

Canadian and International Education / Education canadienne et internationale

Volume 24 | Issue 2

Article 7

10-24-2012

Assessing the Medium: Term Impact of an Institutional Strengthening Project

James Shute

Follow this and additional works at: <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/cie-eci>

Recommended Citation

Shute, James (1995) "Assessing the Medium: Term Impact of an Institutional Strengthening Project," *Canadian and International Education / Education canadienne et internationale*: Vol. 24: Iss. 2, Article 7.
Available at: <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/cie-eci/vol24/iss2/7>

This Research paper/Rapport de recherche is brought to you for free and open access by Scholarship@Western. It has been accepted for inclusion in Canadian and International Education / Education canadienne et internationale by an authorized administrator of Scholarship@Western. For more information, please contact kmarshal@uwo.ca.

ASSESSING THE MEDIUM-TERM IMPACT OF AN INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING PROJECT

James C. M. Shute
University of Guelph

INTRODUCTION

It has entered the conventional development wisdom, at least that version of it proclaimed by the harshest critics of development cooperation, that when projects have been completed and their funding exhausted, the anticipated benefits usually grind to a halt, the inter-institutional relationships fade rapidly and the longer-term outcomes are more often than not stillborn. From Hancock's slashing critique of aid organizations (1989) to Goss and Gilroy's more temperate 1994 review of Canadian university-based linkage projects, this sour view has gained sufficient currency as to be almost accepted uncritically, even by those who know better - and even in the face of evidence that demonstrates the contrary. Hancock, for example, is unrelenting in characterizing aid as a "grave train" for a special class of grasping, self-centred, overpaid and underqualified personnel interested only in perks, privileges and prestige. Though he does not include universities or the education sector (and only some NGO's) in his condemnation, he implies their guilt by association as he excoriates "experts and professionals" (his "lords of poverty") for boarding aircraft and fleeing northwards as "the ill conceived development projects that they have been responsible for continue to wreck the lives of the poor" (Hancock, 1989; 113). The 1991 CIDA-sponsored review of the Educational Institutions Program conducted by Goss, Gilroy and Associates is more pertinent to this paper. It asserts that developing country institutions are seldom full participants in the formulation of projects, that narrative reporting is inadequate, that partnerships are not sustained and concludes that there is little evidence of impact on national development arising from recently completed projects (Goss, Gilroy and Associates, 1991). In this case study of an institutional strengthening project, I wish to bring a little balance into this discussion.

ASSESSING INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING

I was prompted to this retrospective assessment of project impact by a telephone interview with Tim Lougheed who was writing on the impact of development projects on Canadian universities for AUCC's *Uniwold* (Lougheed, 1994). It occurred to me that there have been few analyses in Canada of university-based institutional strengthening projects undertaken 15 or more years after their completion and fewer still (if any) that examine the impacts on participating partners. As Stockmann (1993 a; 93) asserts, "The study of project effectiveness, specific results, and measurable successes is the most neglected research field." I decided to pursue some issues raised in the *Uniwold* article in an effort to reflect on what I am calling medium-term outcomes; that is, those that can be identified 15 years after final completion of a project. Short-term impacts are probably easier to describe, with long-term outcomes necessarily in the realm of speculation until the passage of time clarifies them. In this analysis, I have selected two main criteria for attention. In the case of the African partner, the University of Ghana at Legon, the principal indicator is the sustainability of staffing, in that the major objective of the 1970 project was staff development (HRD) as the principal contribution to institutional strengthening. In the case of the Canadian partner, the University of Guelph, the main indicators are impacts on Canadian academic participants and on curriculum developments arising from the links with Ghana. The larger issues of institution-building and institutional strengthening are beyond the scope of this modest case study, as is any detailed review of the relevant scholarly sources. For the latter, the reader is referred to Delage's excellent literature review of institutional technical assistance projects (Delage, 1987). For a comprehensive treatment of the impact of 15 German development projects the work of Stockmann (1993b) is highly relevant.

THE GHANA-GUELPH PROJECT

In 1970 a CIDA-supported link was established between the University of Ghana at Legon and the University of Guelph with a variety of objectives designed to strengthen five academic departments at Legon - Nutrition and Food Science, Animal Science, Crop Science, Home Science and Agricultural Extension. Eleven departments at the University of Guelph became engaged in the normal mechanisms for implementing such a project - graduate degree training, short-term technician training, visiting fellowships for senior Ghanaian faculty members, library support, the provision of teaching and research equipment, and the posting of Canadian academics to Legon

departments while Ghanaian staff were in Canada for graduate work. Ghanaian graduate students on the project studied not only at Guelph but also at UBC and Manitoba. Seven Guelph M.Sc. students also conducted thesis research in Ghana and served as assistants to the Guelph faculty there. In all, some 125 Ghanaians and Canadians participated directly in the project from 1970 to 1979. Of the 24 Canadian academics, 13 were full-time Guelph faculty. Forty-four Ghanaian graduate students, technicians and fellows studied in Canada. Statistical summaries of participants, and other outputs are found in the proceedings of the first conference held in Canada to review Canadian experience in university development cooperation (Shute, 1979; 39-44; Thompson, 1979; 70-75). Research outputs are detailed in a 1982 bibliography of all publications, theses and presented papers up to 1982 (Shute, 1982). The short-term outcomes are summarized in numbers of Ghanaian and Canadian graduate students trained to specific levels, numbers of Canadians and Ghanaian participants, numbers and qualities of publications, numbers of administrators exchanging visits, quantity and quality of technical/infrastructural/library support and the like. Some effort was made in the 1979 end-of-project report and in the 1979 AUCC workshop to identify strengths and weaknesses and to evaluate achievements. By necessity, however, these assessments had to be short-term in nature, following as they did hard on the heels of project completion. Thus, for purposes of this mid-term analysis, a somewhat longer perspective is offered, complete with the somewhat greater degree of detachment and objectivity normally attendant upon the passage of 15 years or so. [For a detailed discussion of the Ghana-Guelph Project from the perspective of the Institution Building Model whose analytical framework is composed of five institutional variables - leadership, purpose, program internal structure and resources - together with environmental linkage variables, see Delage (1988).]

MAJOR ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

HRD Sustainability in Ghana

By 1987, when Delage studied the Ghana-Guelph Project, he concluded that despite the achievements of the project, political and economic problems in Ghana had become severe enough to threaten the very survival of academic departments and programs at Legon. (Delage, 1987; 6.) Again relying on the Institutional Building model of Esman *et al.*, Delage claimed that "institutionality," the state in which institutions have acquired the capacity to sustain themselves and influence the larger environment in which they function, had largely been achieved and that the five institutionality criteria -

The University of Guelph has continuously received substantial numbers of Ghanaian graduate students, many of whom are graduates of Legon departments staffed by Project 'alumni.' In 1992-93, for example, the 24 Ghanaian students at Guelph constituted the fourth largest group of visa students (after China, Kenya and Indonesia).

Of the seven Canadian graduate students who took part, one went on to become a senior staff member at ICOD (International Centre for Ocean Development) after her Ph.D. and is now a consultant. Three continued in development work, and three pursued careers in education.

Perhaps most remarkable, because the majority of Canadian staff were full-time Guelph faculty (13 of 24), the project had both direct and indirect influence on the University of Guelph itself. First, for some faculty members this initial developing country experience led to subsequent advisory and consulting assignments overseas (including subsequent assignments in Ghana), visa student advising, and a heightened contribution to the university's internationalization through committee work and departmental and university management (three became department chairs at Guelph in the eighties, and one a dean). Participating Guelph faculty also benefited in career terms from their project activity; all are now full professors and senior academic leaders at Guelph. Three senior staff seconded to the project from the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food went on to senior positions before their retirement.

One other important institutional consequence has been the contribution of the Project to curricula at the University of Guelph. Largely because of their experience in Ghana, a number of faculty members in several departments designed a ten course international minor in the undergraduate agriculture degree program to expose undergraduates to some realities of tropical agriculture and rural development, complete with a field course in the Caribbean or Mexico. Many of those courses were designed and have been taught by faculty members who were in Ghana. Since the mid-seventies this minor has attracted 15 to 20 students per year, and a great many of its graduates have gone on into international careers. In terms of more formal linkages, a new CIDA-supported ICDS project was initiated in 1987 with the intent of consolidating some of the earlier Project's achievements in the Department of Home Science at Legon. This new project, just now being completed, brought back to Guelph (and elsewhere in Canada) a number of Ghanaian academic staff whose degrees had been earned at Guelph and it had, among its results, the effect of renewing and up-dating some of the valued

connections between the two universities. In 1991, a formal linkage agreement was signed between the two universities, building both on the relationship begun in 1969 and on an earlier agreement signed in 1979 to continue the links. (Following the 1979 agreement, the University of Guelph funded for several years from its own resources a scholarship for Ghanaian graduate students.) More recently, both Legon and Guelph have become members of the Commonwealth Universities Study Abroad Consortium (CUSAC), a 28 member university consortium designed to increase student mobility among Commonwealth universities, mainly at the undergraduate level. Guelph graduate students have spent periods at Legon over the last few years; we hope now, under the CUSAC scheme, to have undergraduates taking courses there in the 1994-95 academic year.

There have been unexpected outcomes stimulated by the Ghana link. The existence of peanuts as a commercial crop in Ontario is partially a result of the experience of Guelph agronomists with groundnuts in Ghana - an example, perhaps, of South-North 'technology transfer.' One Ghanaian Ph.D. student, in fact, did his thesis research on peanuts in Ontario.

LOOKING BACK

Normally papers like this conclude by looking to the future. Instead, I would like to look to the past in order to identify what I believe can and should be learned from the project I have described here. One reason for doing so is that far too often, in my experience, development cooperation projects are designed in complete isolation from (and usually ignore) valuable lessons already learned, frequently the hard way, by others, occasionally in one's own country or even province. Probably this fact is what motivated AUCC in 1979 and 1993 to collect data on university development cooperation experience. Looking back, then, these are the principal observations I would make about the Ghana-Guelph case study:

By virtually any standard, the project's impact on the medium-term manpower needs of the University of Ghana (leaving aside staff development related to other Ghanaian universities and ministries) was impressive. For example using two of the five indicators of university performance proposed by Johnes and Taylor (1990) - non-completion rate and employment of graduates - the project achievements were most positive - probably more positive, in fact, than would be the case for a similar number of Canadian graduate students in the same period.

Clearly 'pull' factors on these Ghanaian academic staff have been stronger than 'push' factors. Several of those now on staff at Legon did, in fact, seek employment outside Ghana during the eighties and have since returned - this in spite of the severe impacts of the Structural Adjustment Program on the Ghanaian economy (Sowa, 1994). Employment in Ghana's university system seems to have held continuing appeal.

I believe that many of the 'lessons learned' about which I have written elsewhere still apply (Shute, 1978, 1979). Others, too, have surveyed more systematically a wider range of university experience in development cooperation and have found, on the whole, positive consequences for Canadian universities arising from their involvement with developing country partners (AUCC, 1993). It remains something of a mystery to me that universities, in the face of their cumulative experience to date in these matters, still refuse or are unable to learn from the past and from each other. (For a wider discussion of South-North university partnerships in the context of the constraints on the university sector, see Bor and Shute, 1991.)

Unless deliberate steps are taken to assimilate international experience into faculty career paths and curriculum development in the Canadian partner, the risk is strong that the project's impact on the core activities of the home institution will be marginal, even negligible.

Few projects of this kind have included Canadian students. CIDA objected to our inclusion of Canadian graduate students and Guelph departments were reluctant at first to nominate graduate student participants. To overcome the first objection, Guelph students were assigned to Guelph faculty as teaching and research assistants and were not simply labelled as grad students. By the time the second obstacle was overcome, the project was nearing completion. Building in opportunities for Canadian graduate students where appropriate is, in my view, a highly desirable element of the design of cooperation projects of this type.

It seems clear that, at least in this case, it would be quite simplistic and misleading to hold the view that university-based development cooperation projects inevitably deteriorate when the funding is exhausted. All sorts of factors impinge on longer-term outcomes, some of which I have described. It is impossible, probably, to control for non-project-related influences. It is important, therefore, not to pronounce decisions prematurely on success or the lack of it. Human resource development, the stuff of most such

linkages, is not linear in development, not predictable in outcome, not assured of short-term results. It lurches, staggers, and suffers setbacks as trained people leave, employment opportunities shrink and incomes decline. Then it may rebound as new graduates appear, graduates drift back, conditions change and brain-drain merges into brain-gain. Such, at least, has been the story of this project in the medium-term. For the longer term, a systematic tracer study and impact analysis might reveal even more about what constitutes success (or failure) in institutional strengthening.

Note

- 1 I wish to acknowledge the assistance of Dr. Charlotte Anokwa of the University of Ghana in assembling these data.

References

- AUCC. *Study of the Impact of Involvement in International Development Projects on Canadian Universities*. Ottawa: AUCC, May, 1993.
- Bor, W. van den and J.C.M. Shute. "Higher Education in the Third World: Status Symbol or Instrument for Development?" *Higher Education* 22, 1991, 1-15.
- Delage, Paul B. *Relevance of Organizational Theories to Institutional Technical Assistance Projects*. Ottawa: Institute for International Development and Cooperation, University of Ottawa, 1987 (a) (Working Paper NR/872).
- _____. *Human Resources Development and Institution Building: The Ghana-Guelph Project*. Ottawa: Institute for International Development and Cooperation. University of Ottawa, 1988 (Working Paper NR/882).
- _____. *Assessing the Impact of the Ghana-Guelph Project on Institutionalization at the University of Ghana*. Ottawa: Institute for International Development and Cooperation. University of Ottawa, 1987 (b) (Working Paper NR/874).
- Goss, Gilroy and Associates. *Report on the Evaluation of the Educational Institutional Program*. Ottawa: 1991. (Executive Summary.)
- Hancock, Graham. *Lords of Poverty*. London: Mandarin Paperbacks, 1989.

- Johnes, Jill and Jim Taylor. *Performance Indicators in Higher Education*. Buckingham: Society for Research into Higher Education/Open University Press, 1990.
- Lougheed, Tim. "Planting The Seeds - Guelph's Experience." *Uniworld*. Fall 1993/Winter 1994, 11-12.
- Lohrmann, Reinhard. "Irregular Migration: An Emerging Issue in Developing Countries." In Appleyard, Reginald (ed.). *The Impact of International Migration on Developing Countries*. Paris: OECD, 1989, 129-140.
- Shute, J.C.M. *Ghana-Guelph Bibliography*. Guelph: University of Guelph, 1982.
- _____. "Lessons Learned From the Ghana-Guelph Project." Paper prepared for the Food Committee, Science Council of Canada, March, 1978.
- _____. "The Ghana-Guelph Project in Retrospect." *Canadian University Experience in International Development Projects*. Ottawa: AUCC, 1979, 39-44.
- Sowa, Nii K. "A Decade of Structural Adjustment." *West Africa*, 11-17 October, 1993, 1809-1811.
- Stockmann, Reinhard. "The Long-Term Impact of Development Aid." *Development and Cooperation*, No. 5, 1993 (a) 21-22.
- _____. *Sustainability of Development Projects*. Mannheim: University of Mannheim (Draft Paper; August, 1993 b).
- Thomas-Hope, E.M. and R.D. Nutter. "Occupation and Status in the Ideology of Caribbean Return Migration." In Appleyard, Reginald (ed.). *The Impact of International Migration on Developing Countries*. Paris: OECD, 1989, 287-300.
- Thompson, E.J. "Workshop on Canadian University Experience in International Development Programs." *Canadian University Experience in International Development Programs*. Ottawa: AUCC, 1979, 70-75.