

SPECIAL THEME

THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES IN DEVELOPING AREAS

Editorial

The theme of the papers presented in this issue is the role of universities in developing areas. The term 'developing areas' covers lesser developed countries and regions, communities of more developed and post-industrial nations and societies whose socio-economic systems are undergoing change. The term 'universities' refers to various institutions of higher learning and research.

Economic development continues to be a subject of global concern. Over time and space it has been neither continuous nor uniform. Large differences exist not only among but also within countries. Lack of growth creates many problems including those of poverty and food supply. However, there seems to be broad agreement that economic growth, while necessary, may not be sufficient to resolve these problems. Additional efforts are needed to ensure that development reaches the poor. What is the role of education in such efforts and what can it contribute to development in general? In particular, what role can and should universities play in this process? Development has proved to be both complex and difficult. Recent focus has emphasized the importance of social and human variables. Undoubtedly, one way to develop human capital is through a variety of educational activities. While many points of view can be and are expressed and debated, the underlying common assumption has been that universities do indeed play an important role in development.

Our activities on the subject originated with a conference on 'The Role of Universities in Developing Areas' held at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (BGU) in Beersheva, Israel in December 1983. The conference was sponsored by the joint University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) – BGU academic cooperation programme. Development has been a common bond between UCLA and BGU. Located in a semi-arid zone, UCLA has been inextricably involved in the explosive growth and development of Southern California and the Metropolitan Los Angeles area. The Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, located in the Negev desert, has in its founding charge the explicit mandate of coordinating and contributing to the development of the Negev region of Israel. It has indeed already contributed much to the growth and development of Beersheva, the capital of the Negev, and to the Negev as a whole. The activities of this joint programme, over ten years old, have recently been described in *Higher Education Policy* (Aroni, 1990).

In organizing the first conference the three editors, together with the late James S. Coleman of UCLA, aimed at bringing together scholars studying the impact of universities on various aspects of development including social, economic and cultural, in both the less developed countries of Africa, Asia and South America and the more developed nations of North America, Europe and the Far East. Over 40 scholars from 14 countries presented papers on subjects as diverse as the role of universities in training health, legal and social professionals in China, Israel, the Federal Republic of Germany and the United States; fostering regional development in Canada, Israel, Sweden and Nigeria; coping with changing urban environments in Europe and the United States; the crucial function of universities in nation building in Malaysia, India and China. Participants came to the conclusion that many universities perform similar functions in their respective environments despite the significant differences in economic development, culture, and standard of living among countries. In addition to the traditional function of disseminating knowledge and education, these shared functions include coping with social and environmental needs, the training of professionals, regional growth and development, and nation building.

We published several papers from the conference in a Policy Studies Organization (PSO) symposium 'Developing Areas, Universities and Public Policy' (Lazin, Aroni and Gradus, 1986), and many of the papers from the conference together with additional work of other scholars were published in a book (Lazin, Aroni and Gradus, 1988).

The Second BGU-UCLA International Symposium on 'The Role of Universities in Developing Regions' was held in Beersheva on 26–29 December 1989. It was jointly organized and chaired by the three editors and attended by 65 people from 16 countries. Almost 70 papers were presented in the 15 panels of the symposium dealing with a broad spectrum of relevant subjects. These included the role and experience of universities in professional training, regional and national development, academic cooperation, economic and rural development, and issues of governmental policy towards universities, university students, research institutes, continuing education, health, and planning for the future. As a result of this conference an informal International Network on the Role of Universities in Developing Areas (INRUDA) was established. INRUDA's Steering Committee consists of 20 members with a wide representation, geographically and across disciplines, with three members acting as a Secretariat. The activities of INRUDA are to produce and distribute a small semi-annual newsletter, the first of which was recently published (Aroni, 1991), and to undertake other tasks determined by the group which can be achieved with volunteer efforts.

We have selected nine thought-provoking papers for publication in this issue of *Higher Education Policy*. These papers were presented or submitted to the Second International Symposium and cover a broad range of subjects which can be grouped into three sections: *general issues*, *specific activities* and questions affecting *specific geographic areas*.

The three papers on general issues include the keynote address by David S. Saxon, a proposal for a global approach of education for developing areas by Bishwapriya Sanyal, and considerations of universities, political development and regional imbalance by Fred A. Lazin. Claiming modesty on the subject, David Saxon, the distinguished scientist-educator, first summarizes his observations of the literature of development: the vast literature seems to indicate that 'the subject of development is unknowable', and 'strong and confrontational disagreement is endemic'. He illustrates this disagreement by the

range of views on a subject that 'ought to be ... clear cut', namely the role of science and technology in developing countries. Some see the basic differences between developed and developing worlds in 'their differing mastery and utilization of present-day science and technology' while others dismiss basic laws of modern science as 'ethnocentric' and 'colonial science'. Things get worse when one considers less neutral subjects such as population, environment, trade etc. At the same time, Saxon sees optimistic signs of challenges and unparalleled opportunities. Pursuing global equity as an objective, he discusses the goals of raising the quality of life and narrowing the 'unacceptably large gap' between countries, and considers both the various constraints that exist and the specific challenges that need to be overcome. He sees the role of universities not in projects but in educating students, not in prescribing solutions but in offering students 'the best that we know, think, understand and value', and trusting them to 'take ... whatever is of value in the light of their own experience and history.' The clear thinking of a scientist is refreshing when compared with the complexities that exist at a detailed level and in empirical observations.

Bishwapriya Sanyal discusses the question of education in the United States schools of planning, and by implication in other similar schools of developed countries. In particular, he focuses on the education in such schools of students from low-income countries. It should be remembered that planning education has undergone a revolution in the last half of this century from purely physical planning to a much broader definition of economic, social and developmental planning. At the same time, there has been a loss of certainty and consensus on the path and meaning of development, on directions of planning education in general and on what international students should be taught in US planning schools. While earlier students from developing countries may have come to seek a transfer of Western 'know-how', their later planning education was organized in specialized degree programmes dealing with developing areas. Sanyal argues that 'we live in one world', that 'solutions require reform in both domestic and international contexts simultaneously', and that 'the road to consensus may well begin in the US [or, as we understand it, developed countries] planning schools'. He advocates bringing United States and international students together as 'an opportunity for enhancing the relevancy of education for *all* planning students – foreign as well as domestic'. Foreign students from developing countries are seen here as 'a major resource in the understanding of the global dimension of the current crisis and in building a consensus of ideas about ways of transcending it'. It seems that the arguments presented by Sanyal are applicable to other socio-economic fields somewhat in contrast to the situation that may exist in the physical sciences.

Fred A. Lazin draws upon the papers presented at the December 1983 conference mentioned earlier (Lazin, Aroni and Gradus, 1986, 1988) and analyses examples concerning the role of universities in dealing with inequalities between regions, ethnic groups and economic classes within a single country, and imbalances in national development. Unfortunately, the reported successes are in a minority. They include an example in New York of addressing neighbourhood needs and problems in education, juvenile delinquency, crime, unemployment, and an example in Malaysia concerning the role of higher education in nation building. Other cases illustrate various lessons and problems: Indian universities are criticized for doing little either to deal with urban problems or to reduce existing social inequalities; a major urban American institution of higher education is criticized for fostering inequality and class differences in its immediate neighbourhood; at a university in the under-developed north of Sweden some faculty and departments question the value of the special commitment and orientation to the region; the provincial government in the northern region of Canada lacks a developmental plan for the area and thus provides no rationale for the new universities in this development; the case of BGU clearly presents the external and internal dilemmas facing those institutions of higher education committed to developing their regions. Two major factors emerge, namely governmental policy at the national, regional or local levels, and the conflict between the traditional values of higher education – to pursue knowledge, research and teaching – and the policies designed to change imbalance.

The two papers on specific activities are a description by Geza Gordos and Robert Tuschak of the role of international programmes, and an analysis by Leonard Freedman of continuing education and the development process. Gordos and Tuschak point out that the 'exchange of experiences on an international scale is now a prerequisite for a satisfactory engineering education'. They discuss the experience at the Technical University of Budapest where, since 1984, the entire range of engineering and management courses is in the English language parallel to the traditional courses taught in Hungarian. They see many advantages of this action for a country whose mother tongue is spoken by relatively few people: attracting foreign students, encouraging visiting faculty who can now teach in an international language, and at the same time helping local students to become more international as well. The fear of creating enclaves of foreign students proved unjustified; these students also quickly learned Hungarian for cultural and other activities. The issue of language is indeed not trivial; many international examples come to mind involving past and present cultural and political conflicts centring around uses of different languages.

Leonard Freedman's paper deals with continuing education provided by universities and its potential contribution to the processes of economic and social development. In affluent countries, with rapid technical change, the need for continuing education for various professionals and the demographic increase of older people have all contributed to increased demand for such educational services. Yet this remains a relatively undeveloped activity because of many factors including negative and dominant faculty attitudes towards continuing education. While alternative institutional arrangements have emerged, Freedman argues that it would be damaging to the interests of traditional universities if they avoided any response to this growing demand. The situation in poorer developing regions is somewhat different. The demand from college-age groups for university education is exploding but the number of adults with skills and education needed for development is inadequate. In these countries, continuing education may be 'a means of upgrading the skills of older adults who have completed secondary education but have no higher education experience, as well as providing updating opportunities for their professional class'. Much work still remains to be done on defining and analysing the problems, policies and possibilities of continuing education in developing countries. Increased international cooperation in this area could help significantly.

The third and last section contains four papers on specific geographic areas. Varaporn Bovornsiri and Gerald Fry examine the past successes and future challenges of Thai higher education and its relation to development; N. Jayaram deals with State policy and social constraints of higher education in India; Charles V. Kidd discusses the education of sub-Saharan university students in foreign countries; John A. Nkinyangi writes on the causes and impact of student revolt on African education. Bovornsiri and Fry describe the Thai experience since the establishment of the first university only 74 years ago to the present

time when there are over 300 colleges and universities. They relate it to the six national development plans during the past 30 years and to the present 15-year long-range planning for higher education. More recent moves have been towards the growing number of private institutions. The future is considered in the context of unprecedented economic growth, issues of international competitiveness, the need for excellence in human resources, the need of emphasizing science and technology and their impact on higher education. The uneven geographic distribution of universities creates problems of access to higher education related to region and socio-economic status. Mention is also made of the need to serve a greater diversity of age groups, along the lines discussed above and advocated by Freedman. This paper is an interesting case study of a country without a colonial past.

In contrast, Jayaram describes India's higher education embedded in its colonial history: 'the legacy of higher education inherited by India at the time of her independence in 1947 was already crisis-ridden'. Nevertheless, his pessimistic analysis attributes the post-independence crisis to 'the lack of a political will on the part of the leadership – traceable to a vested interest in the *status quo*'. He describes a 'phenomenal expansion' in higher education during the last 40 years which took place 'in a largely illiterate society' and 'despite the low rating of education *per se* in the order of national priorities'. A number of past educational commissions are discussed as well as the 'new educational policy'. The expectation is again rather negative: 'If past experience is any guide, we can expect piecemeal tinkering rather than a determined overhaul of the system. In the meantime, the hiatus between the worsening crisis and its feeble handling grows wider.' Jayaram criticizes both the process of planning and its implementation. The expansion of higher education has had negative results: 'The deterioration of the quality of education has been a direct and inevitable consequence of the rapid proliferation of colleges and universities and the undue emphasis on examination.' Other problems discussed are the 'education-employment mismatch', lack of 'manpower planning', and the dilemma of curtailing the supply of graduates, in the absence of a rapid rise in the demand for qualified people, and its negative impact on upward mobility. The educational crisis is understandably seen in the context of related socio-economic and socio-political problems. India is a large and complex sub-continent and one wonders the extent to which regional educational differences could be related to regional economic and social changes and developments.

The paper by Charles Kidd deals with an important subject which is too often neglected in the literature, namely the training abroad of students from developing countries. He focuses on the 20 per cent of all sub-Saharan university students enrolled in foreign universities, mostly in Europe and the United States. Data are presented and discussed dealing with a great number of important questions: What are the numbers of students involved? How are they distributed among the host countries? What has been the movement of students among the sub-Saharan countries? What are the fields of study? (as selected by sub-Saharan university students abroad, 'they bear little relationship to high priority national needs, as witnessed by the small proportions of students who select such fields as education, health, agriculture, and the physical sciences'). At what academic levels are these students? What are their sources of economic support, and how are they distributed among students' families, foreign universities and private sponsors, African entities and international development agencies? Who controls study abroad and what are the reasons for it? It was found that most of the financial support comes from students' families and, in terms of control, 'most countries rely primarily on the choices of individuals'. 'At the same time, training abroad helps to meet national needs for the skills that contribute to economic development. The question is whether it is possible to design and operate systems that could meet these needs more efficiently without unreasonably restricting the freedom of choice of individuals.' Most of the reasons for studying abroad are related to deficiencies of local universities. All the data mentioned are for periods before 1985. Since then, while the numbers have apparently declined sharply because of a decaying economic situation, precise data have not yet become available. This paper demonstrates one type of continuing analysis that seems essential for rational educational policies to be established and implemented in developing countries.

In the final paper of this issue, John A. Nkinyangi discusses student revolt and protest in African universities which, compounded by swelling enrolments and shrinking budgets, are endangering the whole African university system. 'The virus of discontent among African students has spread, disrupting the educational process and making the smooth administration of institutions untenable.' The problems are embedded in the rapidly deteriorating social and economic conditions in the African countries. While the quantitative growth of the African educational systems in the last 30 years has been impressive, the decline in educational facilities and standards are obviously adding to student unrest and, in many African countries, are developing into serious explosive situations. What seems to be needed is more than the observed 'management' of student revolt through university closures, student expulsions, some cooptive approaches and the establishment of national youth service schemes. If universities are to contribute to national development, they require minimum standards to exist for the welfare of the institutions and their members.

In summary, we have discussed the theme of this issue, described our earlier activities and publications and summarized the nine papers presented here. The subject of the role of universities in developing areas is vast and complex. The objectives of development and universal equity, and the ways of serving them through education, require and deserve our efforts and commitment.

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