

N O R R A G N E W S

**NETWORK FOR POLICY RESEARCH REVIEW AND ADVICE ON
EDUCATION AND TRAINING (NORRAG)**

NUMBER 42

June 2009

SPECIAL ISSUE

A SAFARI TOWARDS AID EFFECTIVENESS?

**A CRITICAL LOOK AT THE PARIS DECLARATION &
THE ACCRA AGENDA FOR ACTION
AS PART OF THE NEW AID REFORM ARCHITECTURE**

[Free on website: www.norrag.org from late June 2009]

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Higher Education in Africa: Dead Aid or Dead End?

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More than 30 hours teaching a week for professors with hundreds of students inside and outside the lecture room, very little time and means for research, students' work reflecting the quality problems stemming from the primary and secondary levels of education, exams cancelled or postponed, strong social pressure for unrestricted admission, very limited adequacy between training content and the needs of the labour markets (formal and informal), expanding brain drain... the list of the multifaceted problems which most public universities in French speaking West Africa are faced with could be much longer: are they in a dead end, as aid is dead in that sector of higher education?

The social, scientific and institutional costs of the radical changes in aid to education which have followed the structural adjustment programmes in the 80s and the Jomtien Declaration in the 90s, are being paid to day by these universities. The passing of the pendulum from supporting secondary and higher education to basic/primary education has had a dramatic and devastating effect today, which is not due to the excess of aid but to the inconsistency of some aid policies which work without the necessary knowledge and strategic base. In the case of public universities, the lack of aid, or rather the lack of some sound international cooperation objectives and instruments, is the problem.

Aid has been dead for a long time in many of these universities, a solution that Dambisa Moyo is proposing for all sectors of activity in Africa. This proposal is based, among others, on the argument that aid creates corruption. Corruption exists in universities (and schools) as J. Hallak and M. Poisson have just demonstrated (Corruption in Schools, Corruption in Universities: what to do? IIEP, 2009), but aid has almost totally disappeared from universities! If Africa has received 24 billion US\$ of ODA, in 2008 which creates corruption like in any other business, we can suppose that the 1500 billion US\$ being spent the same year in the world for arms purchases must have created much larger corruption flows. But Africa received in the same year only 7% of the world arms exports. At the same time, one can wonder whether the impact of this "limited" phenomenon on development is not as questionable as the one of aid. This discussion shows that only a comprehensive and interdisciplinary analysis of the aid industry is meaningful.

In the same way, one can question the alternative proposed by Ms Moyo to aid: trade. Trade has started replacing aid in the higher education system of many countries, thanks to the General Agreement on Trade in Services through which some non-African renowned and less renowned universities are investing, franchising, exporting into national higher education 'markets' without much consideration for the internal effects of these actions on the public universities: These are: flight of the teaching staff in favour of private tertiary education organisations with higher salaries, low quality curriculum degrading the overall knowledge capital of the population, high fees keeping less privileged students in the weakening public universities....These

problems are so crucial that the so-called international community starts to realize that something has to be done to rebalance the higher education scene in many African countries.

The next UNESCO World Conference on higher education (July 09, Paris) will talk at length of these issues. More important, IDRC West Africa is launching a research programme on the governance of research in universities, as this element is a key one for a renaissance of higher education (HE). Of a different nature is the US-Africa initiative for HE, which provides some important funding opportunities, but which might be linked with the security issues as defined by the US in that region in connection with the visible Islamisation of the student body in many countries in recent years. What is needed is not only the ‘traditional aid business’ with scholarships and new buildings but also some creative ways to (re)connect African universities with the international research and training agendas, to find some alternative means of funding, to diversify the objectives and structures of HE, to look to academic expatriate networks not only in terms of brain drain but also in terms of intellectual capital accumulation, circulation and remittances...

One can wonder whether these issues were included in the curriculum Ms Moyo followed while she was preparing her PhD in Economics at Oxford University or her MA in public administration at the Kennedy School of Government. One can also wonder whether the concept of aid she uses still reflects the diversification and complexity of the many kinds of cooperative and partnerships agreements which do not boil down to the old fashioned “donor” perspective? One could hypothesize that a negative answer to these questions is counterbalanced by the fact that Ms Moyo might have launched a group of alumni from her Zambian university to raise funds to support some innovative developments of the latter? And that, unless considering higher education as a non politically correct conduit to “eradicate poverty”, the support she provides to some local communities through the “Rooms to read” Foundation aims at preparing a next generation of better students? We don’t have any answer to these questions, but one can hope that the lessons she has surely learned from her work (2001-2008) in the debt capital markets management at the famous Goldman Sachs Bank will lead her to propose some innovative ideas and have a fresh and critical look at the recently contested neo-liberal financial instruments she proposes as well as to the innovations that some components of the academic and “aid” communities are launching to overcome the present crisis situation in universities.

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