Internationalisation of Tertiary Education Importance of Mauritius

Mr Nirmal Kumar Betchoo
Swami Dayanand Institute of Management, Mauritius

ABSTRACT

The breakthrough of information and communication technologies accompanied with a wider access to higher education makes it more practical and logical to think of broadening access to tertiary education. In this context, most nations are willing to develop their domestic environment in order to impart tertiary education within their borders. It might also be imperative for educational institutions through the assistance of government, stakeholders and the educational community to think critically of internationalising tertiary education.

The strategy of making education accessible beyond national borders opens up the way to offering higher level academic and technical education to a wider global community so far disallowed from learning and furthering their education. It is also a process of democratising access to higher level education whereby the development of a critical mass of highly qualified people would substantially contribute to the economic advancement of their respective nations. This paper sheds light onto the internationalisation of education firstly on a regional basis and gradually reaching global audiences willing to further their educational competences.

It considers the democratisation of education firstly through the development of government-to-government partnerships in the Indian Ocean region, the opening of universities through more pronounced collaboration within the Indian Ocean and the development of human and technological competencies to ensure that the internationalisation of tertiary education gets out of the room debate to a wider and more responsive learning environment.

It analyses the challenges and difficulties of tertiary education barred from linguistic, ethnocentric and technical barriers and considers how well partnerships and concrete transfer of competences and skills reasonably contribute to the medium or long-term ambition of governments and educators in the Indian Ocean region to achieving well-integrated regionalisation or internationalisation of tertiary education.
1 INTRODUCTION
In a speech, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan argued:

*The University must become a primary tool for Africa’s development in the new century. Universities can help develop African expertise; they can enhance the analysis of African problems; strengthen domestic institutions; serve as a model environment for the practice of good governance, conflict resolution and respect for human rights, and enable African academics to play an active part in the global community of scholars.*

2 TERTIARY EDUCATION IN THE REGION-A COUNTRY ASSESSMENT
To consider the relevance of tertiary education at the international level, it would be reasonable from a Mauritian perspective to have an overview of tertiary education in the region. The relevance of higher education needs to be emphasised in the Indian Ocean. Higher education has given ample proof of its viability over the centuries and of its ability to change and to induce change and progress in society. (UNESCO World Conference, 2009) There is also the perception that owing to the scope and pace of change, society has become increasingly knowledge-based so that higher learning and research now act as essential components of cultural, socio-economic and environmentally sustainable development of individuals, communities and nations.

The regional scene already sheds light onto the variety of programmes that different institutions provide in the region and which, if grouped, represent quite a unique and interesting tertiary education hub in the Indian Ocean region alone. With a population of 23 million people (NationMaster, 2009) along with a sizeable percentage of younger people (18-30), further education should be harnessed regionally to ensure its internationalisation within the Indian Ocean Rim. Although, the intake remains comparatively low as a result of streaming through academic education and related factors like family background, gender inequalities and income,
there is a possibility of developing tertiary education by bringing about the potential of the different institutions in the region.

For this exercise, the following countries have been listed given their proximity with one another and the similarities and differences that their further educational system highlights.

### 2.1 MAURITIUS

Tertiary education in Mauritius is provided by a wide range of institutions with different objectives. A number of the institutions are overseas with their provisions made available through the distance education mode. Within the public sector, tertiary education revolves around the University of Mauritius (UoM), the University of Technology Mauritius (UTM), the Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE), the Mahatma Gandhi Institute (MGI) and the Mauritius College of the Air (MCA). Two Polytechnics actually under the UTM also operate within the public sector. The Mauritius Institute of Training and Development (MITD) and the Mauritius Institute of Health (MIH) equally dispense tertiary level programmes in selected areas. In addition to the above publicly-funded institutions (PFIs), an estimated 35 private institutions and 50 overseas institutions/bodies are presently delivering tertiary-level programmes, mostly in niche areas like Information Technology, Law, Management, Accountancy and Finance. Most of the programmes are those of overseas institutions. These are being offered by franchise agreements whereby the overseas institutions provide programme materials and/or tutorial support.. The provision of tertiary education extends beyond the local tertiary education institutions given that a significant number of Mauritian students either go overseas or resort exclusively to the open learning mode for pursuing their studies.

### 2.2 MADAGASCAR

Madagascar gained independence in 1960 and the first true university was formally organised by merging the independent faculties of law, letters, and science and technology with the formerly independent medical school. The University of Antananarivo enrolled 1,130 students during its first year. Tertiary enrollment accounts for 2.5% of traditional college-aged students, but is unevenly divided across the country.¹ All faculties are appointed and promoted by the Ministry of Higher Education. The student-to-administrator ratio (6:1) remains high relative to other countries. There are strategies regarding the development of tertiary education in the country namely through the launching of pilot vocational high schools for school year 2009-2010, the
establishment of the First tertiary LMD programmes endorsed by AMAAQ for the 2010 academic year. There is also the expansion of Higher Education Technology Institutes.

2.3 SEYCHELLES
Seychelles does not have a higher education system. The Seychelles Polytechnic, however, is a postsecondary institution, which is largely funded by the Chinese government. The government expenditure on education was estimated at US $ 29.3 million in 1998. Seychelles partners in education include, among others, UNICEF, UNESCO, and African Development Bank.

2.4 COMOROS
Postsecondary education in Comoros is public and limited to a number of programmes in teacher training, agriculture, health sciences, business studies. Enrolment ratios at the primary, secondary, and postsecondary levels are estimated at 64%, 11% and 2%, respectively. Postsecondary education is offered at the Official School (l’Ecole Officielle) based on the French education model. L’Université des Comores is a public institution for cultural and scientific training and it operates on an autonomous basis regarding financial and administrative management. It has the following faculties: School of Medicine, Administration and Commerce (ENAC), Training and Research (ISFR), Teacher training, among others. Enrolment now amounts for more than 3500 students and more than 150 lecturers work at the Université des Comores.

2.5 REUNION
With a student population of 242,000 students, 122,000 go to primary schools, 103,000 enter secondary schools and some 17,000 students enrol for university programmes mainly offered by the Université de la Réunion. The institution offers programmes in Law, Economics, Humanities, Social Sciences and Information technology. The IUFM (Institut universitaire de formation des maîtres) aims at providing teacher training and pedagogical programmes. Other tertiary institutions are: Campus Sud in Tampon, The Institut Universitaire de Technologie (IUT) regarding training in the Information and Communication Technology field, AXIOM, a number of training schools for office administration, ICT and human resources, Formation AMADEUS for prospective students reading for tourism and aviation courses.
3 GENERAL FINDINGS FROM THE COUNTRY ASSESSMENT
The country assessment helps to highlight the situation at the tertiary educational level of the countries in the region. The figure below helps provide a condensed picture of the existing situation with focus on particularities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Existing tertiary education system</th>
<th>General particularities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mauritius</td>
<td>Well developed tertiary system with the potential of attracting foreign institutions and development of an educational hub.</td>
<td>An ambition to develop tertiary education with one graduate per family policy adopted recently.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reunion</td>
<td>Well-established educational system with French medium of teaching and funded by France.</td>
<td>A secluded system of education through French assistance but well developed in environmental sciences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madagascar</td>
<td>Fairly well-established system with good universities but with low-student population.</td>
<td>University having tradition-based reputation of languages, history and social sciences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comoros Island</td>
<td>Poorly structured tertiary system but with a full-fledged autonomous university.</td>
<td>A developing educational system although the country’s economy does not favour tertiary education development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seychelles</td>
<td>Essentially a Post-secondary educational system</td>
<td>An economy that could develop its tertiary education system so far limited to skills learning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: A summary of findings and analysis from Country Assessment regarding tertiary education

4 A SITUATIONAL AUDIT OF TERTIARY EDUCATION IN THE REGION
It is imperative at this point to make an audit of tertiary education available in the Indian Ocean. A SWOT analysis helps in providing a range of variables that would assist in devising strategies for Mauritius to benefit from the internationalisation of tertiary education.

4.1 STRENGTHS
A relatively reasonable number of universities

In relation to UN’s student: university ratio (500000: 1), there is a reasonable number of universities in the Indian Ocean taking into consideration the location of the universities and the concentration of students. In the case of Mauritius, with the growing number of institutions
providing tertiary level courses, there is a much lower student: university ratio than in the neighbouring nations.

A variety of faculties

Universities in the region were limited to few faculties at the beginning with regards to their size and scale of operations. In the Indian Ocean, considering the variety of courses and their relation to the countries’ needs, there are a reasonable number of faculties catering to the diversity of the student population in the tertiary sector.

Qualified staff

Staffs are qualified with more academics reading at the Master’s level and eventually aiming to complete a Doctorate or PhD. Tertiary institutions are also much willing to have their staff trained and prepared to face the current challenges in teaching.

Tailor-made educational programmes

Tertiary educational institutions in the Indian Ocean offer tailor-made programmes for their students. Most of the programmes relate to the needs of today’s working environment and prepare students for the world of work. Some programmes combine both academic education and work placements to blend student knowledge to the work environment while ensuring a smooth transition from education to work.

4.2 WEAKNESSES

Relative isolation of tertiary institutions

Tertiary institutions in the region operate in relative isolation. It is presently difficult to create an association of Universities in the Indian Ocean. This situation explains how institutions operate individually with little room for co-operation.

Disparate funding of the different institutions

Tertiary institutions are already under the threat of having their budgets curtailed due to economical factors. Such funding is perceived as major constraint by academic staff since it does not favour the development strategies of universities in the medium and long-term.

Low level of research
Compared to other areas of the world, sub-Saharan Africa including Indian ocean countries suffer from low level of research due to lack of funding including co-operation from assisting organisations, government and the educational community. Altbach et al, (2009) state that African universities for example, have found it extremely challenging and complex to find their footing on the global higher education stage. They barely register on world institutional rankings and league tables and produce a tiny percentage of the world's research output.

**Little development of distance or online learning**

Small developing states in the Indian Ocean might suffer from a low level of development regarding distance and online while this could be an opportunity exploited by such nations. This comes from a low involvement in distance learning which is still in its infancy in such nations.

**4.3 OPPORTUNITIES**

**Possibility of tapping resources from the region**

To develop tertiary education in the region, it would be important to develop resources from the different education institutions offering tertiary level programmes. Very often, such issues are broadly discussed without the genuine involvement of stakeholders in improving consistently and in a durable manner the intellectual and technical resources in the region.

**Provision of training and learning to students in the region**

The provision of training and learning opportunities must be a reality at the regional level. The percentage of students coming to Mauritius from the region is appallingly low. Mauritius has to deeply consider the opportunities that it can provide with its existing facilities and how it could better meet the needs of regional students in the long-run.

**The opportunity to use bilingual advantage to develop tertiary level programmes**

The advantage of the bilingual educational system of Mauritius favours the accommodation of a larger number of students at the tertiary level from the regional and international environment. Given that English remains the medium of instruction, there is every possibility of running bilingual programmes for students who are generally exposed to French language and the native language of their respective country.

**The opportunity to develop partnerships and create a cultural and educational identity**
There is also the added opportunity to develop partnerships in tertiary education. Apart from exchange programmes between students and academic staff, there should be efforts undertaken to improve partnerships whereby programmes could be jointly offered by the local tertiary institutions and the foreign partners.

4.4 THREATS

Foreign countries/universities taking advantage of tertiary education

The main threat, so far, has been the accommodation of tertiary institutions to Mauritius. This could be an opportunity since such institutions, with their campuses, can attract a potential number of students from abroad. However, there must be the understanding that quality of education cannot be sacrificed by a large number of courses offered with a pecuniary intention.

Increasing costs of operation

Costs of operation will be on the rise in the prevailing economic situation where most countries in the region are not economically well off with the rising threat of poverty. An increase in operational costs will result in increasing costs of tertiary education which is in turn affected by lower level of funding provided by the government. Such a situation could result in lower intakes caused by increasing costs of tertiary education.

Inertia and ethnocentric approach to learning

Another impediment could come from the reluctance of students from the region to move beyond their national borders. This could arise from cultural barriers that may not prompt students to move to other countries, namely those in the region. For instance, the affinity that the neighbouring countries have with France would be more in their favour of undertaking further studies in France and not in Mauritius.

5  TAKING ADVANTAGE OF REGIONAL OPPORTUNITIES TO DEVELOP TERTIARY EDUCATION

It is essential to consider how Mauritius could take advantage of regional opportunities to develop tertiary education. This might be considered daunting given that the educational environments of the countries vary much in terms of linguistic differences and educational systems. Yet, it would be good to assume that, despite such differences, Mauritius could
consider the development of capabilities and competences which are essential for the creation of a suitable platform for tertiary education in the region.

**Figure 2:** The diagram below provides an illustration of the strategies that Mauritius could adopt in the internationalisation of tertiary education

**5.1 THE DEVELOPMENT OF GOVERNMENT-TO-GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIPS**

Government-to-government partnerships have to be sustained and, so far, this has been more limited to co-operation without due importance given to the development of tertiary education. Apparently, all countries in the Indian Ocean region have a fairly good educational system and it is seen that tertiary institutions operate independently with linkages from foreign institutions, apart from those of the Indian Ocean. These collaborations have been broadly sparse and, to some extent, broadly covered under the Université de l’Océan Indien. Here, it would be suggested that authorities in tertiary education should help in forging links and more profound academic ties to find out how tertiary education could be developed in the Indian Ocean. The success of institutions like University of West Indies and the University of Pacific along with institutions in Micronesia testify how collaboration in specific fields through governmental support would be the most welcome alternative to the advancement of tertiary education.
5.2 THE LEVERAGING OF HUMAN AND TECHNOLOGICAL COMPETENCES

The development of tertiary education will depend on the development of human and technological competences. Broadly, certain competences are sorted out like sustainable and green development from Reunion Island, clerical and technical competences from Comoros and the Seychelles, linguistic and artistic competences from Reunion Island and general economic and scientific competences from Mauritius. These ideas are broadly developed from the panoply of universities and higher level institutions providing tertiary education. Apparently, Mauritius will have to find out an opportunity of developing synergy around these differences and wealth of competences and constructively think of developing tertiary level programmes in conjunction with the respective regional universities.

5.3 TRANSFORMING ETHNOCENTRIC AND LINGUISTIC BARRIERS INTO CAPABILITIES

French and English mode of education (Creole for Seychelles) should not be considered as a divide although curricula do vary depending on linguistic affinities. It would be wiser to transform ethnocentric and linguistic barriers into some commonality. Shi (2006) confirms that the encounter with another culture propels individuals to conduct critical inquiry and self-reflection. It posits the potential for learning and for experience that offers an invaluable opportunity to develop self-awareness and intercultural sensitivity, which can fundamentally transform the newcomers. In short, although an exchange with persons from other cultures can cause psychological disturbance, at the same time, it offers a vehicle for personal growth.

From an academic perspective, Tropical Biology or Biosciences could be an advantage whereby Mauritian universities, through their expertise in the agro-industrial sector, could provide useful programmes in partnership with the other nations. In a similar way, ethnology and language would be better developed as comparative linguistic studies between Mauritius and Madagascar. These are just examples but, highlight how barriers would be transformed into collaboration opportunities.

5.4 PARTNERSHIPS AND THE TRANSFER OF COMPETENCES

Mauritius expects to become an educational hub. Although, collaboration is sought from Western nations mainly like institutions in the United Kingdom and Europe, with some opening to Asia through Indian and Singapore, partnerships should be effectively developed. Partnership,
in essence, ensures the joint collaboration of regional universities in research, curriculum and teacher development. Partnership enables visiting lecturers to see what is offer, say, in Mauritius, and how programmes could be developed through such collaboration. Such exchanges have been rare but can evidence that the transfer of competences between Mauritius and the region would certainly improve the status of tertiary education while sustaining excellence in the long-run.

Partnership needs to be sustained to create and develop competences. In the knowledge-based society, universities are expected to collaborate with each other to meet the challenges of a global economy and labour market as well as contribute to the further enhancement of the academic standard. (Tsuruta, 2003)

5.5 TERTIARY LEVEL PROGRAMMES AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL WITH FOCUS ON DIVERSITY

The goal might be to develop pan-Indian ocean tertiary level programmes. Certain fields were mentioned earlier like tropical Biosciences, Linguistic programmes focusing on ethnicity or history. Such programmes are innovative and focus on diversity where they generate a wealth of new knowledge and learning which have not been developed so far. The focus on diversity would help create the pan-Indian Ocean (Indianocéanique) culture and differ from existing programmes in terms of quality, content and research experiences. Such learning would be more fulfilling to regional students. Policy makers and institutional leaders seeking to develop proactive institutional policies with respect to any aspect of institutional diversity should take into account the whole array of such forces if their policies are to be effective. (Reichert, 2009)

5.6 SPONSORSHIP AND ATTRACTIVENESS OF PROGRAMMES

Focus should be devoted to the attractiveness of programmes. Albeit the content of the new and innovative programmes, attractiveness should cover the following:

- Delivery of the learning which includes academic and vocational programmes
- Lodging and campus facilities
- Library and documentation opportunities
- Attractive cost of programmes through subsidisation and scholarships
Networking of regional students through up-to-date technology

-Constant development and re-engineering of educational programmes

5.7 THE DEVELOPMENT OF DISTANCE LEARNING
The development of distance education within the region looks to be a must. At the local level, such development has been initiated and welcomes a broader student population which could not afford such studies. Distance education would bridge the gap for effective tertiary education at the regional level. Mauritius could take advantage of its Information and Communications Technology advancement as an asset and help in the implementation of distance education programmes through virtual classrooms and interactive learning and entail franchising possibilities. The higher education equivalent of licensing production is more usually known as ‘franchising’, in which a university sub-contracts a local provider in another country to offer part or its entire degree programme (Haynes and Wynward, 2002). The development of e-libraries, lately initiated by the TEC, would be an opportunity that would have to be prioritised to develop regional education.

There is also the possibility of supporting education through the development of e-infrastructure. The use of e-Infrastructures could help African research and higher education institutions promote the development of ICT in sectors as public administration, education or health aiming at speeding up the process of developing advanced economies contributing to the social and economical development. (Erina Africa, 2009)

5.8 LIFELONG LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES
Lifelong learning would be the “icing to the cake”. To sustain tertiary education at the regional level, lifelong learning has to be developed. The increased pace of globalisation and technological change, the changing nature of work and the labour market, and the ageing of populations are among the forces emphasising the need for continuing upgrading of work and life skills throughout life (Rojvithee, 2005).

It ensures that students keep studying and coming to the universities and tertiary institutions. It develops also the concept of regional alumni with its enriched diversity of students and scholars from the region. In line with lifelong learning, the furthering of research through advanced
programmes like Doctorates would be further encouraged while ascertaining that Mauritius confidently makes inroads in the development of tertiary education in the region.

6 CONCLUSION

The internationalisation of tertiary education comes at a time where the Mauritian tertiary education sector is going through a critical phase of change where more institutions, local and foreign, are being expected to provide new learning opportunities for an ever-increasing number of students. Government is already pursuing strategies to increase the intake of tertiary level students and develop an educational hub in Mauritius.

In parallel, it would relevant to consider the internationalisation of tertiary education. Too often, this had been limited to the local context through an extension of services provided by universities and tertiary institutions but, rarely, the debate has focused on the regional level.

The Indian Ocean region can boast itself to be a wealth regarding the different cultures living in the different islands. The differences have so far been considered as impediments to the promotion of an “Indianocéanique” culture usually referred to as in terms of cultural and anthropological identity. It would imperative to transform existing differences into capabilities and competences (Prahalad and Hamel, 1999) through the leveraging of resources, human and technical.

The paper has explained how partnerships in the region could entail the development of learning curricula, educational programmes and exchanges at the regional level. Mauritius could find within all such differences, an opportunity to develop tertiary education and make it affordable to potential learners in the region.

The potential is already here with different universities and tertiary education institutions in the region providing structured programmes for the needs of their respective citizens. It could also be an opportunity for Mauritius, with its bilingual advantage, to provide programmes that would bridge the gap between cultural differences among the different countries. Collaborative approaches to the development and enhancement of tertiary education would be a much sought-after initiative.
The future of internationalisation of tertiary education will have to go through the regionalisation stage. Globalisation has already shaped tertiary education. Altbach (2009) points the concept as the reality shaped by an increasingly integrated world economy, new information and communications technology (ICT), the emergence of an international knowledge network, the role of the English language, and other forces beyond the control of academic institutions.

Regionalisation, on the other hand, has been overlooked since institutions from Europe and Asia have shown their intention to establish learning centres in Mauritius and provide courses here. UNESCO-ADEA (2009) in this context, stipulates that there is a need to diversify higher education services and courses to better answer an increasing and varied demand and improve the relevance of the training courses. It encourages nations in the region to adopt, sign and ratify, and then implement the new revised Arusha Convention, in order to stimulate an academic mobility, transcending the regional and linguistic areas within the Continent.

Such initiatives could help to increase and broaden equitable student access, with the appropriate financial support to students from poor and marginalised communities and targeting a greater representation of women across broad fields of study. However, to ensure that Mauritian-based learning can be developed in a concrete way at the tertiary level, the regional market needs to be tapped. The island-nations have their own particularities and weaknesses regarding the development of higher learning but, collaboration, partnerships and the development of competences and capabilities can effectively lead to wider access to tertiary education. This would be an opportunity that Mauritius should not overlook but rather find it as an opportunity to internationalise its tertiary education through regional co-operation.
REFERENCES


“Globalization, a key reality in the 21st century, has already profoundly influenced higher education. We define globalization as the reality shaped by an increasingly integrated world economy, new information and communications technology (ICT), the emergence of an international knowledge network, the role of the English language, and other forces beyond the control of academic institutions. Internationalization is defined as the variety of policies and programs that universities and governments implement to respond to globalization. These typically include sending students to study abroad, setting up a branch campus overseas, or engaging in some type of inter-institutional partnership.”


[9] IDP (2003), Global Student Mobility 2025 Series: Analysis of Global Competition and


[14] Observatory on Borderless Higher Education


[22] Tsuruta Y (2003) Internationalisation of higher education with special reference to Japan, a theoretical consideration , Department of Educational Studies, University of Oxford


🌟🌟🌟🌟🌟