities programs and this masks inequalities across academic programs such as science, engineering and technology (CHE, 2004: 235).

4.2 Policy Stream and Free Higher Education

It was indicated in Chapter 2 that the second process that affects agenda setting according to Kingdon is the policy stream. This stream has to do with the generation and specification of policy alternatives or solutions by specialists and experts within policy communities intended to be applied to current problems. It is Kingdon's argument that while there might be many potential solutions, only a few make it onto the decision-agenda. Solutions that survive or which are selected are those that comply with the principles of selection which include technical feasibility, value acceptability, anticipation of future constraints and policy compatibility.

In South African higher education at the advent of democracy in 1994, there were no specific alternatives especially with regard to the funding mechanisms to improve equal access since the SAPSE funding model was still used. The ANC-led Tripartite Alliance document entitled "*A Policy Framework for Education and Training*" that dominated the debate at the time only indicated a need to restructure that SAPSE formula which was composed of categories such as "full funding of all activities, itemised budget funding and formula funding" in order to improve access of historically disadvantaged students (ANC, 1994: 115 cited in Bunting, 1994: 239). The ANC indicated that in restructuring this funding formula, emphasis would be on providing financial incentives to the institutions so that they can support the national policies.

It was not until the NCHE report of 1996 that alternatives began to be attached to this problem. The NCHE proposed the *goal-oriented funding model* in order to finance higher education and improve access of historically disadvantaged students (NCHE, 1996). This model anticipated earmarked funds being made available for both institutions and individual student redress. According to the NCHE, earmarked funds for institutional redress were to be allocated to disadvantaged institutions according to their missions, programme mixes and needs which would be based on comprehensive institutional audits (NCHE, 1996). With regard to earmarked funds for student redress, the NCHE indicated that they would take the form of student financial aid schemes that would be administered by National Student Financial Aid (NSFAS) (NCHE, 1996). In the light of these proposals, increased participation of the targets was expected to be restricted and in line with equity and redress

principles, availability of financial resources that were to be spent both effectively and efficiently, and multiple entry (input) and exit points (throughput) of the students.

Responding to this report, the ANC-led government released the Green Paper of 1996 which endorsed the earmarked mechanisms in order to fulfil the demands of the goal-oriented funding model. However, the Green Paper urged that this model needs to be “complemented by strategies to harness increased private resources without unduly increasing student tuition and residence fees - and to achieve efficiency improvements in the unit costs of producing employable graduates” (DoE, 1996). The Green Paper further mentioned that there would be some additional investigations with regard to student financial aid schemes which would include a “loan component, bursary or grant component, scholarships, employer-sponsored cadetships, student work or study schemes endowment funds, graduate tax and bank loans” (DoE, 1996).

However, there were mixed responses to the NCHES report and Green Paper especially by student representatives which notably included The South African Students’ Congress (SASCO), The South African Universities Students Representative Councils (SAUSRCs) and The Pan Africanist Student Organisation (PASO) (Chisholm and Vally, 2003: In Chisholm et al., 2003: 278). Some of the major criticisms by these students’ organisations were that the goal-oriented funding model has been unable to deal with issues of redress and equity especially with regard to alleviating disadvantaged institutions and students (Odhav, 2009: 43). Therefore, these organisations (SASCO being the prominent actor) proposed *free higher education* as an alternative proposal proper to be attached to the problem of unequal access to higher education if transformation in higher education is to be a reality. For SASCO, free higher education means “non-repayment of student loans” because it believes that it should be the government that is wholly responsible for financing higher education (Odhav, 2009: 43). Chisholm and Vally (2003: In Chisholm et al., 2003: 278) further indicate that, “...students favoured a bursary system which offers tuition, accommodation and living expenses in return for community services and a higher-education tax on the private sector.”

In order to push this policy alternative onto the agenda of decision-makers before the goal-oriented funding model could be made law, SASCO marched in protest to highlight its

rejection of the discussed NCHE report (Naidu, 1996). SASCO therefore called for immediate government intervention against financial exclusion that was experienced on various campuses and also added that the NCHE proposals in this regard were expert-driven rather than stakeholder-driven (Naidu, 1996). Mr. Bengu the Minister of Education at the time indicated that SASCO's free higher education proposal was problematic in the sense that it is technically not feasible. At that time, student debt was about R100m and so Bengu asked SASCO to explain how free higher education was possible while the government could not even provide adequate finances for basic education (Naidu, 1996). The minister also argued that higher education is competing with other marginalised parts of education such as classroom backlogs, literacy and numeracy, adult basic education, early childhood development and out-of-school youth programmes for limited financial resources (Naidu, 1996).

Some experts have also indicated that SASCO's free higher education policy is not feasible. For example, as was indicated previously, Odhav (2009: 44) argues that free higher education is problematic in the sense that it would require redirection of funds from dysfunctional Sector Training Authorities (SETAs), but then these funds might not be adequate for universal free higher education. However, there are some experts that believe free higher education is possible. For example, Badat argues that in order to make free higher education possible, the NSFAS would need a massive capital injection that would need to be administered both effectively and efficiently at the national and institutional levels among others (Badat, 2010). This implies, therefore, that there is no consensus among the specialists for free higher education to be able to meet the principle of value acceptability.

Following the NCHE report and the Green Paper of 1996, the Minister of Education released the White Paper 3 of 1997. The White Paper endorsed the recommendations of the NCHE report especially the goal-oriented funding model. However, the White Paper also adds that the goal-oriented model should be related to the performance of the institutions and students (DoE, 1997). According to the White Paper, the performance will be in terms of goal-oriented planning in relation to "...enrolments in different fields and levels of study which will be related to their institutional missions and plans" (DoE, 1997). With regard to the student redress, the White Paper committed itself to the NSFAS, but adds that the costs

would be shared between government and students who have better family support-systems (DoE, 1997). The Paper also indicates that the performance-related funding would be connected to students' progression and throughput. Thus in this case, some incentives will be made available through earmarked funding (DoE, 1997). What emerged out of the White Paper was a goal-oriented and performance-related funding model. This implies that the NCHE goal-oriented model was refurbished because of the addition of the performance-related element.

Following the provisions of the White Paper, the goal-oriented and performance-related funding model was made law through the enactment of The Higher Education Act of 1997. According to Chapter 5 of this Act-Funding of Public Higher Education, any sort of funds received by higher education institutions from whatever sources must be reported to the Minister of Education on an annual basis; and institutional councils must also provide such additional information to the Minister as he or she may reasonably require (DoE, 1997). Any failure to comply with the provisions of this Act would lead to the Minister withholding payments due the institutions from the government (DoE, 1997). The underpinning principles on which these funds are administered by the Minister include fairness and transparency (DoE, 1997). And so, Barnes (2005: 224) indicates that on this basis then, the principle of redress which dominates these major legislative documents became a "...requirement for funding policy rather than an optional extra."

Building on the developments in the White Paper and Higher Education Act, it is clear that SASCO's free higher education did not make it onto the agenda of decision-makers. It was left out and seen as inappropriate to address unequal access to higher education. The goal-oriented funding model rose onto the policy agenda, but it was also not selected as a policy. One can infer that at the time, it was still being weighed against some of the principles proposed by Kingdon. This is because the SAPSE (subsidy) funding model that was used during the apartheid era was still being used, while being scrutinised in its details (Bunting, 2004: In Cloete et al., 2004: 86). As was indicated in the preceding section, this period saw a significant decline in student enrolment on the basis of financial problems. This being the case, the government had to consider the size and shape of higher education in order to curb this problem. This meant that the goal-oriented and performance-related funding model had to be re-evaluated in order to effectively and efficiently address the problem in

question. Thus, the Minister requested the CHE to advise him with regard to the shape and size of the higher education system. It should be noted that at the time, the higher education system was still fragmented. There was still a clear distinction between historically black and white universities and there were many institutions of higher education which included universities, technikons and colleges.

Following the request of the Minister of Education, the CHE released a report by 2000 in order to advise the Minister with regard to the matter in question. The CHE (2000: 58) recommended that with regard to the shape of the system, it should be reconfigured as a differentiated and diverse system so that institutions can effectively respond to the social needs of the country. The CHE further urged that the number of institutions should be reduced through mergers; the consequence of which would be more responsiveness than during the apartheid era and this would be achieved through consultation with the stakeholders in higher education which include university vice-chancellors and students among others (CHE, 2000: 58). With regard to the size of the system, the CHE recommended that increased participation rate of 20% in public higher education of the historically disadvantaged students aged between 20-24 should be the target for the next 10-15 years (CHE, 2000: 59). In relation to funding so that the issue of unequal access can be addressed, the CHE recommended that the SAPSE funding model should be sustained despite decline in enrolments (CHE, 2000: 61). In order to justify this, the CHE argued that "savings' should be used to reconfigure the higher education system" (CHE, 2000: 61). Therefore, the CHE in the light of this maintained that institutions should be appropriately resourced in order to fulfil their responsibilities, mandates and missions; and student financial aid increased and resources made available to cover students support and development initiatives (CHE, 2000: 61).

It must be noted that while the CHE recommended that the SAPSE funding model should be retained; there were three key policy alternatives that were competing for the selection process so as to determine the future of South African higher education. The competition was therefore between the goal-oriented model which was later developed into goal-oriented and performance-related model by the White Paper of 1997, free higher education proposed by SASCO and now the old SAPSE model which was proposed by the CHE. The

developments of post 2000 were to determine which among these would emerge as a policy to address the problem in question.

By 2001, the National Plan for Higher Education was released by the Minister of Education following the CHE report. Although the Minister did not accept some of the recommendations of the report for the reconfiguration of the higher education system, its explications on institutional landscape were extremely influential on the National Plan. For example, the concepts of historically disadvantaged and advantaged institutions were becoming “less useful for the purposes of social policies.” It was the vision of the White Paper of 1997 that this be the state of affairs if transformation in higher education was to move in the right direction for equity and redress (DoE, 1997). Again, the CHE report discussed earlier argued that these concepts were not useful because all these institutions were the result of discriminatory apartheid policies (CHE, 2000: 13-14). Therefore, according to the National Plan, redress was only appropriate insofar as it intended to empower functionally differentiated and diverse institutions. Even though institutional redress was still relevant, the Plan insisted that there must be a shift from the then notions of redress as their focus was narrowly on levelling play fields between the institutions concerned (DoE, 2001: 9).

In relation to financing higher education, the National Plan did not propose a new funding model except to be in favour of the goal-oriented and performance-related funding model proposed by the White Paper which was not yet implemented. The Plan indicated that this model as the new funding formula (unlike the SAPSE model which was old) would be finalised by 2003. This new formula would link funding to the institutional three-year “rolling” plans rather than linking it to mere student enrolment trends as the SAPSE model had done, (DoE, 2001: 10, 29). The earmarked funds would still be used to increase access of poorer students (DoE, 2001: 10). Taking note that there was a decline in student enrolment coupled with inefficiencies in graduation rates and shortages of high-level skills in the labour market, the Plan’s vision was that the new formula would help to connect funding with skills development, student enrolment and throughput (DoE, 2001: 14-21).

In December 2003, the *new funding framework* (NFF) or goal-oriented and performance related funding model for higher education institutions was published by the Minister of

Education in terms of the Higher Education Act, No. 101 of 1997, in the Government Gazette No. 1791. This being the case, the NFF has two main elements with regard to financing higher education, namely, block grants which are the initial institutional set-up subsidy costs; that is, undesignated amounts to cover running costs of higher education institutions linked to the provision of teaching and research-related services; and earmarked grants which are allocated to achieve specific purposes (MoE, 2003: 6).

Block grant funding is expected to be paid to the institutions based on student numbers and institutional graduate throughput, and research output. In the light of this then, the block grants were anticipated to be in the form of four categories, namely, research output block grants, teaching input block grants, teaching output block grants and institutional factor block grants (MoE, 2003: 7). Research output grants would be determined by approved publications, doctoral degrees and research masters degrees; teaching input grants by student places according to student enrolment plans approved by the Minister; teaching output grants by qualifications awarded (throughput and graduation rates); and lastly institutional factor grants determined by expenses in relation to the teaching services offered by institutions and numbers of disadvantaged students enrolled (MoE, 2003: 7-11). The earmarked funding is supposed to be paid to the institutions in order to achieve particular institutional purposes. Under this type of funding is included the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS); institutional development and redress programmes; interests and redemption payments; institutional restructuring; and Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) (MoE, 2003: 12). The NFF was implemented in the 2004/2005 financial year and presently the NFF is still the funding model used by the ANC-led government to address the issue of unequal access to higher education.

The above being the case, it can be seen that the goal-oriented and performance-related funding model rather than the free higher education model made it onto the agenda of policy-makers and was selected to address the problem of unequal access to higher education. But then, the pressing question is: Why was it selected given the fact that it is somehow problematic with regard to the values of equity and redress? For example, Walwyn (2008) sees this model as violating these values on the basis that its performance management system is flawed. Walwyn (2008: 721-722) argues that the NFF has led to a

decline in funding the consequences of which are sharp increases in student fees and student exclusion on the basis of lack of financial resources.

A reflection on the developments throughout the legislative process since the NCHE report of 1996 to the NPHE of 2001 shows that as opposed to free higher education, the goal-oriented and performance-related funding model met Kingdon's principles for policy alternative survival and selection. Given the fact that the government's concern has been developing a funding formula that recognises the financial constraints within which South Africa finds itself as a developing nation, the goal-oriented and performance-related funding model appears to be feasible and as such anticipates future financial constraints and policy compatibility. As the then Minister of Education (2003: 5) argued, the NFF (or the goal-oriented and performance-related model) accepts the "...principle that institutional costs tend to be functions of income, that is, of what is available to be spent." The Minister further says:

"In this regard, funds allocated by the Government to institutions are not designed to meet specific kinds or levels of institutional costs, but are intended to pay for the delivery of teaching and research-related services linked to approved institutional three-year "rolling" plans" (2003: 5).

This implies that feasibility coupled with anticipation of future constraints and policy compatibility, made it possible for the goal-oriented and performance-related model to be selected ahead of SAPSE model and more specifically ahead of free higher education. Even more so, the goal-oriented and performance-related model was also more acceptable (but not wholly) among some academics in South Africa. For example, at its initial stage in the NCHE report, this model was proposed by the experts, hence SASCO's point that that NCHE report was expert-driven; the CHE of which its report of 2000 influenced the NPHE of 2001 which in turn influenced the NFF is dominated by academics; the previous ministers were themselves academics; and the SAUVCA/CTP (now HESA) members who also played a role in its emergence are academics.

Summary:

This section has considered the processes by which policy proposals are generated, debated, redrafted and accepted for serious consideration. Much of this process takes place in policy communities such as specialists or academics. The goal-oriented and performance-related funding model or new funding framework (NFF) has been selected over the SAPSE funding model and free higher education model to address the problem of unequal access to higher education. Specifically, it has been selected because it meets the principles of selection according to Kingdon's theory. These include feasibility, value acceptability, anticipation of future constraints and policy compatibility.

Free higher education was rejected mainly because it could not meet the principles of technical feasibility and future constraints. This is because it implies that equal access to higher education should be universal: that is, higher education should be free for every historically disadvantaged and poor student especially at the undergraduate level. Hence the White Paper and the National Plan wanted to move away from the usage of "historically disadvantaged and advantaged institutions and students" even though the emphasis was still on equity and redress in order to ensure that the NFF can receive serious attention.

4.3 Political Stream and Free Higher Education

In Kingdon's theory as it was previously shown, politics is another stream that is to a greater extent distinct from and independent of the problem and policy streams, but which also affects agenda setting. The major components of the political stream include change in the political (national or public) mood, interactions among political forces, personnel changes in governmental administration, election results and consensus and coalition building.

Some of the above mentioned elements are evident in South African higher education policy-making. For example, in the period between the early mid 1990s and late 1990s, the political mood was dominated by a need for reconstruction in order to redress apartheid political, social and economic inequalities in general and higher education in particular. As Booyesen and Erasmus (1998: In Venter, 1998: 229) indicate, 'in 1994 and the late 1990s after years of a hard-fought struggle, South African social and political organisational life experienced seismic changes and for that matter, the "macrowindows" were opened for

policy innovation.' Booyesen and Erasmus (1998: In Venter, 1998: 229) further mention that 'this period permitted the new ANC-led government to engineer far-reaching policy regeneration.'

In relation to the transformation of higher education and addressing the issue of unequal access to higher education, the national mood at that period provided a fertile ground for policy communities to push policy alternatives onto the decision-agenda even though it was under the constraints of transition and relative uncertainty. As Pityana (2003) holds, the period since 1994 was characterised by optimism since the majority of Black students who were previously marginalised had to be admitted and the demands for reform were urgent and reaching the peak. Therefore, the national mood of the mid-late 1990s provided an opportunity for SASCO to lobby for free higher education in order to address the problem of lack of equal access to higher education. It appears that SASCO interpreted the mood as suitable for this policy proposal to be included on the agenda of decision-makers since at that time the majority of Black students were still excluded from participating in higher education on financial grounds (Greenstein and Mabogoane, 2003: In Chisholm et al., 2003: 139-140; Chisholm 2003: In Chisholm et al., 2003: 184; Chisholm and Vally, 2003: In Chisholm et al., 2003: 278; Motala, 2003: In Chisholm et al., 2003: 318-319). But after the NCHE final report was released, SASCO pushed for free higher education even more vehemently because of the perception that students' problems and demands were being ignored. This is because the NCHE proposed the goal-oriented funding model and ignored the free higher education model which SASCO requested to be included in the agenda by the Commission after the release of the first report (Chisholm and Vally, 2003: In Chisholm et al., 2003: 278-279).

Even though that period seemed to be favourable for free higher education, the government did not apply it to the problem in question, but rather applied the goal-oriented funding model proposed by the NCHE. As was indicated previously, the Minister of Education at the time, Mr. Bengu argued that SASCO's free higher education policy is impossible, citing lack of financial resources to make it a reality. The release of the Green Paper of 1996 and the White Paper of 1997 saw rather the refurbishing of the goal-oriented model which ended up being the goal-oriented and performance-related model.

When changes of personnel (Mr. Thabo Mbeki elected into presidency and Mr. Kader Asmal becoming the new Minister of Education) in governmental administration took place in 1999, one would have expected that free higher education would be considered because by 1999 South African higher education experienced decline in student enrolments. This was not the case however since the refurbishing of the goal-oriented and performance-related model continued instead. This was a period that pressed the Minister of Education to make decisive choices in crucial areas such as playing a steering-role and financing higher education within a single integrated and co-ordinated, yet differentiated, higher education system as per the recommendations of the NCHE report of 1996 and the principles of the Green Paper of 1996, White Paper of 1997, Higher Education Act of 1997 and the National Plan of 2001. The economic challenges that South Africa faced globally and nationally determined that any policy that was to be adopted in order to address the problem in question had to be feasible and anticipate future financial constraints. The aim was to make higher education responsive to the economic challenges. In this period then, the role of the Minister in policy-making began to be predominant since as Badat (2006: 8) notes, "...particularistic stakeholder interests generally tended to make difficult any substantive consensus on crucial issues that require tough choices and decisions..." This remained so until the NFF (goal-oriented and performance-related model) was officially released in December 2003 and the beginning of 2004.

After the 2004 elections, another change of personnel especially in the Ministry of Education, took place and this again provided a chance for free higher education to be pushed onto the agenda of decision-makers. Mr. Kader Asmal was dismissed and Mrs. Naledi Pandor became the Minister of Education. However, the developments of this period were not that fertile for its promotion onto the decision agenda. This was because Pandor's office was committed to implementing the recommendations of the National Plan about the mergers and the NFF. Even though this was the case, the challenges of university dropouts on the basis of lack of financial support were still persisting and the Minister still expressed serious concern about this in her education budget speeches of 2005, 2006 and 2007 (Pandor, 2005; 2006; 2007). In most of the cases, Pandor's message was that given the challenges of financing higher education in order to improve access to higher education, there were considerations to strengthen NSFAS. In 2007, The Minister introduced a three-

year pilot of Fundisa Fund that was to be managed by the Association of Collective Investments in partnership with the NSFAS (Pandor, 2007).

These developments of change in personnel in South African government between 1999 and 2006, however, did not wholly inhibit SASCO from being engaged in marches and protests especially on the basis of student exclusions from participating in higher education because of lack of financial support. For example, Cele (2004) (cited in (Koen et al., 2006: 408) mentions that in 2002, SASCO protested against the idea of mergers claiming that they would negatively impact individual student fees. According to Koen et al (2006: 405) students who participate in these activities are generally more concerned about their financial abilities to complete studies than they are with issues of university entrance and/or acceptance. However, in Koen et al.'s observation, these marches and protests had little impact on exclusions (2006: 413). This implies that SASCO marches and protests in this period have not forced decision-makers to consider free higher education as a more viable alternative to improve access to higher education. This should not be surprising because according to Kingdon (1995: 154), while it is the case that changes in personnel can produce new agenda items, they also make it impossible to consider others too. This is because the new administration (or political appointees) might make the consideration of other items impossible on the basis of the dominating interests of the day. This is the case because the period in question was dominated by a need to make higher education responsive to the global and national economic challenges while still emphasising equity and redress in order to transform and improve access to higher education. It was again dominated by a need to make higher education accessible not only through an increase in student numbers, but also through increased throughput and success rates. Hence, the desire for the goal-oriented and performance-related funding framework.

The above state of affairs did not last until the ANC's 2007 Polokwane conference which can be best seen as containing both the elements of public mood and turnover of personnel. It should be noted that SASCO which is in the spotlight in this study because of its free higher education proposal, is the support base of the ANC and its alliance partners. Its activities to a greater or lesser degree affect ANC policies. Therefore, for the sake of the discussion in this section of the study, the students represented by SASCO become, in a sense, "the public" for the top ANC-led alliance officials so that their opinions about higher education

policies are considered “the public opinion or mood.” On the other hand, change of personnel in the leadership of the ANC should mean “change of personnel in administration” because some of those elected to lead it would, if the ANC is elected into power, become governmental leaders.

So, since 1999 to 2006 the problem of university dropouts persisted despite the increase in student enrolments on the basis that the NSFAS financial capacities were not enough to assist all poor students, and since 1994 and throughout 2000 to 2006, SASCO has been complaining about the exclusion of poor students from higher education on the basis of lack of financial support, the top ANC officials interpreted this “public mood” to their advantage in that free higher education was placed on the party’s decision-agenda towards the Polokwane conference. Of course it is Kingdon’s view that government officials’ sense of the national mood serves to promote some items on their policy agendas for it creates a fertile ground for their promotion (1995: 147). Therefore, decline in student enrolments, coupled with dropouts and continual students’ marches and protests created a fertile ground for the promotion of free higher education onto the policy agendas of the ANC. Providing free higher education became one of the ANC’s 2007 Polokwane resolutions and so it promised to progressively introduce it up to the undergraduate level (ANC, 2007).

The election results of the Polokwane conference caused a turnover of personnel within the ANC as the present South African president Mr. Jacob Zuma became the ANC president (ANC, 2007). This turnover provided SASCO with the hope that finally, free higher education would be adopted and implemented by the new administration. This hope even grew when the Ministry of Education was split into two and Dr. Nzimande of the SACP was appointed the Minister of Higher Education and Training after the 2009 general elections. The SACP in its 12th national conference also resolved for free education from early childhood to higher education especially up to the undergraduate level (SACP, 2007: 8). However, this has not been the case since it seems that there was no indication or even consensus about the time for its adoption and implementation. What is evident is that SASCO was expecting that it should have been adopted and implemented already. This is because SASCO leadership is accusing the government of selectively implementing Polokwane resolutions and thereby neglecting to progressively introduce free higher education (Chuenyane, 2010). Apart from that, the Minister of Finance, Pravin Gordhan is accused of defying Polokwane resolutions

by giving tax breaks to capital instead of detailing the processes of acquiring funds for progressively introducing free education (Ndamase, 2010). Again, earlier this year, the majority of university campuses were plagued by SASCO marches and protests demanding free higher education.

While it is assumed that Nzimande is of the view that free higher education is possible for poor students, the problem among others is that his argument is that “the poor” must be properly defined (Pretorius, 2009). This is because in his view as Pretorius notes, some students are not considered as poor by the current NSFAS’s threshold eligibility mechanisms (Pretorius, 2009). This is because the current NSFAS’s income provisions and cut-offs mean that the majority of students from South Africa's working class are excluded because of their income bands (Mail and Guardian, 2009). Furthermore, Fredericks (2010) indicates that while Nzimande advocates free education up to the undergraduate level, his opinion is that it should only be given to academically deserving students. This implies that the Minister advocates free higher education but only on the basis of merit. Within this context the question is: Why is free higher education not an accepted policy in South Africa? The next chapter is dedicated to explaining this.

Summary:

The argument in this section has been to show that the political stream is the most important promoter or inhibitor of high agenda status. As was indicated, the political developments immediately after the 1994 elections provided a fertile ground for free higher education to be elevated onto the decision agenda, but it was inhibited because it did not receive any serious backup from high ranking ANC-led Alliance members. From 1999 to 2006, change of personnel both in the Presidency and in the Ministry of Education was expected to provide this policy proposal chances to be considered, but this was not the case as much of the attention was the goal-oriented and performance-related funding model. It was only before and after the Polokwane conference that free higher education was elevated onto the agenda of decision-makers especially at the ANC-led Alliance party level. Some of the decision-makers in the Alliance especially in the Presidency (Mr. Jacob Zuma) and the current Ministry of Higher Education and Training (Mr. Blade Nzimande) are in

governmental administration, but free higher education is not yet an adopted policy. Thus, the question is: why is this case?

CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

Close attention to the developments in the policy and political streams reveals why free higher education is not an accepted policy. As was seen in the policy stream since 1996, free higher education has been mainly rejected or ignored on the basis that it was or is technically infeasible. For example, when SASCO rejected the NCHE report 1996 in the form of its first and final draft and thereby proposing this policy alternative, the then Minister of Education rejected it on the basis that it appears to be infeasible. When the White Paper 3 of 1997 was released, the same sentiments were repeated because SASCO still called for this policy proposal after the Green Paper of 1996 was released. In order to prove that the policy proposal in question was not accepted by the government, the goal-oriented funding model that was proposed by the NCHE in 1996 was therefore debated and redrafted throughout the developments in the White Paper, Higher Education Act and the National Plan. Eventually, the new funding framework (NFF) or goal-oriented and performance-related funding model came into being in 2003 and was implemented in the 2004/2005 financial year.

Some policy specialists and academics have also rejected free higher education on a similar basis. For example, Odhav (2009) argued that the call for free higher education is problematic since it implies redirecting resources from dysfunctional constituencies, but even that might not be enough for the implementation of universal free higher education. It is also interesting to notice that even those who advocate free higher education are quite aware that its implementation would need massive financial aid from government. For example, Badat (2010) holds that any immediate implementation of this alternative would mean that other priorities such as health and housing have to be sacrificed. While this view was meant to show the possibility of free higher education, it implicitly suggests that it is not feasible because to improve its feasibility would heavily rely on redirecting funds from other constituencies.

Currently, free higher education is still seen to be problematic because funding and resources remain the major stumbling blocks (SABC, 2010). Of course, the ANC-2007 Polokwane conference has elevated it onto the agenda of decision-makers to be investigated, but lack of financial resources is still the hindrance for the realisation of this

policy proposal. For example, the Department of Higher Education and Training's former director general, Mary Metcalfe (cited in SABC, 2010) argues that while this policy is the goal of the government; financial constraints make it unaffordable especially if it is to benefit all poor students. It is for this reason that Dr. Blade Nzimande would indicate that rather than advocating free higher education for all, he is advocating free higher education for poor deserving students (SABC, 2010).

The infeasibility problem of free higher education further implies not complying with other selection or survival principles proposed by Kingdon, especially anticipation of future constraints. This is because providing free higher education for everyone means that universities would have to enrol every historically disadvantaged or poor student. Student enrolments are already posing a challenge to the human resource capacities and university facilities. This challenge has been brought about by the help of the NSFAS which has at least ensured that a great number of disadvantaged students are able to access higher education. Some universities cannot cope with these increased student enrolments and the government has adopted and implemented the NFF which somehow caps student numbers to anticipate future financial and human resource constraints. Therefore, the adoption and implementation of the NFF implied the rejection of free higher education on the basis future budgetary and human resource constraints.

Apart from that, the developments in the political stream have proved to be a hindrance for free higher education to become an accepted policy proposal in South Africa. In principle, this means that lack of political support from decision-makers is one of the contributing factors that prevent this policy alternative from being accepted. For instance, when the change in administration after the end of the apartheid regime in 1994 took place, SASCO tried to push free higher education to be considered by requesting that it should be placed on the agenda of the NCHE. However, as it was previously shown, the then Minister of Education rejected it on the basis of its infeasibility and considered the goal-oriented funding model proposed by the NCHE while for the SASPE model was still scrutinised. The former was then redrafted and emerged as a goal-oriented and performance-related framework during the release of the White Paper of 1997. This funding framework was then made law when the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 was enacted. His successor, Kader Asmal, ignored free higher education and fully focused on making the goal-oriented and

performance-related funding framework a reality. As was previously indicated, it was adopted in 2003 and implemented in 2004. Mr. Asmal's successor, Mrs. Pandor is the one who saw the implementation of the NFF (goal-oriented and performance-related funding framework). However, the ANC 2007 Polokwane conference saw free higher education back on the discussion agenda and it was then considered by the new decision-makers. Although this is the case, the same policy-makers have not adopted it: instead the debate is now about appropriately defining the poor who would constitute its beneficiaries.

In the light of the developments in the policy stream and political stream, free higher education appears not to be an accepted policy because these streams as well as the problem stream cannot converge. While the events in the problem stream have been strongly indicating that the problem of unequal access to higher education is still immense and therefore this problem received the serious attention of decision-makers, the events in the policy and political stream have been inconsistent and unable to ensure that all of them converge. For example, the events in the policy stream which were dominated by the redrafting and refurbishing of the goal-oriented funding model proposed by the NCFE in 1996 until it was implemented in 2004, have caused this stream to drift away from the problem stream in the sense that free higher education was not selected to address the in question. Therefore free higher education could not be coupled with the problem of unequal access to higher education because it was perceived as too expensive. Even currently free higher education is still seen as problematic based on the same principle. Hence the Minister of Higher Education and Training is calling for free higher education for academically deserving poor students so that it can meet the principles in question.

With regard to the political stream, events such as changes of personnel in the government administration have caused similar issues even though they provided opportunities for free higher education to be elevated onto the agenda of decision-makers. Since the end of apartheid in 1994 until 2006, free higher education did not even rise onto the agenda of decision-makers in all the turnovers of South African presidents and ministers of education. Hence it could not even become a policy. This is because in the light of Kingdon's theory, a policy proposal has to at least be elevated onto decision agenda if it is to receive a serious attention by decision-makers and be selected to address a policy problem. Since the end of 2007 until currently this policy proposal has been elevated onto the agenda of decision-

makers and it has received the attention of decision-makers as the Minister of Higher Education and Training appointed a Ministerial Committee to evaluate the efficacy of the NSFAS and make recommendations on how to progressively introduce free higher education for the poor at the undergraduate level (Nzimane, 2009). But the problem is that political support is not strong enough for it to be seriously considered and adopted. The implication of Nzimande's opinion is that free higher education still needs to be studied so that it can be feasible and anticipate future constraints. This is a positive movement toward the problem and policy stream as it implies that free higher education needs to be redrafted and refurbished so that it is not universal; that is, not for every one of the poor students. However, due to a lack of political support, it is not yet an accepted policy proposal.

In general, what is being driven home here is that free higher education is not yet an accepted policy proposal in South Africa because:

- It does not meet all the principles of selection and survival particularly technical feasibility and anticipation of future constraints,
- Political support especially from the decision-makers is still not enough to ensure its acceptability; and,
- The three streams have not yet converged as the policy and political stream keep drifting away from the problem stream.

Therefore the implication is that if free higher education can be refurbished such that it can become feasible, receive enough political support and the three streams of action converge, it would emerge as a policy to improve equal access to higher education. However, if it can be considered, it must be carefully planned such that it is not as free as it is proposed by SASCO otherwise the money sponsoring higher education would not be different from charity funding. This is because the main feature of SASCO's model of free higher education is that it is non-refundable. In this form, free higher education does not provide an opportunity for cost-recovery plans like the present NSFAS's loan bursaries. In such a form, this policy proposal will not meet the selection principle of anticipating future financial constraints because it will still not be feasible.

Another complicating factor is that the South African social context is also steadily changing from what it was immediately after the apartheid. Poverty is no longer highly attributable to

the historically disadvantaged institutions and students. Presently, some critical elements of poverty are conspicuous even the former white universities as well as White students. Therefore, targeting institutions and students of colour in order to improve access to higher education is becoming illusive because students move between these types of institutions of higher learning (Letseka and Maile, 2008). This might cause free higher education to fail to improve the issue of equal access. While the possibility of free higher education is still being assessed, then the voucher system proposed by HSRC (2008) should be assessed too. In principle, "the voucher could be used in the form of a certificate that parents or students could use to pay for education at a university of their choice" and this would allow greater economic diversity by offering students from lower-income families the opportunity to access quality higher education from previously unaffordable universities (Letseka and Maile, 2008). Strict definition of the poor as proposed by the Minister of Higher Education and Training is not far from the truth. The fact of the matter is it appears that in order to improve equal access to higher education whether through the NFF, free higher education or voucher system, South African government needs to seriously address the issues of poverty and inequalities otherwise skewed representation and higher numbers of university dropouts would continuously confront higher education system.

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