



The Role of Universities in Achieving Global Equity

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'...higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit'
[Article 26, Universal Declaration on Human Rights, 1948]

1 Introduction

1.1 Universities and developing areas

The International Research Network on the Role of Universities in Developing Areas (INRUDA), an independent informal international organisation, was born in 1983 out of concerns that universities were misunderstood and overlooked as agents in international, national and regional development. Tertiary education in general and universities in particular are now more recognised as vital to innovation, productivity and economic growth, skills formation, the generation of knowledge and the capacity to adapt that knowledge to local conditions, build institutions and structures of governance, increase social capital and promote social cohesion [Ramphela 2002: x]. Mass higher education in developed countries and multilateral agency support for tertiary education systems and institutions in developing countries have these common themes.

In the pursuit of equity, including the elimination of extreme poverty, universities are still widely seen by governments, development institutions and across civil society as part of the problem, reflecting and reproducing élites. The lack of serious engagement of higher education institutions and their representative bodies in global equity movements – implementing the millennium development goals, extending access to women across countries and disciplines, deepening practical engagement with regional development – reinforce these impressions. Even when the will is there – as it now is, for example, in the World Bank's support for tertiary education reform in developing countries – the way is not clear:

... there is a perception that the Bank has not been fully responsive to the growing demand by clients for tertiary education interventions and that, especially in the poorest countries, lending for the subsector has not matched the importance of tertiary education systems for economic and social development. The Bank is commonly viewed as supporting only basic education; systematically advocating the reallocation of public expenditures from tertiary to basic education; promoting cost recovery and private sector expansion; and discouraging low-income countries from considering any investment in advanced human capital.' [World Bank 2002: xviii].

In the midst of an explosion of demand for higher education around the world, a scramble to provide capacity and a dramatic extension of modes of delivery, I hope to suggest ways to strengthen the contributions of universities, and their wider communities of practice, to global equity and the elimination of extreme poverty.

2 Universities as global actors

2.1 International scale of higher education

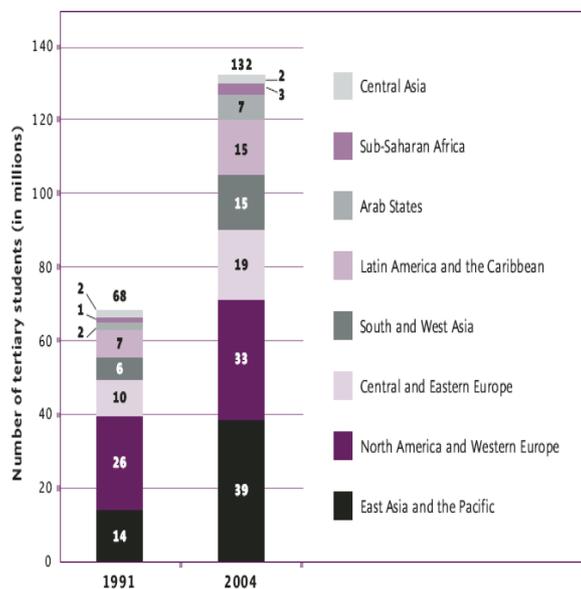
Post-compulsory, post-secondary, tertiary and higher education sectors can be defined with successively diminishing scope. Universities are an important but untidy part of

these sectors because they often also provide vocational education and training, lifelong learning and consultant and commercial services outside higher education as normally defined [See UNESCO 2006b for systematic definitions] and because the powers to grant the title university and accredit institutions vary so widely. So long as we are clear about what we mean each time we can move among the terms.

In the global economy tertiary education is a large, fast growing and under-recognised industry, deeply embedded in, but by no means the driver of an emerging global knowledge community. In 2004 it engaged 8.475m teaching staff and enrolled 132m students (up from 68m in 1991) [UNESCO 2006]. The private higher education sector alone spent over USD350bn a year [Perkinson 2005], but all sectors are growing fast around the world. Moreover the pace of growth is accelerating, with tertiary enrolments rising around 7 percent per annum by comparison with 4 percent early in the 1990s. [UNESCO 2006]. International movements of students are expanding too, but only as fast as the system overall, with 2.455m tertiary students studying in another country in 2004 [UNESCO 2006].

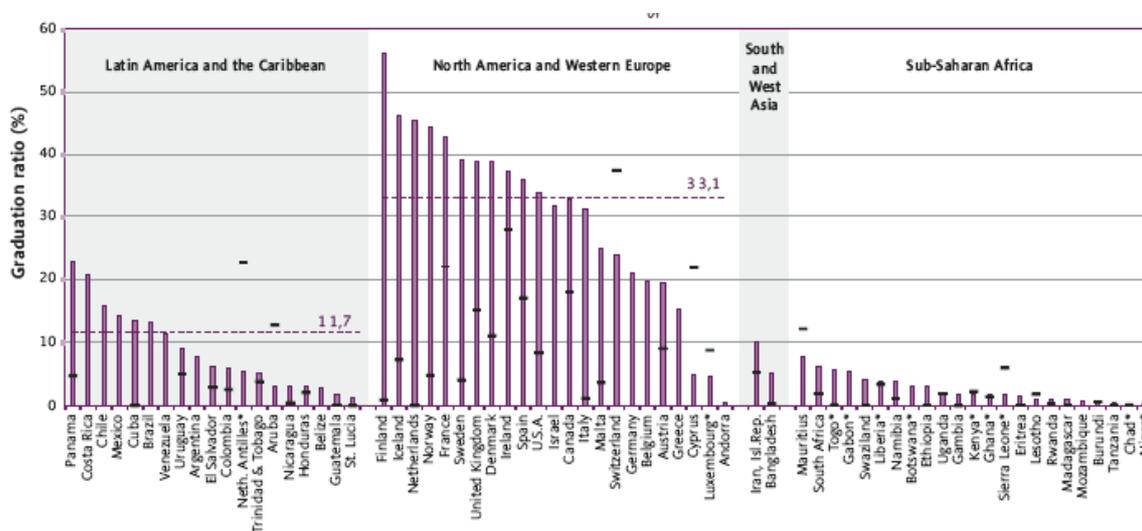
This growth has been very uneven (see figure 1). In some countries there has been spectacular growth in the numbers of new students entering tertiary education, particularly in east Asia, for example with China and Malaysia doubling intakes over the past five years as a result of their policies to build local capacity. The disparities starkly show up the gaps between demand and supply and many countries' economic and institutional inability to offer adequate tertiary education opportunities (see figure 2). In north America and western Europe 69 percent of those of tertiary age were enrolled in tertiary education programs, by contrast with five percent in sub-Saharan Africa and 11 percent in south and west Asia. Sub-Saharan tertiary education has a high rate of growth off this low base, at 7 percent per annum, but because of high population growth the ratio of enrolments to population in the age group is not improving. Arab states have improved from 11 percent in 1991 to 19 percent in 2004, and China from 25 percent to 29 percent just between 2001 and 2004. In central Asia the ratio has actually declined [UNESCO 2006: 20-23]. Overall, among the least developed, less-developed and OECD countries the gaps in tertiary education gross enrolment ratios are getting wider [World Bank 2002: 46]. A large part of the world cannot provide adequate tertiary learning opportunities to their populations, including qualified applicants; in a highly competitive and globalising world with urgent development needs this is an incalculable waste of human potential.

Figure 1: Growth in tertiary students 1994-2004 [source UNESCO 2006]



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics database.

Figure 2: Graduation rates as a proportion of graduation-age population, 2004 [UNESCO 2006: 13]



How many young people graduate from tertiary education?

First-time ISCED 5A and 5B graduates as a percentage of the population at the theoretical graduation age (gross graduation ratio), 2004 or most recent year available

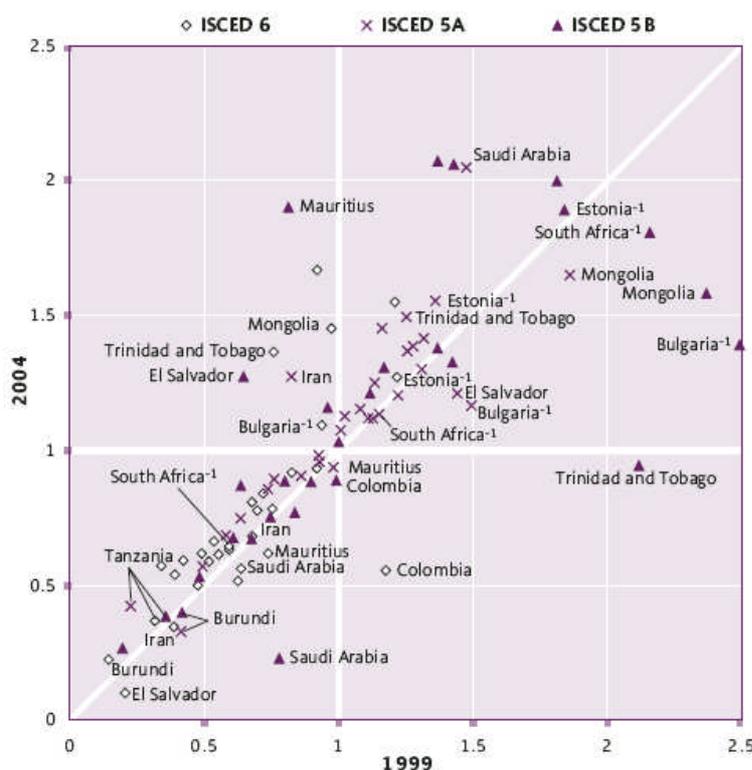
■ ISCED 5A - - - ISCED 5A Regional Average ■ ISCED 5B

This is not to say that all is well within the higher education sector that does exist. One has only to read the annual reports of the UN Commissioner on Human Rights to see in dramatic form that just getting people onto educational seats may retard development without adequate standards, endanger life through unsafe environmental health and security conditions and diminish rights through systematic discrimination. [e.g. see Tomasevski 2004].

In this paper it is hardly necessary to describe the main trends and issues in higher education and among universities around the world, the movement in many systems from elite to mass education, problems with quality assurance arising from this growth, irrelevance of many programs to economic and social needs, the impact of ICT and the growth of distributed learning, poor governance and management of systems and institutions – some jurisdictions are barely able to keep campuses open and cannot pay academics and teachers – and crippling resource constraints (encouraging private, cross-border and online provision, to which we will return).

Universities address many aspects of inequality, among which gender participation is critical, key to the Millennium Development Goals and international human rights conventions. Between 1999 and 2004 a gender parity index defined by UNESCO improved at all tertiary levels, such that the ratio improved to the benefit of women in lower academic and higher levels for over 77 percent on countries and in lower professional levels for 56 percent of the countries. Parity for any one level, i.e., the value of one, was met only by Mexico, Libyan Arab Jamahiria, Australia and New Zealand. The overall international picture is shown in figure 3.

Figure 3: Gender parity index for the gross enrolment ratio by tertiary program 1999 and 2004 [UNESCO 2006: 29]



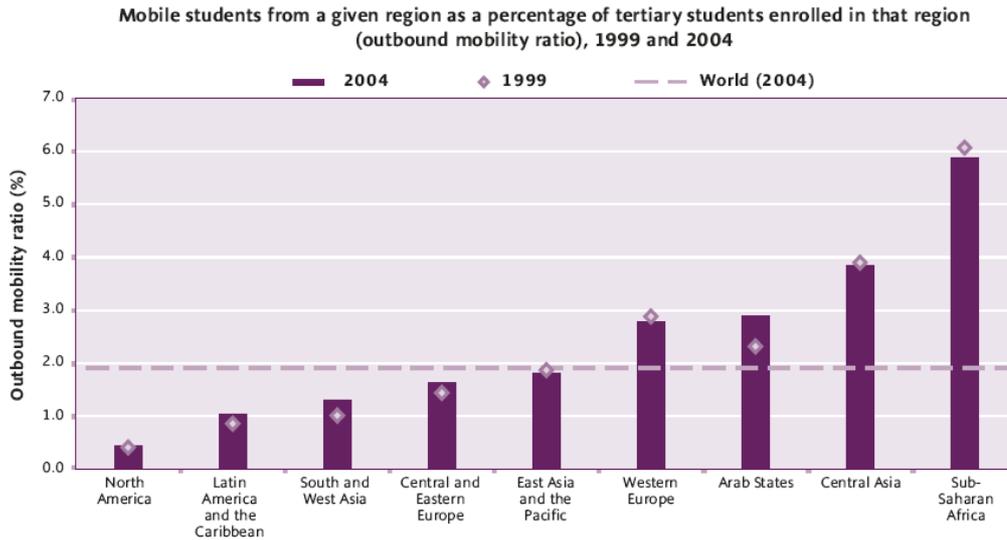
Notes: ⁻¹ Data refer to 2003.
 This figure includes only those countries where the GER was less than 40% in ISCED 5A.
 Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics database, 2006.

2.2 Globalisation of higher education

From their beginnings long ago universities have been cosmopolitan forces, hosting mobile intellectuals and extending learning across boundaries, giving rise to conceptions of social justice that transcend the civic [O'Neill 2000]. In the present era the international character of scholarship and the growth of cross-border provision is rising exponentially and starting to transform patterns of higher education, training and research. A global knowledge economy is emerging, changing the content of education, training and research programs as well as their modes of provision, creating new trade routes in educational services through commercial presence (branch campuses, franchised programs, etc) cross border supply and the movement of academics and others travelling to clients to provide tertiary education services. [See Knight 2002 for a good taxonomy of transborder international education].

In 2004 at least 2.5m tertiary students enrolled outside their home country, an increase of 41 percent from 1.75m in 1999, but only around the rate of increase of the global number of tertiary students overall (see figure 4). However behind outbound mobility the other categories of transborder education are growing fast).

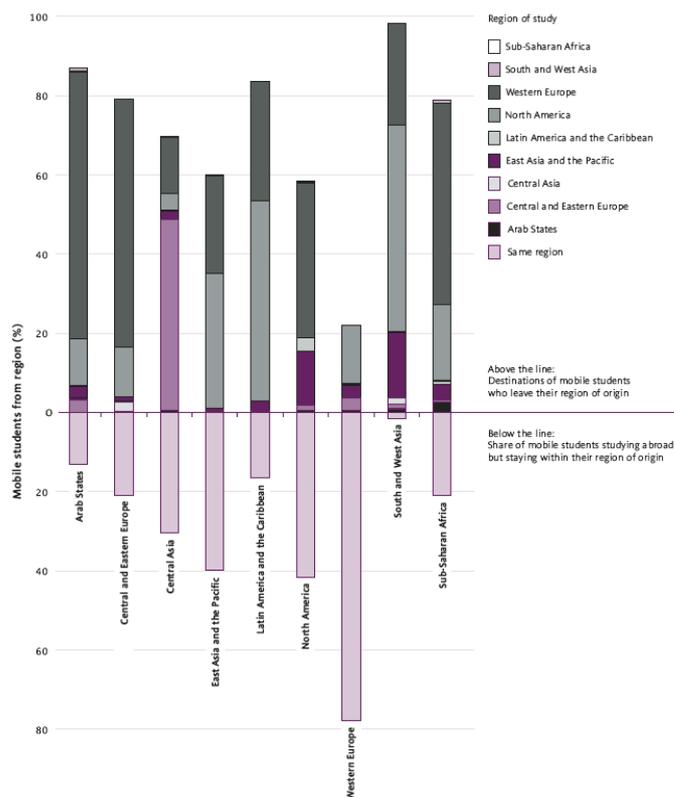
Figure 4: Students studying abroad as a proportion of those at home [Source UNESCO 2006: 37



Coverage: See Figure 13. Mobile students not classified by country of origin are excluded. They account for 12% of mobile students in 1999 and 10% in 2004.
Note: Data partially imputed from other years. See note on Figure 13.
Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics; reference year 2004: Statistical Table 10; previous years: UIS database.

The internationalisation of tertiary education services is also dramatically skewed, and integrally related to professional migration, patterns of brain drain and brain gain, and the globalisation of related industries such as ICT and research and development, to which we will return. In 2004 six countries hosted two thirds of the world’s mobile tertiary students (USA 23 percent, UK 12 percent, Germany 11 percent, France 10 percent, Australia 7 percent, Japan 5 percent). In those countries international students grew three times faster than domestic enrolments. The pattern of destination countries varies widely by region of origin, reflecting in part patterns of colonisation and second languages, with sub-Saharan students going to Europe and Latin American students going to north America for example (see figure 5). Many students from poor countries never return, depleting capacity for economic and social development other than through remittances.

Figure 5: Regional distribution of mobile students by region of origin, 2004 [Source: UNESCO 2006]



Coverage: See Figure 13. Mobile students not classified by country of origin are excluded. They account for 7.5% of all mobile students.
 Note: Mobile students from a given region studying abroad are expressed as a percentage of total mobile students from that given region.
 Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Statistical Table 9.

Beyond these movements new technical capacities to provide programs virtually and engage any time anywhere in transactions are enriching universities' international and global outlooks, lifting the constraint of distance on other activities and reducing the cost of many inputs to university services.

As universities consciously develop strategies for international and global engagement they address issues of environmental sustainability, contribute to knowledge creation and dissemination, and form associations to advance and protect the interests of higher education and the university sector (e.g. IAU, IE, IAUP, AUCC, ACE, IUS, ACU, OIF, INRUDA). The role of global equity in such movements is present but not strong; most institutions make an effort to project their own values, policies and practices onto their international and global activities, and few rethink them in a global context (but see for example Monash University's global equal opportunity policy 2006). Some universities such as the United Nations University, the Asian Institute of Technology and the African Virtual University have been established with a specific mandate to promote international development through higher education or research and training, and have policies to promote equity.

Around the internationalisation and globalisation of higher education communities of practice and areas of scholarship have grown up in their own right (e.g. IMHE, CEPES), including efforts to manage institutional accreditation, recognise international qualifications, assure quality and encourage student and scholar mobility (e.g. GATE, CHEA, NARIC). In contemplating action to address global equity in the sector, the role

of such bodies bears examination, but the record of specific consideration of equity, let alone concerted action, is not impressive.

As higher education systems have sought to provide mass professional and vocational education, and contribute to national economic capacity, and as institutions have recognised the various forms of engagement with their respective communities and consciously sought to manage them, social equity has been an aim but defined in many ways. It is time to turn to these dimensions.

3 Dimensions of equity

3.1 Distributional equity

By claiming that the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer, the critics of globalization have, often enough, chosen the wrong battleground. Even though many sections of the poor in the world economy have done badly (for a variety of reasons, involving domestic as well as international arrangements), it is hard to establish an overall and clear-cut trend. Much depends on the indicators chosen and the variables in terms of which inequality and poverty are judged.

But this debate does not have to be settled as a precondition for getting on with the central issue. The basic concerns relate to the massive levels of inequality and poverty – not whether they are also increasing at the margin. Even if the patrons of the contemporary economic order were right in claiming that the poor in general had moved a little ahead (this is, in fact, by no means uniformly so), the compelling need to pay immediate and overwhelming attention to appalling poverty and staggering inequalities in the world would not disappear. [Sen 2006: 5]

For the purpose here it is useful to follow the dual definition of the World Development Report [World Bank 2005: 2], 'that individuals should have equal opportunities to pursue a life of their choosing and be spared from extreme deprivation of outcomes... Greater equity is thus doubly good for poverty reduction: through potentially beneficial effects on aggregate long-term development and through greater opportunities for poorer groups within any society'. A concern with equality of opportunity also enables us to focus on economic opportunities, political voice and the distribution of assets, including the social assets represented by universities which constitute a vital regional resource [see Friedmann 2006]. However such a view of equity is contested by those for whom the fairness of outcomes is more pressing.

It is important to separate the concept of global equity from international equity. In the former, according to Sen [2006], a 'grand universalist' set of principles would be formed in the interests of all the people of the world, without regard for political boundaries, with all people everywhere deriving rules and principles of justice from a Rawlsian 'original position'. In the latter, a 'national particularist' set of rules and principles would be derived within national domains first, and international equity could follow as a supplementary exercise. He argues that neither conception gives us an adequate understanding of the new demands for global justice, and that it is therefore more appropriate to 'pose the issue of justice – and that of fairness – in several distinct though interrelated domains involving various groups that cut across national boundaries' i.e., plural affiliations. Such a hybrid concept is appealing for our

discussion of the role of universities in the many overlapping domains of equity across a globalising world.

These domains fit with the competing concepts of inequality described in the 2006 World Bank's World Development Report on Equity and Development.

- Global inequality, in which people, households or establishments are compared without regard to country boundary
- International inequality, in which each person or measured entity has that country's mean income or unit of measurement, and
- Inter-country inequality, in which each country has one representative at its mean income or unit of measurement.

Is the world becoming more or less equal? It depends on the concept of equity. The World Bank summarises it as follows:

'...while the world got richer, income inequality – relative and absolute, international and global – increased tremendously over a long period of time (1830-1992). But the story is less clear-cut for a more recent time frame. In the post-World War II era, inter-country inequality (unweighted) has continued to increase while international inequality (weighted for population) declined... because the inequality-reducing effects of income growth in China and South Asia more than offset the inequality-boosting effects of continued steady income growth in the now-developed countries and the declining incomes in Sub-Saharan Africa.' [World Bank 2005: 65]

Inequalities within countries are rising again around the widening interpersonal and interregional disparities in the two largest countries China and India [e.g. see figure 6 and Colvin 2006]. The persistence of dramatic differences in opportunities and the number of people forced to live on less than \$1 per day have enormous consequences for all parts of society including the role of universities.

3.2 Extreme poverty

Inequalities along these dimensions present a major challenge to universities everywhere as they seek to attract students and staff representative of income groups and regions, and to pursue economic and social justice through all their programs. How much more difficult it is for universities in less developed areas effectively to address extreme poverty, as addressed by the millennium development goals of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger and of achieving universal primary education [UN 2005].

It is true that we sometimes underestimate the social assets and intrinsic wealth of the very poor, whether or not we believe, with Prahalad [2005], in fortunes at the bottom of the pyramid.

Figure 6 Long-run income equality divergence [UNESCO 2006]



Source: Authors' manipulation of data from Bourguignon and Morrisson (2002).

Universities have sought to break down barriers to access for slum dwellers and the rural and remote poor through scholarships, loans, preferential admissions and regional outreach. However such actions have generally been ineffective, and meanwhile the absolute incidence of extreme poverty is growing fast. For example the millennium development target of significantly improving the lives of 100m people in urban slums is only a small proportion of the 800m people who live in such conditions and any progress will be swamped by a further half billion additional slum dwellers by 2020. [Bazoglu 2005].

3.3 Global educational equity

Deep social divisions persist in access to tertiary education between higher education systems and among institutions, although there is some progress in access for women and students from rural areas. Again, progress varies significantly by country and continent and in the underlying structural or discriminatory bases of inequality, which can be family income, caste, ethnicity, language, region and disability, and can be perpetuated through such policies as the use of languages such as English and French (e.g. Sri Lanka, Tanzania, north Africa), the reservation of places for relatives of academics (e.g. Venezuela), bias towards private secondary schools, inappropriate or absent lodging, the endemic sexual harassment of women, the location of campuses and learning centres (in this respect Tunisia has good practice), the under-representation of women on teaching and research staff (e.g. some Middle East countries), affirmative action policies – however well-founded on social cohesion their aims might be – in favour of majority groups (e.g. Malaysia), corrupted distribution of scholarships, loans and financial aid, and high reliance on private provision (e.g. Philippines) where social equity is not always an institutional or regulatory objective [see World Bank 2002: 52-58]. So much depends on prior preparation and non-educational support, so that even open-access and free university systems (e.g. Argentina) or decades of mandated equity and access policies (e.g. Australia) still tend to reproduce favourable access for upper-income households. .

Government and international agency reluctance to give priority to universities is understandable, with higher education but one path to equity, and a difficult path. Yet universities and higher education systems engage with social, economic and environmental issues across many sectors and by many means. What can higher education institutions do to strengthen global equity?

4 Modes of engagement

Universities play many roles in society, ranging among regions of the world, public/private status and profit/non-profit status, professional and disciplinary spread, institutional settings, resource endowments, locations and constitutions. Boyer [1990] considers four forms of scholarship at the heart of the university enterprise: the scholarships of discovery (contributions to the stock of human knowledge), integration (connections among disciplines towards integrated understanding), application (theory and practice coming together in scholarly service) and teaching (which are held to require the highest form of understanding). For discussion on global equity, we shall consider their roles in a more consolidated form, as (1) the production and transmission of knowledge, (2) the formation of human capital through education and training, and (3) engagement with wider civil society and the state in social, political and economic development.

4.1 Producing knowledge

Many universities undertake research and development and otherwise seek to create new knowledge, but other teaching-only universities do not. Widely varying criteria are used for regulating the use of the term 'university' [see Observatory 2006], and on national traditions of locating lead research in separate institutions. Though tempting to range across the knowledge economy by including non-university research institutions, our discussion will stay with universities. By normal measures of scholarly production such as publications and patents, research impact and citations, disparities among institutions globally and among countries internationally are very large, wider than differences in teaching programs we have already considered, with OECD countries generating 85 percent of investment into R&D from all sources. 'Universities are vastly underutilized and potentially powerful vehicles for development in developing countries, particularly with respect to science and technology' [Juma et al 2005: 99]. However given the range of missions and combinations of disciplines, the equity agenda in the production of knowledge through universities is complex.

First, the structures of global knowledge-based industries are changing rapidly. Emerging economies, particularly those investing heavily in universities, are making a difference even by OECD-centric measures, including in cutting-edge areas like nanotechnology.

Each new wave of science and technology innovation has the potential to expand or reduce the inequities between industrialized and developing countries in health, food, water, energy, and other development parameters. Information and communication technology produced a digital divide, but this gap is now closing; genomics and biotechnology spawned the genomics divide, and we will see if it contracts. Will nanotechnology produce the nanodivide?

Singer [2005:1], who asks this question, tracks China, India and South Korea as front runners; Thailand, Philippines, South Africa, Brazil and Chile as 'middle ground' and Argentina and Mexico as 'up and comers'. We may or may not believe the world is flat [Friedman 2005] but we have to accept that the globalisation of research and discovery create opportunities and threats to countries at present less capable. Whether universities in less developed regions take part in this and gain the rewards depends in part on how effectively those institutions engage with industry.

If both universities and industry are encouraged to work actively together, universities will be able to assume new roles that could accelerate local and national development. Rendering these institutions more effective as key development partners will require changes at several levels of university administration. It will also require deep changes in enterprises, private as well as public, so that they can become strong demanders of the universities' capabilities, helping transform these capabilities into capacities. Government will need to act as a careful facilitator of interactions between these two actors. If this is achieved, the 'loneliness syndrome' that for so long affected universities in developing countries will be redressed, allowing them to contribute to economic growth and social development [Juma 2005: 99].

Despite progress in areas such as generic pharmaceuticals, publishing and software, a more equitable distribution of knowledge creation and transmission requires reforms to national and international intellectual property regimes and these should be on our universities' agenda.

However a second element of global inequities in knowledge production is the systematic underestimation, in both senses of the term, of innovation and discovery

undertaken by universities in developing areas, particularly through non-English language media. The world's managers of information resources, corporate vacuumers of inventions, data warehouses of patents and copyrights and controllers of intellectual property all understate less formalised and internationalised knowledge embodied in local and indigenous know-how. The knowledge resources of traditional medicine, now being so competitively pursued around the world, make a case in point. Making global knowledge production – and its economic benefits – more equitable thus involve reconstituted definitions of knowledge and intellectual property, not only a redistribution of presently defined opportunities.

(e.g. New Delhi MDG localisation), Ghana and Korea differences 1956-90, >1/2 difference attributed to knowledge cf. physical and human capital p 11

4.2 Human capital formation

The most universal role of universities is to educate and train men and women for their participation in the workforce and in productive lives. The rising knowledge-intensiveness of modern economies creates skill shortages in developed and developing countries alike, but wide gaps between rich and poor universities, between developed and developing countries, between well-endowed regions and those without tertiary education opportunities, hold back global equity greatly. Some less developed countries have fast-growing numbers of young people, who as they qualify through improving secondary schooling create demands that risk social upheaval if not met. Vietnam, for example, faced the prospect of over 800,000 qualified candidates missing places in public universities, and among other policies resolved to allow the entry of foreign direct education providers such as RMIT Vietnam in an effort to bridge that gap [see Wilmoth 2004].

University academic programs are mixed goods, part public and part private, and uninformed conclusions about social and individual returns on investment have retarded investment in public higher education in developing countries and stymied private investment that might play a role. In countries such as Argentina, Brazil and Mexico rates of return on tertiary education grew significantly from the 1980s, reversing prior trends [Pessino 1995], and in Vietnam individual returns on investment in higher education were found comparable to returns from primary education and well above secondary and vocational levels [Mook et al 1998 and World Bank 1996] The same work showed that social rates of return were, by contrast, relatively low for higher education in Vietnam, suggesting to the researchers over-subsidisation of higher education, and opportunities for private higher education to contribute to national economic efficiency. The conventional view of overall gains accruing to society from public funding for the expansion of higher education, as distinct from the positional gains of participants, is questioned by some [e.g. Wolf 2002 and Blöndal 2002]. In developing countries the externalities associated with investment in higher education suggest to the World Bank spending of 15-20 percent of the education budget (itself perhaps optimally around 4 percent of GDP) as appropriate for higher education [World Bank 2002 xxiii], over which a distortion of resources to wealthy élites becomes more possible.

Effectively providing education and training programs to students from disadvantaged sectors of society, and through universities in low-income regions and countries are the core tasks of promoting equity in higher education. The means by which these are done are many and not enumerated here, but they include substantial investment in tertiary education systems through higher aid priority, incentives for the non-profit

and for-profit sectors to expand programs targeted to disadvantaged sectors, development and promotion of cost-effective modes including e-learning but also more effective use of moderated on-line learning. In turn, institutions have choices around equity-driven programs and priorities, whether and how to support the millennium development goals through teacher and principal training for example, admission and retention policies and practices, and measures to reach into the K12 sector, where discouragement and denial of opportunities for tertiary education begin, to find ways of expanding the pool of tertiary applicants. The curriculum, its social inclusiveness and engagement with global equity in so many ways are further obvious areas for action, as the values and knowledge of new generations of professionals and educated people join the workforce and become active in social and political affairs. Expansion of universities as they are may do little for global equity; developing and developed countries sometimes host high levels of graduate unemployment e.g. in Sri Lanka this was 35 percent – [World Bank 2002:60]. Expansion needs to be related to, if not always slavishly follow, workforce planning.

4.3 Social and political development

The third sector of university activity, engagement with government, industry and civil society, covers institutions' roles in national and regional development, social cohesion and global affairs. [quote p 31 and 32?]

In developed countries explicit university engagement strategies cover

For our universities to continue to be the economic engines they have been in the past, they require continued investment by governments and their other partners. In an environment of constrained budgets and competing needs, it is increasingly important for universities (as for any recipient of public funds) to demonstrate the value of the public's investment in terms of social benefits. As the institutions make their futures with less reliance on government support and more exposure to market opportunities, international development imperatives and redefined risks, new forms of cooperation, beyond previous boundaries, become the drivers of success.

Issues of global equity are usually not important in the community engagement of universities in developed countries though there are exceptions. The capacities of poorer universities to provide any extension services or community engagement are limited.

However universities make a very significant contribution to their regions and beyond through the knowledge and skills built up through education and training programs mentioned above; research and innovation drawing funding into the region and where successful attracting investment from domestic and international entities; contributions to the commercialisation of new products and processes and company startups. Universities can be major employers and have an impact through combined payrolls and indirect job multipliers. They buy goods and services in the region, hire local contractors and construct campuses and other infrastructure. Student spending, including from overseas students can affect a regional economy, sometimes affecting the property market and contributing to a region's reputation for better or for worse. Universities participate in community services and support social access and participation, if not on a global scale. The economic, social and cultural contributions of university scholarship are not well understood, through scholarly publication, public lectures and continuing education, arts and culture, alumni and retired staff.

To those of us from universities in the developed world such engagement might sound optional, a form of corporate social responsibility. For institutions in emerging economies and less developed countries, their roles in hosting social movements and political development, including under conditions of political or physical repression, can be issues for their survival and for the well-being of the whole civil society in whose midst they forage a sometimes-precarious home.

More and more, the activities of universities in strengthening capacity elsewhere are undertaken in a global setting. Our focus in discussion should therefore be on the means of ensuring that university community, social and political engagement is more strongly driven by the principles of equity, that contributions to global equity become a central part of such activity, even if at first in small ways, and that institutions in poor or otherwise disadvantaged areas can improve their capacities to provide such forms of extension and political engagement themselves.

Lest this be seen solely in utilitarian terms, we should be reminded that some countries, Vietnam among them (proud of its ancient traditions of learning and incidentally one of several claimants to the home of the world's first university) put the intrinsic worth of scholarship as the highest value in their national education plan.

5 Towards an agenda for action

5.1 The role of universities

Actions that universities and like-minded institutions could take are implied throughout the survey above. They tend to have a dual character, to be about global equity and poverty alleviation as a field, or to be about strengthening universities in disadvantaged areas

5.1.1 Expanding our knowledge of global equity

Universities are already deeply involved in research and policy development on global equity and poverty alleviation, and strong centres focusing on this knowledge are linked and active e.g. through the Canadian Partnerships in Cooperation and Development Program. Nevertheless there is a need to widen the networks geographically, strengthen their capacity and better inform popular movements for poverty alleviation the other Millennium Development Goals.

5.1.2 Strengthening research in lagging countries and regions

Whatever the field – though choices should be informed by development priorities – the role of university research in poorer countries and regions, though underrated, is still weak and warrants much greater investment to promote endogenous innovation and sustainable development, with the caveat that institutional priorities in some places favour universities more than in others. The Millennium Project on Innovation [Juma et al 2005] provides a wealth of recommendations for action in this regard.

5.1.3 Teaching global equity and practicing it in teaching

Global efforts to alleviate poverty have assisted with focused curricula and case studies but there is a major task to enable curricula in all fields to address the issues in an interdisciplinary framework and within each discipline and profession.

However the experience of ventures like the African Virtual University [2006] highlight the absolute importance of empowering and resourcing educators in settings where

disadvantaged groups are being brought into formal tertiary learning. As well resourced as the AVU itself might be – an intergovernmental institution providing accredited online and moderated programs from universities around the world – its success relies on the teaching and learning capacities of 57 learning centres in 27 countries, including a number of hosting universities. For universities to serve their constituents and help them take a full part in the knowledge society they need significantly strengthened teaching resources, advocacy for which is needed.

5.1.4 Practicing access and equity

Virtually all higher education institutions have policies and practices that promote equity and access, often mandated and varying considerably. For example in Australia publicly funded universities demonstrate performance in assisting students from financially disadvantaged backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, students with disabilities, students from non English-speaking backgrounds, women especially in relation to traditional male disciplines, and students from rural and remote areas. For a global perspective it is necessary to add refugees, people living under occupation and cultural and linguistic minorities.

The task is to press universities worldwide to see their equity obligations and opportunities as global, and to engage in supporting programs with priority equivalent to the above. It is also to enable universities in disadvantaged areas themselves to reach out to the poorest of the poor, to find creative pathways to learning and sustainable development including through programs that 'reach down' into the K12 sector.

There is rich worldwide experience with scholarships, loans and financial aid driven in part by equity and access, including many innovative schemes in developing countries.

5.1.5 Strengthening dedicated higher education institutions

Some universities are dedicated to the task of promoting development and alleviating poverty: they should be strengthened, not bypassed, in the search for the means of eliminating poverty. The United Nations University with its global network of institutes and training programs is one such example and the Asian Institute of Technology in Bangkok is another. university

5.1.6 Joining knowledge institutions in the cause

Universities so-called are only one type of institution in the fields we have reviewed, and that their regulators and public funders but one type of ministry (see also ministries for training, human resources, primary and secondary schooling, etc.) For those students trainees and researchers taking less conventional paths, often from disadvantaged backgrounds, poor relationships among learning institutions and oversight agencies cause opportunities to be blocked and time wasted repeating work for non-transferable credit. Any action to address global inequities in and through universities must be collaborate and forge simple interfaces with kindred institutions. The special role of universities in providing accredited programs, and accrediting others' programs against academic standards, is ground for a much more active engagement with non-university learning resources that contribute to development, such as the Global Development Learning Network (GDLN).

5.1.7 Private universities that are equitable

Some count private tertiary education as part of the problem, imagining a contradiction between profit and equity. Though more nuanced, the global lobbying

effort of Education International on behalf of education unions worldwide sometimes comes close to that. First, however, most private universities are non-profit, and often established specifically for social purposes. Second, as experience in the USA shows, the fast-growing for-profit sector also tends to attract people of limited means, usually mid-career people seeking qualification upgrades. Reliance on fees and other commercial income creates obvious limits, but strong clear policies for dedicating a portion of income to scholarships and expanding the pool by other means, along with low-cost – and sometimes innovative – student loan schemes can mitigate such inequities. The cash-intensive character of private education make bond financing for expansion attractive under the right conditions. The International Finance Corporation has been effective in working with the private sector from and for the benefit of students in developing countries and regions.

It follows that any campaign for global equity in higher education needs to include the private sector providers and not only work with the sector as clients or benefactors [see UNDP 2004]. The philanthropic sector also plays a key role in the interstices, and could be brought more strongly into supporting university programs for equity and poverty alleviation (though Carnegie, Ford, Atlantic, Fulbright and Wellcome have been active).

5.2 The role of higher education systems

5.2.1 Investing in equity

Any review of public higher education and university systems around the world has to conclude that very few jurisdictions are adequately investing in universities (those that do have been successful economically). Action to redress the global imbalance, and yoke universities to the cause of poverty alleviation, need higher resourcing commitments, and for that better argued technical and popular cases need to be constructed. Two very effective recent global campaigns for road safety provide useful analogies.

However no amount of investment can be effective without fundamental reform to the ineffective and sometimes punitive regimes regulating higher education in many jurisdictions, and not only in developing countries. The words of 1998 UNESCO Declaration on Higher Education acknowledge the need to reorganise for learning pathways:

Equity of access to higher education should begin with the reinforcement and, if need be, the reordering of its links with all other levels of education, particularly secondary education. Higher education institutions must be viewed as, and must also work within themselves to be a part of and encourage, a seamless system starting with early childhood and primary education and continuing through life [UNESCO 1998]

Geographic disparities within countries and territorially across national boundaries are sometimes severe and warrant action through higher education systems; recent European experience with regional policy can give us some good examples. The intended results of such interventions should clearly not be uniform access, but appropriate to socio-cultural and economic conditions.

5.2.2 Social justice a stronger driver

All education systems purport to advance equity, along with social cohesion and other values. However social justice tends to a secondary redistribution in public resource allocation rather than a primary purpose. An emerging plural affiliation between

universal values and particular national constructions of social justice is a basis for enabling universities ameliorate inequities and extreme poverty by means in part independent of the state, as part of global civil society. The glaring gaps and pressing needs that this conference addresses require new means of constructing and promoting equity.

5.2.3 Equity in governance ?

qualifications frameworks, quality assurance and accreditation regimes

Engines of growth in E Asia e.g. massive investments China, UAE/Saudi

Some countries like continents

What do HE and VET systems pursue as equity and what are global dimensions of that?

Some countries global in scale or project definitions of equity outwards

5.3 The role of international development

5.3.1 Using international institutions

Much of the weight of responsibility for addressing global disparities rests on worldwide international institutions, particularly UNESCO, UNDP and the World Bank. As we can see from this paper UNESCO has taken the lead role in terms of policy and statistics, but is not well resourced to make the dramatic differences necessary. UNDP has focussed on development projects and the World Bank has used technical assistance, loans and grants to promote the reform of higher education systems and build up universities including especially in Africa where many higher education indicators have been falling behind. The IFC, the bank's private sector arm, has also become active in providing technical assistance, loans, guarantees and equity to private higher education institutions, most of them not universities.

It follows that action in support of global equity for universities, higher education or tertiary education must involve these agencies and indeed might elicit tangible support. The UN headquarters sponsors the UN Global Compact, a worldwide tri-sector program (government, business, NGOs) of corporate responsibility directed towards the development agenda. The World Bank, along with a number of bilateral aid agencies, sponsors the Global Road Safety Program, a similar tri-sector campaign to reduce road trauma, in which global corporations sponsor global or regional programs and take an active part in its governance. An approach similar to these could perhaps be considered with such multilateral partners for global equity for universities or higher education.

Many programs of development assistance to universities or for their benefit come through the bilateral aid agencies such as DFID, CIDA, DANIDA or AusAID. Often they are focussed on an area of engagement of particular interest to the donor country and may be tied. Typically universities cobble together teaching or research programs to maximise the resource input, with the result being patchwork programs not sustained much beyond the project period. However such programs can directly assist universities and other higher education institutions provide services to very poor or disadvantaged minority areas, and the productive international personal and professional relationships formed may outlast the programs themselves. The role of bilateral agencies in any new or revamped campaign to alleviate inequities in the sector or to strengthen local universities engage with slum upgrades or rural

development would therefore depend on the preferences of local partners, countries and resourcing tactics chosen.

5.4 Opportunities for global action

International development agencies by normally being constructed on the basis of member countries tend to be constrained to slow processes that understandably include the upward winnowing of development proposals through recipient governments. For universal goals like social justice, does a more global frame assist?

5.4.1 Trade and investment for equity

In the great global switchboard of direct university to university relationships there are few focused on the participating parties' equity goals and responsibilities, other than the usually implicit contribution of north-south partnerships towards such a goal. However global equity does feature on the agenda of global associations of universities and higher education institutions as they swarm together for the conferences of a number of organisations. But most attention at present is on trade and investment rather than collegial cooperation.

Debate on the contribution of liberalised trade to international development and the elimination of poverty is on centre court as the Doha round of negotiations perilously moves to its climax. The GATS round, the General Agreement on Trade in Services, is being played on one of the outer courts but crucially involves trade and investment in educational services. The haphazard growth of cross-border provision of tertiary education in its four modes (learning materials moving, or students moving, or course franchises moving, or teachers moving) and the opportunities being taken by some exporting countries (mostly Anglophone) to remove the many non-tariff barriers to higher education have created a vigorous backlash aimed at protecting local universities from competition and national governments from pro-competition obligations to allow foreign providers on the same terms as domestic. The issue, still in dispute, is whether the gains from trade are worth the risks, whether, as the Chinese government used to say, the flies will come in the door once it is opened. The same arguments are being raised about the inclusion of higher and vocational education in the bilateral trade agreements that are proliferating the wake of weak multilateralism.

There is a risk, but with basic quality assurance and a regulatory regime – which is still permitted – the opportunities to expand capacity in net importing and net exporting countries alike are worth it. It matters little whether an institution is public or private provided it meets local needs appropriately and complies with policy in every way. Expanded options and growing capacity do not readily provide opportunities for the very poor or lead to equity, but do up more options for equity though measure discussed elsewhere.

5.4.2 Universities associating for equity

There are several world associations of universities or those associated – e.g. IAU, ACU, IAUP, IUS, ERI – and more on a regional basis. In the consideration of concerted action to reduce inequalities in and through universities, one should look at these organisations to see whether their past record, their governance and their resources are up to the task.

On many matters such organisations collaborate; for example to make a statement on principles for cross-border education the IAU combined with other membership organisations to make a statement in the general direction of global equity.

Cross-border higher education should strive to contribute to the broader economic, social and cultural well-being of communities...

While cross-border education can flow in many different directions and takes place in a variety of contexts, it should strengthen developing countries' higher education capacity in order to promote global equity.

Cross-border higher education should be accessible not only to students who can afford to pay, but also to qualified students with financial need.

On whole, however, aside from statements by office-bearers, the above organisations have not taken a strong stand and are not in a position to mobilise resources to address the scale of the tasks this paper has outlined.

6 Conclusion

Gaps between rich and poor countries on key indicators of global equity are growing and tertiary education even more so. The number of people living in extreme poverty are growing faster than most measures for reaching the MDGs indicate, and the contribution of universities in the developed and emerging and less developed countries to alleviating their conditions of life are small and not up to the task in the future. Universities in the developing world, while producing knowledge more than the measures of the wealthy countries show, are not equipped to bridge the growing divide on research and innovation. The consequences of these growing divides are not only lost human potential and avoidable human suffering, but risks to social solidarity, health and security around the world.

Actions to consider are in two domains, what can be done by the pluralist global constituency for social justice to enable tertiary education better to meet the needs of the world's people and in an equitable way, and what universities and systems of higher education in turn can do to address the larger crisis of unjust world development.

There is much that institutions can do, alone, in pairs and collectively. With political will, international development organisations are able to mobilise resources and know-how for both these monumental tasks, the better by engaging in new global collectivities growing around and outside the nation state. The associations of universities themselves are considerably weaker and concerted institutional reform or reconstitution would be necessary for them to be a tangible force in the tasks above. These tasks are among the greatest challenges of our time but with a will and a way they are not impossible.

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