



Platform for International Education

Discussion Paper
Higher Education and Development Cooperation:
To a new vision on
knowledge capacity building in higher education for development

Introduction

Doekle Terpstra, Chairman HBO-raad, Martien Molenaar, Chairman SAIL, and Han Aarts, Board Member of PIE, started a discussion on Development Cooperation (DC) and Higher Education (HE) at the Nuffic Annual Conference 2009, which had a focus on this particular theme. All three experts made it clear there are significant changes going on in the world of higher education, both globally and in The Netherlands, and that these changes have implications for how to build capacity in higher education for development, in the developing world in the first place, but also in the Netherlands. As a consequence, also in Dutch policies and programs for development cooperation in higher education new approaches are required. Therefore, it seems that the time is right to start the formulation of a strategic vision how knowledge capacity building for development in HE can best be achieved in the context of the emerging knowledge society of tomorrow. The Platform for International Education (PIE) feels the urge to facilitate the discussion and to develop such vision paper, with the involvement of experts and stakeholders in the field of DC and HE. It is the aim to present in the course of 2010 a vision paper to the Minister of Development Cooperation.

In the first part of this discussion paper PIE introduces some of the reasons why we believe a new vision on development cooperation in higher education is needed. In the second part we present some themes, trends and developments in the world of HE (and also in the world of knowledge and research) that we think should be taken into account in developing such vision. As this is meant to be a discussion paper, by no means we pretend to be inclusive or comprehensive. At best this paper may inspire and start the discussion on a topic that is obviously a concern for so many organizations and people who share a commitment to DC in HE, in the awareness that knowledge and HE are crucial for development.

Why a new vision on development cooperation in higher education is needed

A changing scope for Development Cooperation

Development cooperation has to become more than ever a tool of global economic development and of global sustainable solutions for issues in the field of water, environment, climate, health, peace, law and food security. The developing world¹ is becoming increasingly knowledge dependent. One consequence of globalization is the increasing interdependence of societies anywhere on the globe. In a shrinking world many problems have globalized and therefore need global –and often very complicated– answers. Actually quite some of the problems the developing world is confronted with are problems the ‘North’ has exported to all corners of the globe, like pollution leading to global warming. At the same time problems mainly located in the developing world, like certain diseases, poverty, insecurity or serious environmental degradation of all sorts, have become (or at least *should be*) a concern of global mankind. Next to that, many problems in the developing world, from national to local or community levels, need to be addressed anyway and with high urgency, and knowledge is indispensable in doing so (Aarts 2009).

The increasing global interdependence requires global networks of researchers, professionals, policy makers and politicians with mutual understanding.

Dutch and Western higher education institutions play an important role in capacity development in developing countries. Not only for more and better education, and not only because of the impact on social and economic development in both the South and the North, but also from the point of view of self interest, because we owe it to our children and grand children to leave behind a livable earth (Terpstra 2009).

The world of higher education is changing

There is a long tradition among European universities to contribute to human development. Many universities have relations with partner universities in the developing world, often with a purpose of contributing somehow to development. However, the many changes in the world of higher education in the present era of rapid globalization seem to have put this commitment under pressure. That does not necessarily imply that such commitment is disappearing. It looks rather like institutions are somehow at a loss how to accommodate such commitment in their current agendas. Recent times have made university leaders and managers much more sensitive for all kinds of external incentives than they used to be in the past, but somehow powerful incentives to engage in

¹ There are many ways to define the developing world. As any definition is arbitrary, no one is fully satisfying. Here the developing world is arbitrarily defined as those countries which are ranked according to the Human Development Index (HDI) of UNDP with an HDI score lower than 0.80 (the upper limit of the country group classified as having ‘medium human development’). Most of these 120 countries (out of a global total of 177) are located in Africa, Asia (with the notable exception of Japan and the other now more advanced countries in Eastern Asia) and Latin America (with as major exceptions like Chile, Argentina and Mexico).

activities targeting human development issues seem to be lacking – or being pushed aside by seemingly more urgent matters (Aarts, 2009).

Old concepts

For more than 40 years Dutch development cooperation programmes aim at contributing to the development of higher education and research in developing countries. These programmes are financed by the minister for development cooperation and administered by Nuffic. This year (2009) the renewed NFP and a new NICHE programme will start.

However it seems that this type of cooperation is ready for change and renewal. For too long we have been doing more or less the same thing in the same way in the same kind of setup, while the world is changing rapidly. The pressure to stop giving project support is big (project support is scattered, often not aligned with national- and donor policies, and most of all not very sustainable when the subsidy stops). Furthermore there is great pressure to open up these subsidy programmes for foreign suppliers. The programmes are already open for commercial suppliers in the Netherlands, who have obtained already a good share.

The challenge for universities and universities of applied science is to transform this threat into a challenge and to develop a new concept during the coming years. In this new concept DC subsidy programmes should not only aim at providing expertise for the duration of the project, but aim at institutions in developing countries to be given opportunities to build up long term relationships with Dutch universities and universities for applied sciences, including exchange of students and staff and research activities. A new vision should be developed with a central role for the relation between development cooperation and the daily practice of education and research (Terpstra 2009). According to Doekle Terpstra activities of MFO's should get a role in this new vision.

A need for Partnerships

Development cooperation in higher education (HE) and research has specific characteristics. One of these is the fact that linking up with Northern HE institutions is for HE institutions in the South essential, because such link may provide them with an entry to the global scientific community.

Another characteristic is that the interest of Northern institutions in cooperation with the South is strongly related with its potential to generate knowledge products (research output, publications, PhDs, new educational programmes, etc). This 'self' interest of Northern institutions (or Dutch institutions) should not be seen as a problem or a threat. Instead, the interest of Northern knowledge institutions should be appreciated as a potential that is to be used to build linkages with the South that are instrumental in knowledge capacity building in Southern institutions.

A third specific characteristic of development cooperation in HE and research is that it has a long term nature. Sustainable results are to be achieved only on the long term. Therefore such cooperation needs long-term commitments of all involved – from the

Southern and Northern partners, and also from funding agencies. Reliability and security are crucial in this respect.

It is necessary that a 'new' perspective or vision on development cooperation in HE is developed, taking into account these characteristics. It is vital that such vision is understood and shared among all stakeholders in HE development cooperation (HE institutions in the South, governments in South and North, donors, HE institutions in the North).

The participants in the PIE seminar "Good Practices, Good Programmes, April 21, 2005, observed that building knowledge capacity (in higher education and research) in (institutions in) the South is more important than ever. It was concluded that sustainable development of Southern institutions of higher education is strongly related to the integration of these institutions in international (global) networks of education and research. Partnerships, based on mutual interest, between institutions in the North and the South, are indispensable to reach that goal. Long term co-operation projects - with shared 'ownership' - are essential in this process and in the realization of a sustained improvement of education and research in the Southern institutions (PIE 2005).

A clear vision on what Capacity Development is needed

In *building* capacity, educating individuals plays an important role, but the overall aim is strengthening of organisations and institutions in order to strengthen an entire society. Capacity building aims at a sustainable provision of professional capacity and thus organisational and institutional strengthening of private and public organisations (Molenaar, 2009). Likewise, any new vision on capacity development specifically in higher education needs to depart from a clear perspective on what precise capacity development is aimed for.

In addition, the relation between CD in HE and the overall development process is crucial. Therefore, in the specific case of CD in higher education the relation with research development (or, more general, knowledge development) and the application of knowledge and innovation processes is important.

Also the contextual relation of higher education (e.g. the labor market; for what jobs are you educating) need to be taken into account.

Dutch knowledge institutions are not only consultants

In present Dutch development programs the role assigned to Dutch knowledge institutions is generally perceived as rather instrumental. They are institutions that can offer the courses that are needed by students awarded with an NFP fellowship; or they are selected to offer the support needed to develop at a Southern institution a certain capacity defined in the NICHE program.

Almost all Dutch knowledge institutions presently are developing educational programs and research activities as part of their own globalization agendas. These programs and activities are crucial for the Netherlands, for training our own students and future generations of knowledge workers in all areas of globalization and development. They are crucial to nurture in the Netherlands sufficient critical mass in knowledge in areas that are of global significance. All this constitutes a vast potential. However, generally the feeling is that this potential is not effectively tapped by the present Dutch programs for development cooperation.

In a new vision there should be more synergy between the Dutch efforts in DC in HE and the relevant knowledge that is generated by Dutch knowledge institutions.

Themes for discussion

After defining the kind of capacity in higher education (and probably in knowledge and research), the main question for the discussion should be: What is/are the best way(s) to develop knowledge capacity in Developing Countries?

The discussion then may discern three aspects in the field of education and research:

- knowledge development (research)
- knowledge transfer (education and training)
- knowledge application (and innovation)

Important themes for the discussion are present developments in the area of knowledge, research and Higher Education, such as (in random order):

- **demand explosion for higher education in developing countries;** Current realities in higher education often are quite daunting. There are serious problems in quantitative and qualitative terms. In quantitative terms, almost everywhere in the developing world the need for higher education has exploded in recent decades. But this growth has not been met by an adequate expansion of capacity in terms of student places, let alone in (public) funding. Often the capacity of universities has been expanded but in insufficient numbers. Meanwhile funding often has decreased even in absolute terms. As a result (public) expenditure per student has decreased dramatically, which has negatively affected the quality of education. ‘The overall quality of higher education has declined in much of the developing world as a result of overcrowding and inadequate resources’ (Altbach, 2008)
- **strong increase in knowledge intensity in societies;** Knowledge has become more important to our lives than ever before. The development of our societies is increasingly based on the use of knowledge. This is not only the case for new technologies but also for knowledge in such diverging areas as the health sciences, governance and public administration, economics or the humanities. Indeed the relation between knowledge and development has become so tight, that new developments may be viewed as mainly being ‘pushed’ or ‘driven’ by new

knowledge. Some authors therefore qualify our current society basically as ‘knowledge-driven’ – meaning that knowledge has become the foremost driver of any new development (for instance World Bank, 2002).

- **IT revolution which has several important implications:**

- the increasing accessibility of knowledge everywhere;
In addition to new approaches to innovation and putting knowledge in service of human development, the use of new information and communication technologies (ICT) may help countries to get access to new knowledge much faster than the developed countries ever could. The fact that thanks to modern ICT knowledge can circulate much faster than ever before and can be accessed from anywhere on the globe may well be a turning point in history (Aarts 2009).
- increased possibilities for global networking;
Obviously new ICT developments also facilitate global networking. Probably we are only at the beginning of this development that will soon enable situations in which it will be very common to link up and communicate virtually with persons anywhere on the globe
- the increased possibilities to offer education off-campus; Saint sees, among other things, a new crucial role for university libraries. ‘Libraries will become interactive information resource centers for the university and the surrounding community, providing both traditional and computer-based learning materials. They will merge gradually into electronically linked regional and global knowledge webs’ (Saint, 2003). But this, to become reality, will require on the part of universities in the South, and for their partners and the donors in the North as well, big changes. To start an understanding is needed of the evolution of the role of the library from its classical role to a full partner in the academic enterprise. Indeed the classical library may transform into a state-of-the-art learning resource centre. It may well be that this transformation eventually will transcend the library and will call for a complete revision of the university organization at large.
It is not unlikely that many if not most educational programs, either residential or offered as distant learning, in the near future will consist of a combination of lectures, e-learning coursework, practical skills training and group work, with IT as an indispensable tool throughout. And this will not be a revolution just in educational formats, but will need to be accompanied by a thorough revision of effective ways of teaching. It will require the introduction of state-of-the-art methodologies and new approaches to learning (Aarts 2009).
- A related discussion is about the ownership of knowledge, specifically of knowledge made available through the Web. On the one hand there is the ‘Open Resources’ movement, based on the principle that (all web-based) knowledge should be public and therefore freely accessible; on the other hand there is the reality of patented knowledge, of publishers, copyrighted

- publications and paid access through subscriptions, which is based on the principle of ownership, selling and buying.
 - Etc
- **Globalisation;** It is obvious that globalization influences human development and its future prospects in many ways. What does globalization imply for higher education institutions, in the developing world and elsewhere? And how do higher education institutions react to these many changes? Will higher education institutions because of these changes become better equipped to contribute to the huge development challenges that our global society is facing – or not? Are higher education institutions actually contributing to development? Or does globalization and other pressures lead them to have other and, according to their own agendas, more important concerns? So what is needed to make higher education contribute to solving global development problems (or, as relevant, the local manifestations of such problems)? And, seen from the perspective of current global development problems, how relevant is higher education (Aarts 2009)?
- **Increasing commercialisation of knowledge and education;** There is increasing commercialization of knowledge, of research and its products, and of education. Public agents like the European Commission increase their investments in research as well, be it often on a competitive basis. (Aarts 2009).
- **Increasing competition among big players;** Many authors on international education trends have observed a rather radical change in recent years in the (international) relations between higher education institutions. Some see nothing less than a ‘paradigm shift’ changing the emphasis in the relations between HE institutions from cooperation to competition.² Knight, when discussing international academic projects that ‘have developed as part of development and technical assistance work (and) have been considered as an important contribution to the nation building of a developing country’ writes, for instance, ‘There is a discernable shift from an aid-development approach to international partnerships, and now to an approach focused on trade for commercial purposes. This shift is likely to become more pronounced.’ (Knight, 2006). Many authors see this growing influence of market forces on higher education and the emergence of a ‘free market in higher education services’ as a trend that may push aside (traditional ways of) co-operation that is supposed to be of benefit for the developing world (Aarts 2009).
- **Increased movement of knowledge workers;** Another phenomenon of the emerging global knowledge society to be mentioned is the increasing mobility of

² Van de Wende: ‘The competition for talent is growing. The notion of a ‘knowledge economy’ dates from the sixties. However it has turned into a paradigm on thinking about economic competition. The role of knowledge is at the core of that and that is why higher education and research are so important. This is related to a shift of paradigm in internationalization. It has changed from purely cooperation based to also directed to competition. It is however not ‘or/or’. It is often cooperation to be able to better compete together’ (Van der Wende (2006), translation from the author)

knowledge workers –researchers, scholars, students, experts. The increasing availability and accessibility of knowledge is paralleled by an increasing flow of people, as carriers of knowledge, around the globe. Of course this has its impacts on higher education and research everywhere and certainly in and for the developing world.

Although this offers also opportunities, the mobility of researchers, scholars and students generally means in the first place a huge brain drain for most poor countries (see for instance Teferra 2000, 2003, Mohamedbhai, 2003). The increasing mobility of knowledge workers is lopsided, and the main direction in which scholars move is, not surprisingly, from poorer countries to the North. The overall perception is that in the rich world more is possible in scientific research and in higher education, salaries are substantially higher and generally pastures are greener. Current figures suggest there are more African researchers working outside than on the African continent³ (Aarts 2009).

- **More international student recruitment and international PhD's;**
The combination of an increasing internationalization and commercialization of higher education leads to more international student recruitment and international PhD's. This trend is clearly visible in the Netherlands. Until about a decade ago the international recruitment efforts of Dutch universities were neglectable. Presently all universities are engaged in some form of international recruitment of students. Motives behind recruitment policies range from contributing to the internationalization of the campus, filling in places for which no suitable candidates can be found in the Netherlands (for instance certain PhD positions), increasing the student population and thus generating additional income or compensating for an expected loss of students on the home 'market'.
- **Emergence of global networks of researchers/research communities;** In the developing world the emphasis may shift from (attempts to) do (fundamental) research in often rather isolated settings to participation in global knowledge networks. Researchers from the developing world need to learn how to effectively participate in and use such networks. They need to develop the capacity to extract and to critically verify knowledge through such networks. And they will have to 're-invent' how to contextualize and apply that knowledge in often poor and resource-scarce communities and environments in order to produce innovations and applications that are meaningful from the perspective of human development. Partnerships with researchers and knowledge institutions in the North, in Europe, may be instrumental in enabling participation in global knowledge networks. Ideally such partnerships will foster mutual learning in how to develop and apply knowledge in new ways in support of human development (Aarts 2009).
- **The need to 'translate' globally generated knowledge to local contexts;** to develop (the local capacity to make) applications and innovations that are locally relevant. Obviously the developing world needs to create effective mechanisms to put knowledge to use for the benefit of society and to address the many

³ Figures cited by Goolam Mohamedbhai during a presentation at the EAIE conference in Krakow, 2005

problems they face. Some countries may indeed move into that direction, as some Asian and Latin American countries have done since the 1980s and 1990s. But specifically less developed countries are characterized by a very poor knowledge infrastructure. It is difficult to see how such countries in a foreseeable life span can build up a knowledge generating capacity that is to any measure comparable to the knowledge generating capacity of major industrialized countries⁴. Moreover, the gap between the knowledge production and output of Africa, and some other poorer regions elsewhere, and more advanced regions seems, if anything, widening (Aarts 2009).

It will be the challenge for the developing world to create effective mechanisms to tap and download knowledge from all the (virtual) networks that provide access to knowledge anywhere on the globe. The tapped knowledge needs to be translated to the local context (contextualization) before it can be applied and put in service of local development (Saint, 2003)^{5 6}. New innovations and knowledge application may be rather different processes than the ‘laboratory-led R & D’ innovations that have been a dominant driver for economic and technological development so far (Soete, 2009).

- **The shift to the developing world as an important basis for new innovations and new knowledge development (a la Prahalad’s ‘Bottom of the Pyramid’ thinking);**

Soete observes that a fundamental change in the application of knowledge is going on with important implications. Almost every innovation becomes unique with respect to its application. Endogenous innovation processes move centre stage, both in rich and in developing countries. Innovation needs to take place close to the users’ context and actually has to involve users in the innovation process. Soete refers to Prahalad (2004) who sees an enormous potential in the

⁴ The total economic output of the African continent, for instance, is smaller than of a country like Spain, and then South Africa alone is responsible for about half of this figure (IMF, 2008). The IMF calculated the total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the African continent for October 2008 to be 1,647 billion US\$ and for Spain 1,683 billion US\$. For Sub-Saharan Africa alone it was estimated to be 1,311 billion US\$, substantial less than, for instance, the combined GDP of two countries like The Netherlands (909 billion US\$) and Belgium (530 billion US\$). At the same time, Research and Development expenditures in these European countries as a percentage of GDP was *higher* than in all individual Sub-Saharan African countries.

⁵ In William Saint’s words: ‘Most knowledge produced globally is not produced where its application is most needed.’ The challenge is how to transfer knowledge that may have been produced anywhere in the world to places where it can be used in a particular problem-solving context. Because Africa is not presently well equipped to participate in the global knowledge economy, developing the organizational and electronic capacity to identify, access and adapt external knowledge for local problem-solving will produce developmental dividends’ (Saint, 2003)

⁶ In a recent discussion on the topic a striking parallel was made with slum dwellers in a big city in the developing world. The slum dwellers tap from the electricity net, whose wire network above their small huts transport electrical energy from one hub of office buildings to the next compound of luxury apartment blocks. Initially the power is tapped illegally but after a lot of debate and pressure of slum representatives it becomes legal. The slum dwellers tap the electricity, not only for improving their living conditions by having electric power to have light, to cook and to watch TV, but also for all kinds of small scale production, better enabling them to earn them a living in the big city community.

developing world for new innovations and products that will be developed, produced, sold and used mainly by poor communities at ‘the bottom of the pyramid’. Because of the sheer magnitude of the world’s poor communities and the urgency of the many problems they face, a strong expansion of research capacity in and for the developing world may be expected, if not a shift of global innovation capacity ‘Southward’. Because this is where the future action to a large extent will be. Thus endogenous innovation capacity in the developing world can contribute directly to development *and* to knowledge development in general (Aarts 2009).

- **The need for other approaches (methodologies) in higher education (see for instance the ‘Catch Up’ report from the World Bank)** Students need not any longer to learn to work *from* a (more or less static) knowledge base, but how to work *with* knowledge that they independently can collect and interpret. Students thus need to be trained how to process knowledge independently. As future knowledge workers they will need to work mainly on their own initiative. In the global knowledge society they need to behave as ‘self-directed learners’. In the complex reality of the global economy there are no instructions and there is little routine, often even the issues and problems are not so clear. So students also need to learn how to identify issues and problems that are relevant and meaningful in their area of knowledge and expertise. They must learn how to analyze these issues – and to identify what knowledge they need for understanding the problem at stake. They need to learn how to find that knowledge. And they need to know how to validate the information they find: how to discern scientifically based knowledge from opinions and ideas – another increasing complex problem - especially on the web. And, last but not least, they need to be able to contextualize the knowledge and apply it to the issue or problem to be solved.⁷ This all is far from current realities in higher education in most parts of the (developing) world. In short, quite another higher education is needed. The urgency of this is increasingly recognized and confirmed by policy papers such as, for instance, the most recent publication by the World Bank on tertiary education in Sub Saharan Africa (World Bank, 2008)⁸

⁷ In an adaptation from a paper of Patrinos (2002), a brochure of Maastricht University’s Centre for International Cooperation in Academic Development Mundo claims: ‘The emergency of the global knowledge based society implies that we have to move from:
terminal education TO lifelong learning
knowledge based learning TO application of knowledge
discipline based knowledge TO integrated (multi disciplinary) knowledge
rote learning TO analysis, synthesis, understanding
learning things just in case they may be useful TO just in time learning
directive based learning TO initiative based learning
individual study TO group (team) work

⁸ ‘Perhaps the most difficult task facing tertiary institutions as they transition to a culture favoring innovation is to change their traditional pedagogy. The changes required are well known: interdisciplinary rather than disciplinary perspectives; flexibility in learning; group work instead of lectures; problem solving rather than memorization of facts; practical learning as a complement to theory; learning

- **The increased tension between higher education as being instrumental for the knowledge economy and for fuelling economic development (instrumentalist view) versus higher education as a way of emancipation and to develop critical mass in society (the classical ‘bildung’ vision on HE)**

The massification of higher education in the industrialized world since the middle of the 20th century has implied an increasing orientation of education on job markets. The current commercialization of higher education however sometimes tends to a purely instrumentalist view on higher education as a producer of manpower for the (global) knowledge economy (see for instance the World Bank’s Catch Up report). This in turn raises voices that advocate a much broader role for higher education, as the cradle of state-of-the-art leadership and intellectual critical mass for any society.

assessment through project work that demonstrates competence instead of multiple choice examinations; communication skills and computer literacy’ (from: ‘Accelerating Catch Up – Tertiary Education for Growth in Sub-Saharan Africa’, Worldbank, 2008)

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