

UNESCO PROGRAMME FOR THE REINFORCEMENT OF INTER-UNIVERSITY CO-OPERATION AND ACADEMIC MOBILITY THROUGH TWINNING ARRANGEMENTS

(UNITWIN)

I. Background

The 25th Session of the General Conference of Unesco (Paris, October-November 1989) requested the Secretariat to launch, during the 1990-1995 period, a concerted international *Plan of Action to Strengthen Inter-University Co-operation and Academic Mobility*, with particular emphasis on support for higher education in developing countries (MP 1.2, 25C/4). Assistance in its implementation will be sought from the universities themselves, from United Nations agencies, from intergovernmental and non-governmental funding agencies, and from the economic sector. A campaign will be launched for greater international mobility in higher education and increased funding for fellowships and grants.

The acronym chosen for this programme, UNITWIN (University Twinning), is intended to emphasize its key feature, that is increased solidarity through twinning and other linking arrangements - among universities throughout the world. More specifically, UNITWIN is aimed at making full use of North-South inter-university co-operation and of international development aid in order to set in motion a process leading to strong, durable links between higher education and scientific institutions, including among those situated in developing countries, i.e. the South-South dimension of inter-university co-operation.

II. Goals and Objectives

The main goals of UNITWIN are:

- to give *fresh impetus to twinning and other linking arrangements* between higher education institu-

tions in the industrialized and developing countries and to help develop criteria and standards for these arrangements;

- to help reinforce *existing* subregional, regional and interregional co-operation networks of higher education and research institutions, and to establish *new networks* whenever there is a perceived need for them;

- to develop *centres for specialized studies and advanced research* by agreements among institutions in the developing countries, and with international support. These centres, meant to bridge training and research needs across national frontiers, will have a system of *Unesco chairs* as their nucleus and will work through networks of twinned universities.

The three major challenges for humanity on the threshold of the 21st Century identified in Unesco's Third Medium-Term Plan, namely, peace, development and the protection of the environment will provide the broad frame of action for UNITWIN. The project, however, will be flexible as to the nature and content of co-operation. It is, ultimately, for the universities themselves to identify the specific areas of joint action, in keeping with their needs and requirements, as well as with the needs for development of the communities, nations and sub-regions in which they function.

III. Challenges and Needs

The higher education system is crucial to any development programme. Higher education institutions play a key role in the generation, transfer

and application of knowledge; in training professional, technical and managerial staff; in forging cultural identity and fostering democratic processes. The developing countries in particular cannot hope to master and apply the latest advances, let alone contribute significantly to intellectual and scientific progress without institutions of higher learning and research which meet the highest standards. It is only through the development of local skills and competence that they can reduce the gap separating them from the industrialized countries and thus reduce their dependence on continued technical assistance.

Problems of formidable scale confront higher education institutions everywhere at present. These problems have assumed dramatic proportion in the case of the developing countries. Increasing demands on the system have not resulted in corresponding increases in resources. On the contrary, there have been cuts, under pressure for saving on public spending. In many institutions existing resources and facilities have been stretched to breaking points. The difficulties facing higher education in the developing countries call in the first place for a reassessment of the situation and action by the states themselves. Facing financial, social and political problems, weighed under by foreign debts, they will not find it easy to maintain current spending levels, much less allocate additional resources towards higher education. International assistance for maintaining and enhancing quality in management teaching, training and research will be increasingly vital, particularly when the necessary inputs require foreign currency. It has been pointed out that, considerable assistance was granted to the newly established states, immediately after gaining their independence, to develop their higher education systems. The 1970s and the 1980s seem to have witnessed a decrease in such assistance. A new convergence of thinking in the international community is emerging at present which recognizes the centrality of "human development" as emphasized in a recent report by UNDP. Within that context, the need for reinforced international assistance to the developing countries in their efforts to enhance their capabilities for high-level training and research has once again been brought to the full attention of the world community.

The advantages of using inter-university co-operation in channelling and delivering international assistance for higher education development are self-evident:

- Universality of knowledge and the commonality of shared values concerning the pursuit of knowledge make higher education fundamentally international in nature;

- In the search of solutions to unsolved problems, academics and scholars who seek the advancement of science and of knowledge, their institutions and their nations, all stand to gain, irrespective of where their institutions are located, and in such a context assistance can be a preamble to true partnership and co-operation;

- Co-operation programmes which are channelled through universities can more easily reach the grass-roots level by involving individual scholars, departments, faculties and institutions and thus creating conditions for international assistance to reach that level where it is most badly needed, to allow for needs and resources to be better identified and better matched.

UNITWIN intends to respond to a need to make fuller use of the potential offered by inter-university co-operation, to further expand the international dimension of higher education, and to give a clear direction to such co-operation: supporting higher education in those regions and countries of the world where institutions are in great need of assistance. The possibility of sharing, comparing and learning from mutual experience through a global project such as UNITWIN will certainly prove to be a factor in enhancing the effectiveness of individual programmes.

Unesco, in launching UNITWIN, intends to act as a catalyst to bring the idea of inter-university partnership to the forefront of public awareness and to attract widely-based funding.

IV. Key Features

Aimed as it is at reinforcing inter-university co-operation, the UNITWIN project covers a broad range of activities, reflecting the major functions of higher education: teaching, training, research and service to the community. Careful staging and scheduling of activities must be achieved. This is all the more important in view of the fact that the Plan of Action deals with areas where much is being done already: Unesco's contribution must be a complement, a practical contribution to enhance what exists and fill in gaps. Unesco's endeavour should therefore be directed towards the identification of

areas where reinforcement of action is necessary and to concentrate activities so as to meet these needs in the first place. Whenever programmes are already in place, launched by other bodies and organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, duplication will be avoided. UNITWIN should be flexible enough to secure mutual co-ordination with, and support of, such programmes. Key components of UNITWIN are outlined below.

A. Information gathering, analysis and research on inter-university cooperation.

(i) Information will be gathered on existing inter-university co-operation projects in order to establish a compendium of existing bilateral, multi-lateral and networking schemes, and to analyze what the main needs are and what gaps UNITWIN could help to fill. The information gathered should form the core of a *data base* on agreements, programmes and networks in this field. The Unesco publications "Study Abroad" and "World Guide to Higher Education" will serve as a main vehicle for disseminating such information.

(ii) Studies on unmet needs of universities which could be covered by co-operation arrangements will complement the compendium. It is obviously not a potential function of UNITWIN to correct any imbalances in the financial situation of universities or to address basic structural or management problems. However, a careful look at a selected number of universities and a sample of typical bottlenecks in research, development, management, infrastructure development, should reveal a number of areas where inter-university co-operation could be cost-effective and is not yet playing its full role.

(iii) Research on problems and promises of academic mobility is an on-going activity of Unesco but will, within the UNITWIN project, be targeted to meet the specific needs generated by it. Academic mobility is an agreed-upon necessity and a positive factor in university development at all levels. It has another face, which is brain drain. Research on the two sides of this question: how to encourage the positive aspects of mobility without contributing to brain drain, will be an important feature of the information gathering component of UNITWIN.

(iv) Training of higher education administrators and personnel involved in international co-operation in higher education.

B. Improvement of advanced postgraduate studies and high-level research

UNITWIN will concentrate on advanced post-graduate studies. This choice is motivated by the fact that it is at this level that international links are most needed and the gap between systems and institutions in the industrially developed and the developing countries is wider. The promotion of research in areas of major pertinence for development is a natural corollary of that goal. Activities under this component will comprise:

(i) Support for establishing new bilateral and multilateral co-operation agreements between institutions of higher education in both developing and developed countries.

(ii) Support for reinforcing existing sub-regional, regional and inter-regional networks and for establishing new ones, to encourage joint teaching, training and research projects. Although networks will operate mainly within particular scientific disciplines, interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary networks will also be encouraged.

Agreements between institutions and networks are not mutually exclusive: they are interdependent and simultaneous stages of the same process. In fact, more often than not, it is the multilateral approach that serves bilateral agreements best. Sound functional twinning agreements in their turn can be the foundation-stones of durable, self-sustainable co-operation networks in higher education.

(iii) A system of *international chairs* (Unesco chairs, or chairs established by Unesco in conjunction with other institutions, associations, organizations or funding agencies), whose holders will be outstanding specialists in different fields.

Unesco chairs, which must be essentially financed directly or indirectly by the host institutions, will be either newly-created at the request of individual governments or institutions, or will result from the conversion of a vacant chair. Unesco will act as an instigator and a catalyst, but the on-going responsibility will lie with the host institution or authority, with support from various bilateral and multilateral sources such as industry, foundations or funding agencies.

The aims of the chairs will be to develop international programmes geared towards reinforcing teaching and research capacity at higher education institutions in developing countries in a selected

field. The international dimension of their programmes is to be assured through: (1) associating researchers of prestige, who will be willing to spend periods (sabbaticals or retirement for example) at the host institution; (2) linking to the chair a number of international fellowships (from the Unesco Fellowship Bank, or from grants offered through other related programmes) for applicants coming from the developing countries; and (3) open, international recruitment for holders of the chairs. Each host institution will have to make available some grants or fellowships linked to the chair.

The response to this initiative of Unesco has been very encouraging. Several chairs have already been created, agreements have been signed with a number of universities for establishing new ones, and there are numerous requests for information concerning the chairs. Unesco will prepare guidelines for specifying the conditions under which the chairs will be established, the obligations assumed by Unesco, by the hosting institution and by any other partner involved as well as the way they are to carry out their activity.

(iv) The development of *centres of excellence* in particular fields of advanced studies and research, for the training of highly qualified personnel at the national and subregional levels. Transnationality of the programmes will be a key feature of the programme of Unesco chairs. There will be close co-operation with the United Nations University both in selection and development of Unesco chairs and in the work to develop centres of excellence.

Establishment of the Unesco chairs and the centres of excellence are undoubtedly expensive activities. In addition to the funds required for the launching of joint research projects, for the mobility of teachers, postgraduate students and researchers, and the functioning of Unesco chairs, there must be provision for research equipment and materials. Long-term funding will be carefully planned, to ensure that the activities have the necessary impact and durability. Funds will, therefore, necessarily, come from a wide range of sources, including UN agencies, the World Bank, other development agencies and foundations, and the economic sector. Co-ordination with related programmes launched by other governmental and non-governmental organizations is essential, in order to pool resources, to avoid duplication and to reinforce impact.

C. Support to university and scientific libraries in the developing countries

Shortage of books, periodicals, teaching/learning materials, and more generally lack of access to scientific information is a major problem for most higher education institutions in the developing countries. Libraries and information services generally are crucial to the excellence of higher education. High costs of all printed materials and sometimes even higher costs of mailing when they come from abroad (particularly of scientific periodicals), and increased use of new information technologies requiring hard currency for purchase, make this a particularly complicated problem to solve. UNITWIN will have an important component designed to help alleviate the situation. The potential of UNITWIN resides in bringing the problem to a manageable size by involving direct co-operation between individual institutions, departments and university libraries, where needs are more easily assessed and matched by offers for support. The principle underlying this component of UNITWIN is that whenever projects to improve postgraduate studies and high-level research (described under B, above) are put in place, proper provisions for the exchange and donation of books, periodical subscriptions, documents, access to data bases, etc. will be included. The strategies adopted will be flexible and evolve in function of the actual needs of institutions, of their infrastructures, availability of adequate technological equipment, etc.

Thus, one of the objectives of this component of UNITWIN - namely to secure that in the first instance the major universities in each of the developing countries are endowed with the most important scientific journals and scholarly publications - can be achieved better through specialized, scientific networks and through twinning arrangements among higher education institutions and their libraries. On the other hand, computer access to scientific literature and to data bases, the use of optical (CD ROM) discs for storing and dissemination of texts and information, will require larger scale projects but will not be neglected. However, the ultimate objective of UNITWIN with regard to this component is to help develop the capacity of institutions in the developing countries to produce indigenous books and teaching materials, and to have permanent access to scientific data bases.

This part of the project will be carried out through a series of interrelated activities described here.

(i) Unesco in close co-operation with the International Council for Scientific Unions (ICSU) and with other governmental and non-governmental organizations, especially the IAU and the regional and subregional associations of universities will carry out a scheme to provide access of developing countries to scientific literature. This is an independent endeavour which comes within the umbrella project of UNITWIN. A meeting of experts, to be convened by ICSU Press, with the support of the General Information Programme of Unesco, will finalize the programme early in 1981 and in particular to establish organic links with UNITWIN.

(ii) Systematic information will be gathered on both needs and available offers for support in the form of books, journals, equipment and other facilities, as a necessary stage for matching the two. The study will be undertaken in close co-operation with NGOs of higher education at the international, regional and subregional levels. Particular attention will be paid to make use of work already done, or envisaged to be done, in this area by other organizations and bodies.

(iii) Special provisions will be made to secure access by universities in the developing countries to the major scientific journals and other periodicals, either through subscription at reduced rates, or through document supply services upon request.

(iv) Whenever possible, large-scale projects, launched or supported by Unesco, such as the Library of Alexandria project, will include assistance to scientific and university libraries in the particular regions or subregions covered by them.

(v) Special attention will be paid to promoting capabilities for indigenous production of books and other scholarly publications, in the developing countries themselves. Provisions for consultants and experts, for technical equipment and for training of technical and editorial staff will be made.

D. Co-operation and assistance in the field of distance higher education

Higher-level distance education is in full evolution and expansion. It offers new programmes, caters for new clienteles and employs a range of new

technologies, with significant results in improving teaching and learning. Furthermore, the diversity and versatility of higher level distance education gives it a pivotal role in societal development and progress in both industrialized and developing countries. It is in developing countries where higher level distance education, with the potential for lower unit costs than traditional higher education, can contribute the most significantly to the solution of educational problems. That this innovative system of education has already proved its worth and occupies an important place in regional and international co-operation, is demonstrated by the existence of active consortia such as the Asian Association of Open Universities and the European Consortium of Distance Universities, or large-scale projects such as the Commonwealth of Learning, launched by the Commonwealth Secretariat.

Within UNITWIN the following types of activities will be carried out:

(i) Bibliographic and information data bases already created with the support of Unesco will be expanded and made more widely available to users worldwide.

(ii) Regional and sub-regional training courses will be established for higher distance education trainers and course designers.

(iii) A co-ordinated, worldwide research programme will identify, analyze and evaluate key distance education issues. These include major obstacles for distance learners, the relationship with distance higher education with the rest of the system, including the accreditation of courses and diplomas, and the link with the labour market.

(iv) Selected pilot projects will test materials and methods in context.

(v) The LOCSYST Project, currently prepared by Unesco will offer a new dimension to this component of UNITWIN, through the use of low-cost satellite communication.

E. Higher education management

Improving planning, management and evaluation of higher education is crucial for the quality of higher education in the developing countries. In response to these needs, Unesco has prepared a Concreted Plan of Action for Research and Training on Planning, Management and Financing of Higher

Education. The Plan involves various units at Headquarters (Division of Higher Education and Research, Division for Cooperation with African Member States, Division of Educational Policies and Management), the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP), as well as the regional centres for higher education (European Centre for

Higher Education (CEPES), Regional Centre for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (CRESALC) and the higher education units of the Regional Office for Education in Africa (BREDA), the Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (PROAP) and the Regional Office for Education in the Arab States UNDBAS.

REUNION INTERNACIONAL "REFLEXION SOBRE LOS ROLES DE LA EDUCACION SUPERIOR A NIVEL MUNDIAL" EL CASO DE AMERICA LATINA Y EL CARIBF FUTURO Y ESCENARIOS DESEABLES (CARACAS, 2-3 DE MAYO, 1991)

Uno de los Programas prioritarios que la UNESCO está desarrollando en los dos primeros años de la presente década, está orientado al tema "Reflexión sobre los Roles de la Educación Superior a Nivel Mundial".

Los principales objetivos de este programa son:

- Contribuir al establecimiento de relaciones más estrechas entre la educación superior y la sociedad (Sector Productivo, Ciencia y Tecnología, Estado y Sociedad Civil).
- Contribuir a alcanzar los objetivos de calidad, eficiencia y pertinencia de los sistemas de educación superior, ante la emergencia de nuevas modalidades de gestión del conocimiento a nivel global.
- Contribuir al desarrollo de la dimensión internacional de la educación superior, tomando en cuenta los desafíos planteados por la globalización creciente del conocimiento.

En el desarrollo de este Programa están involucradas todas las oficinas regionales de educación superior de la UNESCO, así como también: la Universidad de Naciones Unidas, las ONG especializadas en la educación superior, y organismos internacionales como la OCDE, el Consejo Europeo, el Banco Mundial, entre otros.

Asimismo, se contará con la participación de cada una de las regiones, de representantes de instituciones de Ciencia y Tecnología, de organizaciones de empresarios, de grupos de consultoría, entre otros.

Los objetivos de la Reunión, para el caso de América Latina y el Caribe son:

1. Examinar los aspectos fundamentales que contribuyen a configurar el Futuro de América Latina e identificar en ese contexto los escenarios deseables para la educación superior. (Reflexión Prospectiva para la década de los noventa y comienzo del próximo siglo).

2. Reflexionar sobre los nuevos roles de la educación superior en la región y definir políticas y estrategias de acción que faciliten las respuestas que estas instituciones deben ofrecer en el futuro.

3. Diseñar propuestas y sugerir alternativas y estrategias viables en las áreas identificadas como prioritarias, para que las instituciones de educación superior respondan a los grandes desafíos de la región.

4. Identificar formas y mecanismos para fortalecer la cooperación regional e internacional en la educación superior de la región.