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PIE Workshop May 2005: experiences with Capacity Development

Project: Strengthening MUSES, the School of Environmental Studies, Moi University, Eldoret Kenya

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1 Brief history

1985: Moi University in Eldoret, Kenya,

Intention:

- to become a university for rural development,
- practically oriented,
- and assisting technological and social change

1988: post-graduate School of Environmental Studies MUSES

- to assist with better environmental management in Kenya

1990: dean of the School, Prof. Charles Okidi, requested the University of Amsterdam to strengthen the School, based on a long-term development plan that had just been approved by Senate.

1990-1994 First Memorandum of Understanding UvA-MUSES

1991-94: support from DGIS (Programma Samenwerkingsverbanden, Programme for Inter-institutional co-operation); budget of ca 3.5 million guilders;

Intention: phase I of 4 phases, for 15 years.

1994: DGIS stopped PSV; start MHO programme, managed by NUFFIC

Moi University adopted as part of MHO

support for:

- School of Environmental Studies
- Faculty of Technology (with a connection with Delft),
- Faculty of Health Sciences (with Maastricht),
- Faculty of Agriculture (with Wageningen and Larenstein),
- Department of Tourism (with Wageningen), a
- and the Central Services (with Delft and Amsterdam).

1994-2004: 2 MHO phases for MUSES, with an additional budget of 6 million Dutch guilders.

1995-1999 and 2000-2004 renewal of UvA-MUSES Memoranda of Understanding

2001: Kenya no longer priority country for Dutch development assistance

2002: MHO programme to be finalised, taken over by NPT; Kenya not selected as priority country

2003: Kenya selected again as priority country for Dutch development assistance,
but not in NPT

2004: end of DGIS support for MUSES; UvA pledges continued support

2: Major goals for MUSES:

- School of Environmental Studies to become the leading scientific centre for environmental studies in Kenya,
- to train environmentalists at Masters and PhD level, with an integrated environmental knowledge, and eight possible specialisations
- to have a profound impact on environmental policy and advocacy in the country.

3: Major goals for the University of Amsterdam:

- a way to recruit PhD candidates,
- to acquire and implement joint research projects,
- to produce joint publications,
- to have a fieldwork training ground for Amsterdam-based bachelor's, master's and PhD students.
- To fund extra staff who got a chance to get (additional) long-term research and training experience in Africa.
- To strengthen ties with other Dutch institutions

4: Project elements:

- staff development (eleven PhDs in the MHO programme, and an additional five outside the programme);
- to start a PhD programme at the School itself (of which MHO funded four students, who all graduated; two more were acquired with other Dutch means; and others with German, and Kenyan means);
- to support the existing M.Phil programme, with specific course modules (e.g. GIS, EIA), with vehicles and funds for field trips, and with specific recruitment of female students, and for students from Kenya's marginal areas; in addition curriculum development was supported;
- to support Environmental Impact Assessment course (for MUSES students, environmental officers, and NGO staff in Kenya, and students from abroad; also more than 100 Dutch students have participated in this three-week intensive course);
- to support the staff with five long-term experts from the Netherlands (four with MHO funds, one with DGIS 'suppletion funds');
- to build up laboratories (a computer lab, GIS lab, biochemical lab, biological lab, physical lab, incl. a meteorological lab, and a planning studio);
- to build up three field stations, and to organise area-specific research and outreach activities;
- to build up an extensive environmental information and documentation centre, the best one in East Africa;
- to support environmental research (joint acquisition of research funds) and publications (e.g. by organising student, staff and alumni workshops; and by starting the African Environmental Review journal);
- to support collaboration with other related research institutions in Kenya, and abroad, e.g. a major waste management project (funded by the European Union), a tourism and environment project (funded by the Canadian IDRC), and the Lake Victoria Environmental Management Project (funded by GEF).

5: Results:

- MUSES has become the leading environmental research institution in Kenya, if not Eastern Africa as a whole.
- It has produced a few hundred alumni (MPhil, and now also ever more DPhil), who almost all got environment-related jobs in Kenya, in academic positions, in education, in government departments, with NGOs and with private companies.
- A lot of the scientific work of staff and students has been published,
- Specific outreach activities (of which the EIA course, and activities around the two field stations are most successful) also bring together academics, and a variety of environmental practitioners.
- The School's information and documentation centre has become the leading institution for relevant environmental work.
- Almost all projects that were started to support specific PhD and MPhil recruits resulted in graduations, both in the Netherlands, and in Eldoret.
- Twenty relevant PhD degrees, supported by Dutch funds
- In addition, the attention for 'forgotten' categories (female MPhil students, MPhil and DPhil/PhD students from Kenya's drylands) resulted in a more balanced output of scholarly work on Kenya's environmental problems, and redressed some of the recruitment biases.
- When the project ended, the School had an extensive staff (currently there are 18 academics, six junior research fellows in training, and 20 non-academic staff positions);
- All laboratories were functioning (although some had taken a long time to get really started)
- And a host of research, training, and outreach activities were going on.

6: Problems

- Kenya's economic and political crisis throughout the period
- Most PhDs did not stay at the School
- Forced bonding worked counterproductive
- Investment in long-term personal contacts did not have enough benefits
- Economic differences between Dutch-funded staff and local staff
- Type of support most wanted by MUSES often not possible because of donor rules: ideas about 'demand-driven approaches undermined by 'rules of the game', and paternalistic attitudes of some donor representatives
- School's research programme in fact dictated by chances of getting external funding, and hence by donors
- Changing financial reality in Kenya's higher education undermined philosophy behind MUSES
- Fluidity of funding arrangements
- Fluidity of staff and leadership positions
- Major problem for long-term research and supervision arrangements.

7: Lessons learned = statements for discussion

- 1 Successful ‘capacity building’ of a ‘southern’ university department can only be sustainable if the mission and programme of activities are formulated by themselves, independent of donors, and if the supporting initiatives are really long-term, with considerable ‘volume’ (funds, numbers of trainees), and with considerable emphasis on quality, and hence competitiveness.
- 2 ‘Long-term’ support for capacity building means fifteen years at least. Donors are too unreliable for long-term stable funding conditions. But the instability of university staff (in ‘north’ and ‘south’) is also problematic. A successful long-term collaboration of a ‘northern’ and a ‘southern’ university or department at least means long-term commitment by the leadership of (at least two) university departments (e.g. with regularly updated memoranda of understanding
- 3 Collaboration between a ‘northern’ and a ‘southern’ university or department should be lucrative for both parties, and should preferably involve a variety of joint activities: staff exchange, joint teaching, joint supervision, and joint research and dissemination.
- 4 In the collaboration between a ‘northern’ and a ‘southern’ university department emphasis is needed on networking with other relevant parties, both in the ‘north’ and in the ‘south’ (other university departments and research and training institutes, policymakers, NGOs, the corporate sector, embassy staff) and avoiding ‘closed shops’. Putting the leadership of collaborative projects and programmes in the hands of central university administrations (or their ‘foreign offices’) leads to unproductive closed-shop behaviour, following ‘our-university-first’ instincts.
- 5 Any attempt to counter ‘brain drain’ by legal-administrative measures is futile, and even counterproductive. Instead of expecting that all trained members of staff stay put, it is more realistic to create a network of continued collaboration, with the intention to involve all staff and student alumni, even if they have gone abroad or to the private sector. To counter (the effects of) brain drain it is probably more effective to support joint research and publication projects, in which current and past staff and (doctoral and Master’s) students participate.
- 6 Staff exchange should be balanced. Collaboration on more equal terms means that leading scientists in ‘southern’ institutions should get part-time (professorial) positions in ‘northern’ universities, and vice versa. It would help if there would be financial rewards for participation in each other’s PhD supervision upon completion.
- 7 Product quality should be measured both by looking at scientific output criteria (diplomas, publications, citations), and by other criteria (public and policy dissemination, social problem solving).