

Access to Success: Fostering Trust and Exchange between Europe and Africa

Workshop 2: Towards a coordinated vision of Europe-Africa higher education partnership: Supporting institutional capacity building in Africa 24-26 February 2010 Oslo, Norway

Summary of Working Group 2 – Universities as Catalyst for Change

The focus of WG2 was on “*Universities as a catalyst for change: do programmes really create capacity for change and development?*” The group had a good discussion but as with any discussion, there were more questions asked than answered! The first question was: ‘Change, what change? Social? Economic? Political?’ In Africa, it would mean developmental change, and that cannot be achieved without changes in the social, the economic and the political.

There were two presentations, one from Guido Zolezzi, (CUCS) Network on Universities for Development Cooperation, Italy; and one from Richard Mibey, Moi University, Kenya. A short summary of each is given here.

The Network on Universities for Development Cooperation (CUCS) is an independent network, formed from bottom-up, as a realisation that in Italy there was lack of coordination and too much fragmentation in regard to development cooperation. CUCS’s aims are to:

- Promote exchange of best practices and information at national level
- Foster debate on the role of universities in development cooperation
- Improve development cooperation activities of each partner
- Be a national, institutional reference for universities of development cooperation

CUCS seeks to achieve the goals through activities such as:

- Meeting of universities and development cooperation in Italy – it has just had its first meeting
- Common approach to fund-raising for student mobility
- Survey on development cooperation activities
- Regular coordination meetings

CUCS’s visions are:

1. Education
2. Research
3. Knowledge and technology transfer and sharing, and in this it seeks to promote:
 - Culture of innovation
 - Best practices in industrial ambition
 - Technology as service to local community

It is the third vision that is of particular relevance to this working group in terms of universities as catalyst for change and in serving the communities.

The lack of coordination and fragmentation in development cooperation has been mentioned by previous speakers in the plenary sessions. The CUCS network is doing its bit in Italy to address the problem. This gives rise to the question of whether we can bring it to a European-African level, so that the varied experiences in universities can be pooled in the form of a resource bank to be shared, thus avoiding having to reinvent the wheel each time a development cooperation programme is being set up.

The second presentation from Moi University provided some innovative examples of how a university can bring benefits to its local community. Moi University strongly believes that universities play a central and strategic role in the overall development of a country through education, training and research. Its strategic plan is to fit in the Millennium Development Goals through social, economic and political development. Its academic programmes are tailored to suit market needs. It has set up satellite campuses to ensure access to higher education. By bringing the university to different sites it has also helped revive the local economy in the different communities.

Some examples of what Moi University is doing:

- 'DIY' (Do It Yourself) programmes for students, e.g. in the School of Engineering, students undertake the building of hostels, thus cutting out the need for 'out-sourcing' thereby saving costs and at the same time providing students with hands-on skills.
- The University bought Rivatex, a disused textile factory, to provide practical training to engineering students and carry out research activities.
- It encourages communities to cultivate cotton as an alternative to cattle rustling – this has led to more peaceful communities as there is less conflict from stealing from one another.
- It provides training for young girls in sewing and encourages them to set up their own business and with the income to further their education.
- The university has extensive cooperation programmes with Europe as well as the USA. It has a gender equality programme that is supported by the Flemish universities.

Currently the University receives 51% government funding and 49% private funding, but it aims to increase private funding to 76%. Not many universities would have the audacity or confidence to say that, I'm sure!

Clearly, Moi University is an example of an institution, with a clear strategy of its own, can benefit from international collaboration without the disadvantages, and use it to further its strategic agenda.

Discussion

The discussion was wide and varied but with the help of our chair, Kees Kouwenaar, we agreed that three main issues seemed to have emerged:

1. There was a view that it is not fair that development programmes are often not open to private universities. In Africa, with the growing number of private universities, it was felt that their role can no longer be ignored. However, it was pointed out that some development programmes certainly do not exclude private universities, e.g. Tanzania education fund gives loans to private universities, and DAAD does not explicitly exclude private universities. Of course, when we talk about private universities we should bear in mind the distinctions between private for profit and private not for profit universities. Working for ways to include private universities may be desirable, but in doing so would we be 'tilting the playing field' as one speaker put it? It is a complex issue.
2. The lack of coordination and fragmentation in development cooperation showed a need to create a proper framework for development programmes, regardless of whether or not it will include private universities. However, given the diversity of forms, structures and goals of cooperation, how are we to add coordination without imposing rigidity is another complex question.

3. Someone asked why is Moi University's entrepreneurial role not more common in Africa? Yes, they exist (said Tolly from Open University of Tanzania) but people just don't know about them. So, there is a need for an international forum on this topic and bring together entrepreneurial universities in Africa to showcase and share good practices. It is now time for Europe to have a clearer view of African universities, focusing on universities that are moving forward rather than on the negative.

Conclusion

In conclusion the recommendations from the working group are:

1. The private sector needs to be given the opportunity to play a greater role in development cooperation programmes
2. There is a need to create a proper guidance framework to regulate development cooperation programmes
3. There is a need for an international forum for innovative universities to showcase their achievements and to share good examples of practice
4. To establish a network at a European and African level to inform, pool and share information on development cooperation programmes

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