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## Abbreviations

AKU	Aga Khan University
AOD	Austrian Academic Exchange Service
AUCC	Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada
BC	British Council
BMZ	Bundesministerium für Wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit
BUZA	Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Netherlands)
CICHE	Council for International Cooperation in Higher Education
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
DAAD	Deutsche Akademische Austauschdienst
DAE	Donors to African Education
DAE	Development of African Education
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
DGIS	Directorate General for International Cooperation
DPO/IO	International Education Division
DSE	Deutsche Stiftung für Internationale Entwicklung
DSO	Direct Support to Training Institutions in Developing Countries Programme
EFA	Education for All
ENRECA	Programme for Enhancement of Research Capacity in Developing Countries
ESAP	Economic Structural Adjustments Programme
EU	European Union
GDI	German Development Institute
GTZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (German Agency for Technical Cooperation)
HEDCO	Higher Education for Development Cooperation
HRD	Human Resource Development
IAU	International Association of Universities
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
IED	Institute for Educational Development
IOV	Inspectie Ontwikkelingssamenwerking te Velde
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
MHO	Joint Financing Programme for Cooperation in Higher Education
NEDA	Netherlands Development Assistance
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
Nuffic	Netherlands Organisation for International Cooperation in Higher Education
NUFU	Norwegian Council of Universities' Committee for Development Research and Education
ODA	Overseas Development Administration
PC-MHO	MHO Project Committee
SAREC	Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation with Developing Countries
SIDA	Swedish International Development Authority
SV	Samenwerkings Verbanden
SWOT	Strengths and Weaknesses, Opportunities and Treaths
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation

USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VLIR	Vlaamse Interuniversitaire Raad

## **Preface**

This paperback is the result of a study initiated by Nuffic's Department for Human Resource and Institutional Development (HR&ID). The department administers inter-institutional co-operation programmes between institutions of higher education in The Netherlands and their counterparts in developing countries, as well as fellowship programmes. The largest programme administered by the department is the Dutch Joint Financing Programme for Co-operation in Higher Education (MHO). The MHO forms part of The Netherlands' bilateral aid programme and was specifically set up to support higher education in developing countries. The programme aims to achieve sustainable enhancement of the institutional capacity in the developing countries by helping to develop, strengthen, and improve the general functioning of their institutions for higher education ('institution building') and to contribute to meeting quantitative and qualitative manpower deficiencies ('human resource development').

The MHO seeks to realise these objectives by setting up linkages for inter-institutional co-operation between Dutch institutions of higher education and similar institutions in developing countries. The core of the programme consists of the mobilisation of Dutch expertise within the framework created by these links.

Twelve institutions of higher education (IHEs) in developing countries have entered into a long-term co-operation agreement with Dutch universities and hogescholen<sup>1</sup> within the context of the MHO programme, which consists of about 120 projects covering a variety of subject areas. Seven of the partners in the South are in Africa. The MHO programme is presented in more detail in Annex 1.

Disappointment in the transient results of some of the co-operation projects and a lack of sufficient interest by the partner institutes led the HR&ID department to commission a study to highlight factors that influence the sustainability of international co-operation programmes in higher education, specifically of those programmes that deal with inter-institutional collaborations. The study began as an internal project aimed at enhancing Nuffic's know-how on sustainability issues with possible spillover effects on the administration of the MHO programme. It was hoped that the study would result in a clear and comprehensive analysis of the nature and dynamics of the sustainability of these programmes, and to arrive at new insights in coping with problems encountered.

The study set out to gather and compare the experiences, opinions, and approaches of other funding organisations concerning similar collaborative programmes. Major donor organisations were approached to share their policy outlines, views, and experiences regarding inter-institutional co-operation programmes in higher education, with a special focus on the sustainability of the results of the co-operative ventures. The donors' response was generous, both with regard to the number of documents they made available as well as in the interest they showed in the subject.

The MHO experience was analysed by studying policy documents, indicative plans, reports, and notes on MHO linkages and projects, and through interviews

with Nuffic staff directly involved in the co-ordination and administration of the programme and its linkages.

A 'panel' of key informants was approached with a short list of questions to complement the information gathered from the literature, the other donors, and experts with insight into the situation in the south. The questionnaire asked which actions the main participants in inter-institutional co-operation programmes could and should undertake to enhance the sustainability of these programmes and projects. Representatives of the MHO partner institutions in the South were included as informants, and their reactions too, were numerous and substantial.

This paperback is based on the outcome of the study <sup>2</sup>. It combines the outcome of the review of the literature with practices and experiences in the MHO and similar programmes. Insights derived from the literature and from practice are compared with views held by key informants, resulting in lessons learnt and guidelines to enhance the chances for sustainability of co-operation programmes and projects.

The study was conducted by Ad Boeren and Kees Epskamp of the Department for Educational Studies and Consultancy (DESC) at Nuffic, with the assistance of an internal steering group consisting of Kees van Dongen, Arnold van der Zanden, and Joost Groot Kormelink. All are staff members of the HR&ID department.

The draft report was edited by Annemarie Gerbrandy. The adaptation of the study report to the present paperback version was done by Ad Boeren.

### *Acknowledgements*

The researchers are very grateful to the representatives of donor agencies who reacted so positively to the requests for information and documents, and who showed such a keen interest in the topic of the study.

The researchers are greatly indebted to the key informants who readily participated in the study by sharing their views on inter-institutional co-operation and sustainability based on experience.

### *Responsibilities*

The author is responsible for the choice and presentation of the facts contained in this report and for the opinions expressed in it. These do not necessarily reflect the views of Nuffic.

## **Introduction**

### *Inter-institutional co-operation*

Over the years, co-operation programmes between universities in the North and universities in the South have drastically changed. The emphasis in the co-operative ventures has shifted from fragmented initiatives by individual academicians and faculties to train academic members of staff and to open new fields of study, to a more programmatic approach targeting development of the entire education institutions. Disappointing results in the form of never-ending projects and the frequent collapse of activities after their completion prompted this shift from a project to a programme approach. It was recognised that fragmented interventions had little chance of survival if they were implemented in isolation from the wider institutional context in which projects and staff operated. Donors felt that more attention should be given to conditions and approaches that would offer better guarantees for the continuation of activities after projects had come to an end. The term ‘sustainability’ was adopted to denote the durable effects of projects and programmes. Institutional capacities with regard to planning, management, and administration became recognised as crucial to the successful implementation of projects and the institutionalising of project activities. ‘Institutional strengthening’ became an additional objective in linkage programmes besides the development of staff, new fields of study, and the infrastructure. The donor community stimulated this re-orientation further by concentrating its support for inter-institutional co-operation in higher education on broad-based and long-term programmes of co-operation with a restricted number of partner institutions in the South. The expectation was that focused and larger interventions would have greater institutional impact than a number of individual projects scattered over various institutions.

While this evolution in donor strategy was taking place, drastic changes were taking place in the role and position of universities in society and in the way they are financed. Today’s institutions of higher education are under constant stress to reform their operations and to adjust to society’s demands. They no longer are proverbial ‘ivory towers’ of wisdom where important research is conducted to advance science and where students are groomed to join the academic ranks. The institutions are faced with increasing demands for higher education from all layers of society and, at the same time, are pushed to continuously improve their internal and external efficiency. Full funding by governments is no longer self-evident because government funding cannot keep pace with the increased demands. The view has gained ground that education institutions need to strengthen their financial base by a diversification of funding and by a more commercial approach to their operations.

This seems to be a world-wide trend, affecting higher education institutions in developed as well as developing countries. However, for most institutions of higher education in developing countries the situation is acutely challenging because of the poor economic situation and the fact that the institutions have

usually not reached a stage of full institutional growth. They are in the process of upgrading their academic staff, of adding new departments and curricula, of completing facilities and of setting up a solid organisation with proper management and administration. These are complex, long-term, and costly processes.

Higher education institutions are expensive and require a considerable share of a nation's education budget (in some African countries 40% of the total education budget). The crisis in which many universities in developing countries, particularly in Africa, find themselves is characterised by a series of vicious circles and inter-related constraints<sup>3</sup>. Large-scale expansion of the higher education sector coupled with dwindling resources has led to a serious qualitative crisis in both higher education and research. The poor capacity for research and postgraduate education is contributing to a low standard of academic teaching and consequently poor recruitment to research. Most institutions are characterised by weak organisation and a time-consuming bureaucracy, poor management and planning capacity, and underdeveloped structures for administration. Limited financial and academic autonomy and strong state interference in a university's administration leads to short-term planning rather than planning for the long term. Scarce resources also prevent the universities from paying acceptable salaries to the academic staff, which results in high levels of staff attrition and staff having to seek additional sources of income. These conditions, combined with a lack of adequate libraries and documentation facilities, have resulted in poor quality teaching and research and high levels of student wastage.

Although institutions of higher education in other regions of the world may be slightly better off in terms of core funding or in terms of the economic prospects of their country, they are having problems that are comparable to those of African institutions. The current economic situation forces local governments and institutions to look for creative ways and options to keep the institutions alive and functioning. This may lead to unpopular measures being taken by governments to reform the financing of tertiary education and demands a more pro-active attitude from the institutions.

The circumstances as described above, do not augur well for the successful institutionalisation and sustainability of external assistance projects and programmes. The institutions often do not have the capacity and the means to perform their part of the deal or to continue the activities after projects have ended. Nevertheless, donor agencies continue to support collaboration programmes because they believe in the important role that universities play in producing the desperately needed high-level cadre for economic, political, and social development. Donor agencies and partner organisations are continuously reviewing their programmes in order to find improved or new approaches and procedures that will contribute to durable results in inter-institutional co-operation programmes.

In the first chapter of this book, the factors that influence the chances for sustainability of programme and project results are discussed and analysed based on the experiences of various international co-operative programmes. The MHO experiences are integrated in this discussion. The second chapter discusses the conditions for sustainability of inter-institutional co-operation programmes from various angles. The findings and conclusions are brought together in a table, which summarises the requirements for sustainability and the necessary action expected from the partners at the various levels of co-operation.



## 1.

### **Sustainability: an analysis of experiences**

#### *1.1. Typology of sustainability*

The term sustainability found its origin in environmental circles and signifies “development that meets the goals of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”<sup>4</sup>. Later on, the term was applied to a wide range of development activities as organisations embraced it as a concept equally applicable to political, economic, and social development aspects of society. The Norwegian Agency for Development Co-operation (NORAD), for example, defined a ‘political’ dimension of sustainability, which signifies the development of democratic social structures and methods of co-operation, the right of individuals to participate in the planning of measures that affect their own life situation in the place where they live, and the right of women to participate on equal terms with men<sup>5</sup>. An ‘economic’ dimension of sustainability includes satisfying the basic need for employment and income for both sexes by means of productive activity based on natural human resources. A ‘social’ dimension covers respect for social and cultural conditions, traditions, and ways of life. It also relates to the distribution of resources and the ability to fulfil such basic needs as education and health services for women, men, and children.

The adoption of the concept by many different organisations for different purposes has led to a variety of definitions, which reflect the various schools of thought in the development debate. Despite this varying use of the concept, for many donor agencies in development co-operation, ‘sustainability’ became an ultimate goal, not only at the level of the co-operation programmes, but also at the level of development projects. In short they focused their attention on the durable effects of such projects and programmes. A fairly common and economically oriented definition of sustainability is that used by the World Bank which sees it as the “ability of a project to maintain an acceptable level of net flow of benefits throughout its economic life” (World Bank, 1985:1).

Most definitions have in common that they are far from precise in defining criteria to measure the success of a project or programme in achieving sustainable results. And they tend to be confined to project outputs, while projects can result in effects that go beyond the immediate objectives of the project, in the form of influence, spill-over effects, etc. (Hillebrand et al., 1994).

In inter-university co-operation programmes, the term sustainability is used in various ways. The MHO programme has adopted a project output focus, defining sustainability as “the likelihood that the project’s final results will be sustained at an acceptable level after the external intervention has ended”<sup>6</sup>. A slightly broader definition was used in the evaluation of seven Norwegian-funded university collaboration programmes in Tanzania in 1996<sup>7</sup>. Sustainability was defined as the capability of further maintenance, development, and building on achieved results and enhanced competence after completion of the programme and the withdrawal of the Norwegian partner.

These definitions lack precision in terms of measurability and do not distinguishing between levels and types of sustainability. In co-operation

programmes, sustainability can - *grosso modo* - be classified according to the type of the expected results (outcomes) and the level at which the results are expected to be achieved. A common distinction in results according to type is that between financial and academic sustainability. Academic sustainability focuses on academic, managerial, and administrative knowledge and skills needed to continue a research or teaching programme. Financial sustainability stresses the availability of sufficient financial means to run these programmes<sup>8</sup>. Sometimes a third level is distinguished, that of technical sustainability, meaning that infrastructures and equipment provided by programmes can be operated and maintained by the institution.

With regard to the level of the expected results, a distinction can be made between sustainability at project level, institutional level and at the level of the inter-institutional co-operation. Depending on the objectives and emphasis of the co-operation programme, sustainability can aim at the continuation of project results, the building of a capable institution, or the forging of a viable relationship between the partners.

The three sets of distinctions can be linked, resulting in nine types of end- results of sustainable inter-institutional co-operation, as shown in the table below. In programmes like MHO, which aim to strengthen institutions in developing countries and to create long-term partnerships through the implementation of joint projects, sustainability covers all of these nine cells. In this respect the MHO definition of sustainability is misleading as it only relates to the end-results of the projects, and does not refer to end-results of institution building or those of creating long-term partnerships. Nevertheless, these end-results are implied in the aims of the programme.

<b>Level Type</b>	<b>Project</b>	<b>Institution</b>	<b>Co-operation</b>
<b>Academic</b>	Project activities have been institutionalised and the university is continuing project results after external intervention has ended.	A well organised and managed institution with capable staff that efficiently performs its mission.	Partners have established a true academic partnership with mutual benefits.
<b>Technical</b>	Hardware and software are being properly used and maintained.	An institutional set-up that guarantees the proper use and maintenance of infrastructures and equipment.	Partners maintain the technical infrastructure needed for their academic partnership.
<b>Financial</b>	Recurrent costs <sup>9</sup> are secured.	A sound financial basis.	Partners invest in their partnership.

In the literature and donor reports, sustainability is also usually discussed at project level only and predominantly from a financial perspective. However, there is a growing tendency to look at sustainability from a broader perspective. The strengthening of institutional capacities has gained prominence as one of the focal points of co-operation, because it was realised that good project results could not be achieved or sustained in a weakly organised and managed institution, and that weak institutions would not make interesting partners for the northern institutions.

Even in the past when donors sponsored individual projects, it was envisaged that the co-operation at project level would lead to long-term collaboration between the partners. Successful projects as well as long-term relationships have always been the main aspirations of the co-operation programmes. Inter-institutional co-operation or partnership has been, and still is, an aim in itself as well as an instrument for development.

The tendency to look at sustainability from a broader, programmatic, perspective seems a logical development because the types of sustainability listed above are not - as the matrix may suggest - distinct categories, but clearly related outcomes of interdependent processes.

In this book, sustainability is looked at from this broader, programmatic perspective. The analysis encompasses the results of the inter-institutional programmes at project, institutional, as well as co-operative (linkage) level. It also covers durable achievements with regard to improved competencies (academic, technical, and administrative) and practices, as well as to the funding of programme-initiated activities.

The sections that follow analyse a number of factors that influence the chances for sustainability at the three levels of co-operation. They depict the challenges and problems which the stakeholders, i.e. partner institutions, local governments, programme managers, and donor agencies face in achieving durable results for the programmes to which they have committed themselves.

## *1.2. Sustainability of project results*

Experience gained over the past decades with linkage and inter-institutional programmes indicates that four factors in particular have a strong influence on the sustainability of project activities. They are 1) successful implementation of the project, 2) institutionalisation of project activities, 3) funding potential of the project's outcomes or products, and 4) local ownership of the project.

### *Successful project implementation*

It has been demonstrated that successful and efficient implementation of project activities considerably contributes to the sustainability of project outcomes. Proper planning, the timely provision of quality inputs, professional management, and an enabling implementation environment form the keys to success. Project failures occur when one of more of these 'conditions' is not sufficiently met.

In many international co-operation projects delays in implementation do occur. A common reason for delays is the fact that counterpart staff is not made available (in time), as universities face difficulties in retaining (trained) staff, or because the staff does not have the time or the motivation to collaborate in the project. Poor salaries and/or heavy teaching loads affect their availability and motivation. Other reasons for delays in project implementation may have to do with poor planning of required inputs and insufficient internal communication, or with the fact that lack of 'ownership' on the part of the southern partner negatively impacts the institution's commitment to the project and its implementation.

Quite often, the implementation of projects could have yielded better results had they been planned more thoroughly and more realistically. The partners are often too eager to co-operate, and in the process tend to be too optimistic or too ambitious in view of what they realistically can deliver or afford under the prevailing circumstances in their respective institutions. The designs of programmes and projects are often not realistic in relation to the degree of the

recipient organisation's institutional development, and are not sufficiently planned in relation to technical, economic, and political feasibility criteria<sup>10</sup>. The above mentioned non-availability of counterpart staff for project implementation, for example, is quite common, should be known to the northern partners, and be incorporated in the planning exercise.

In order to base project proposals on a realistic analysis of the needs and capacities of the institution, a growing number of agencies request partner institutions in the South to link project proposals to a thorough institutional assessment. The assessment must analyse the institution's current strengths and weaknesses, set priorities for reforms and development, and delineate strategies to achieve the targeted institutional aims and objectives. In this way it is hoped that projects that are embedded in a wider institutional development plan will be identified. They can be organically linked to other development activities within the institution and can become more easily institutionalised within existing structures and procedures. In doing so, the chances are greater that project activities will become an integrated, sustained component of the institution.

The question then arises who should carry out such an institutional assessment? Should it be the prerogative of the administrators of the institution, the task of the institution as a whole, or should it also reflect the perspectives of external stakeholders and experts? In the MHO programme, the preparation of an institutional plan was part of the procedure to select a number of partner institutions in the South. Once selected as an MHO the institution was invited to identify areas of collaboration with Dutch institutions and to formulate projects. The recipient universities themselves carried out the institutional assessments. As it turned out, the management of the institutions primarily conducted the assessment. Most of the plans that resulted from these exercises concentrated on the improvement of teaching and research capacities. Only limited attention was paid to improvement of management capacities and the institutionalisation of project activities.

The MHO experience is not isolated. In Farrant's opinion (1997), strategic plans produced to date are strong on organisational structure and on corporate managerial issues such as incentives to retain staff and restore buildings. They are weak on what new, different, or enhanced 'outputs' the university can provide. The plans seem to reflect the perspectives of the administrative echelon of the institutions.

The process of purposely 'planning for sustainability' is not an easy one. For it to work well, it presupposes that the partners and the programme administration share the same concerns regarding durability of results and the same vision on the process to achieve those results. In the MHO programme the process of identifying co-operation projects on the basis of a rigorous strategic planning exercise is not outlined and it is Nuffic's policy not to interfere in this process as it could be seen as an act of paternalism and possibly undermine feelings of ownership. The partners identified areas and modes of co-operation without this guidance and without sufficient familiarity with the broader objectives of the programme. Not surprisingly, the partners did not pay attention to sustainability considerations. Neither did they particularly consider measures necessary at managerial or institutional level to increase the opportunity for sustainability of the projects.

The MHO experience teaches that mutuality of concerns and views cannot be taken for granted but needs to be created and nurtured over time. It is also an

example of a classic dilemma in development assistance programmes: i.e. how to compromise between the policy of giving programme ownership to the recipients while steering programme implementation and remaining accountable for its results. In retrospect, the Nuffic administrators of the programme admit that, while in its description the MHO programme is quite explicit on sustainability as one of the core objectives of the programme, the concept itself has not been made operational in concrete strategies, instruments, and activities at institutional or partnership level. It is only through a continuous process of probing during the appraisal of project proposals, during monitoring visits, review of progress reports and annual policy meetings with the vice-chancellors, that the partners begin to appreciate the necessity to address broader institutional issues for the sake of successful project implementation and sustainable results.

This experience underlines the importance of three critical conditions for the achievement of broader programme objectives: 1) strategic planning exercises need to be carefully planned and directed in order to incorporate these broader and long-term issues in the discussions, 2) in the planning exercises all stakeholders, including the donor and programme administration organisations need to participate, and 3) sustainability and institution-building issues need to be made operational and the responsibility for achieving these objectives must be shared among the stakeholders.

#### *Institutionalisation of project activities*

Successful institutionalisation of projects usually means that project activities have been integrated in the structure and system of the university and that the partner institution has been able to incorporate the recurrent cost of the project, including costs for maintenance and depreciation of equipment and facilities, in the regular university budget.

Institutionalisation assumes proper planning and administration on the part of the partner organisation. According to de Haan (1995) it is a slow, gradual, and unpredictable process demanding a high degree of political commitment and leadership, consistently sustained over time. It requires regular monitoring of the project's progress with respect to its institutionalisation, and development of ownership through systematic identification and involvement of principal stakeholders.

From their side, the northern partners should actively promote the institutionalisation of the projects they implement. However, northern partners find it difficult, if not impossible, to realise this laudable goal. Due to the time-bound delivery schedule of project outputs, the implementers feel obliged to meet operational deadlines as planned. The project budget is directly related to this plan of operations, and to specifications of the personnel inputs needed for implementation. Delays in project implementation create problems for the northern partners regarding the provision of staff inputs and the profitability of activities. It is in their interest to avoid these delays and consequently to opt for measures that minimise these risks. Quite naturally, this leads to situations in which the northern partners take charge of administrative and managerial aspects of projects, compensate for shortcomings on the part of the partner institutions or counterparts, and give priority to short-term rather than long-term objectives. Quite often they take on tasks and responsibilities that are beyond the requirements of the project, and delay the handing over of project tasks and responsibilities to the final stage of the project. None of these attitudes, although

understandable from the implementers' perspective and possibly imposed on them by the project's mode of operation, contributes to the proper institutionalisation of projects.

Strategic and indicative planning exercises can provide a good and necessary starting point for the institutionalisation of projects. When a planning exercise has been conducted institution-wide and a consensus exists about the usefulness and importance of a project, the chances for institutionalisation will be far better than in cases where this process of discussion and consultation has been omitted. However, this cannot be considered a rule, as some cases in the MHO programme demonstrate. Sometimes, the influence of strong, even autocratic leadership may also contribute to successful institutionalisation as long as the leader remains in office for some time and the staff accepts and supports his/her authority.

The MHO experience also underlines the need to spell out the institutionalisation process beforehand, by laying down the process of handing over project tasks and responsibilities in guidelines, prescriptions, or milestones, and the need for rigorous monitoring of the institutionalisation process by the programme administrators.

In most collaboration programmes, the partner organisations contribute in funds and kind, but procedures for the budgeting of costs borne by the partner organisation are not explicitly stated. Inclusion of counterpart funding in the regular budget of the institution can be seen as an important indicator of the commitment to the institutionalisation of a project. Nuffic has never requested for an inspection of the institutions' regular budget in order to verify that allocations have been made to the projects, but has been contemplating to include this procedure during monitoring visits.

#### *Funding potential of project outcomes and products*

Securing sufficient funds for the continuation of activities after project termination is an essential aspect of sustainability. For this to happen, wherever possible and feasible, the partners need to create an interest in the projects' outputs and services among potential clients and sponsors. This should not be postponed until the last year of the project but be included in the project from the start. Interest can be raised in various ways, e.g. by conducting joint research with outsiders, by organising seminars to inform the wider public about the project activities, by organising training courses for potential target groups, by publications and public relations.

Looking at the continuation of a number of projects, an interesting question arises: does the source of funding for the continuation of activities matter when deciding on project sustainability? Is it, for example, correct to consider a project sustainable if, after funding by donor A has come to an end, the activities continue with funds from donor B? Or, is this, to the contrary, convincing evidence of non-sustainability? This dilemma surfaced during an evaluation of Dutch-funded university linkage programmes in Southern Africa (IOV, 1993). The evaluators found that, after completion of the projects, the majority of the activities had been continued with support from other donors or other Dutch funds. On the question on the sustainability of the projects, the evaluators could not decide whether to call this situation a form of sustainability or not and refrained from answering the question.

It is an interesting question indeed, which leads to a negative answer when the criterion for sustainability is defined as ‘supported from the institution’s own resources’ and to a positive response when the criterion is ‘capable of continuing the activities’. In the last option, resources to continue the activities have been secured, but they are not necessarily their “own”. But what are “own resources” in terms of a university budget - also that of northern institutions - which is usually made up of government support, grants, donations, fellowships, etc? Even if other donors fund the activities, the argument can be made that the institutions have shown their commitment to continuing the activities and have also shown the capacity to attract other funding. This might well be regarded as proof of academic sustainability.

This is a debatable issue, confusing donors as well as institutions. It seems important that donors and partners come to an agreement on the interpretation of financial sustainability of project results when they enter into a project or programme.

Parallel to finding markets for project products and services, it is necessary to properly manage the endeavours to generate external revenues. Making use of the income-generating potential of university staff, products, and services requires a set of regulations regarding staff time allocations and the utilisation of revenues. Some universities or faculties have issued regulations specifying the maximum amount of time that staff can spend on contract research. They have also introduced a formula to divide the revenues, or set up a central office to coordinate and manage contractual services. In any case, an optimum balance needs to be found in the allocation of staff time to teaching, research and income-generating activities. Likewise an optimum formula must be developed in sharing the revenues between the institution, the faculty, and the staff members who carry out the work. The reward for the staff members is regarded as a necessary incentive to keep them motivated in their work and position.

### *Ownership of the project*

As mentioned above, intense and systematic participation by the institution and stakeholders in the project’s planning, management, and implementation significantly contributes to the development of local ‘ownership’. For ‘ownership’ to develop, the key participants in the programme must feel responsibility for the success or failure of the enterprise. Such responsibility is bred by authority and control of the means to make the project happen. At the same time, it carries with it the freedom to make mistakes (DAE, 1994a: 18).

Some donors agree on signing contractual agreements with the partner institution in the South and to give full responsibility of the programme/project to the recipient. This forms part of a strategy to stimulate the partner in developing an accountable and efficient financial management and administrative capability.

Other donors are still reluctant to (partially) transfer the administrative and financial ownership of linkages to the southern partners, because they are under growing pressure to justify how development assistance funds are being spent. Also, in the MHO programme, contracts used to be signed with the northern partners. The rectors of the southern universities in the MHO programme successfully objected to this arrangement as being contradictory to the claim of the programme as being ‘demand-driven’ and contributing to institution building. Nuffic then decided to introduce tri-partite contracts between Nuffic, the southern, and the northern partners.

Granting full responsibility to the southern partners is easier said than done. Cumbersome rules and regulations put southern partners at a disadvantage compared to their northern partners. The northern partners are usually quite familiar with the system and, consequently, tend to take the lead in project formulation, administration and reporting, thereby diminishing the opportunities for the development of local ownership.

Donors should be prepared to critically look at the often-complex nature of their procedural requirements. There are considerable practical problems involved, such as synchronising the financial reporting schedules of donor agency and recipient organisation, and the submission of accountancy reports that are acceptable to both parties.

It is clear that donors face a dilemma in this respect. On the one hand, they have to cope with higher levels of accountability to taxpayers at home. On the other hand, they advocate the delegation of responsibilities to institutions in the South for the sake of capacity building and local ownership. These conflicting trends result in a widening gap between a donor's policy and practice (de Gast, 1995).

### *1.3. Sustainability at institutional level*

In ideal terms, an institution can be called sustainable if it is well organised and managed by capable staff that efficiently performs its mission, and if it has a sound financial basis. Not many institutions of higher education in developing countries fit this description. External and internal situations do influence the chances of an institution to become or remain sustainable. The main factors that influence sustainability at the institutional level are the external environment and the institutional set-up. They are discussed in detail below.

#### *An enabling external environment*

In the early years of independence, the mission of the university in developing countries was self-evident and undisputed. It was to provide high-level manpower and conduct useful research. More recently, the institutions have become the object of different, and sometimes inconsistent and competing, perceptions of what they are supposed to be doing. Employers, the ministry of education, the government more generally, parents, faculty members, and students themselves all have a different view of what the university should be accomplishing. Sorting out these different perceptions and accommodating them in an institutional form (strategic planning) is a prerequisite for a meaningful university system (Court, 1995).

The rapid changes in the economic and political arena of the last decade have had a major influence on the role of universities in society and the relationship between government and education institutions. The functions of universities proliferated at a time when public resources needed to support higher education were shrinking and the role of the public sector as an employer of university graduates diminished (Eisemon, 1991: 43). The costs for higher education absorbed a disproportionate share of education budgets, while the effects on national development were difficult to pinpoint and the universities were regularly blamed for political and social unrest. A process of rethinking the role and financing modalities of higher education was set in motion all over the world, but especially in developing countries where economic situations have put governments and institutions under great pressure to try and combine efforts aimed at survival with those aimed at reform.

The universities in Africa may serve as an example. Because of the marked decline of the economies of most sub-Saharan African countries, the funds released to universities by governments are (except in the case of the University of Botswana) far from enough to meet the financial needs of universities. In the 1990-91 academic year, for example, the Universities of Zambia, Ghana (Legon), and Makerere received 79, 53 and 34 per cent of the funds requested from their respective governments. As a result, these universities have been unable to pursue a coherent planning process and have been forced to cut down on some of their programmes and basic necessities such as transportation and communication, and to reduce practical learning sessions (Mwiria, 1992: 16).

Universities are per definition expensive and are financially demanding on the decreasing national education budgets (in some African countries 40% of the total education budget). Moreover, there has not been much consistency and stability in the level of government support from one year to the other. Many of these universities are funded on a monthly basis, which makes it difficult for universities to plan ahead – and more so, because the likely levels of funding are not always predictable.

This situation requires unpopular measures to be taken by governments to reform the financing of tertiary education and to demand a more pro-active attitude by the universities involved. A concerted effort by governments, universities, and other stakeholders is needed to successfully implement such reform. The universities will have to play a pro-active role and accept their obligation of accountability to both government and the wider society if they want continued support from these constituencies. Maintaining regular contacts with a variety of types of clients (government, NGOs, private sector), and keeping abreast of their changing needs, are powerful means to achieving satisfactory task performance (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Netherlands, 1997).

In exploring strategies and options to improve the performance of systems for higher in developing countries, the World Bank report *Higher Education - The Lessons of Experience* (1994), focuses on four main directions for reform:

- 1) Greater differentiation of higher education institutions, including the development of private institutions
- 2) Diversification of funding sources for public higher education
- 3) A redefinition of the role of the state in higher education, with greater emphasis on institutional autonomy and accountability
- 4) An emphasis on the importance of policies explicitly designed to give priority to quality and equity issues

According to Mwiria (1992), the strengthening of Africa's institutions of higher learning is strongly linked to the mediation of both internal conflicts and conflicts between universities and governments. Apart from resources and a favourable political climate, the resolution of this type of conflict forms a key factor in determining the extent to which Africa's institutions of higher learning will remain afloat. Processes that contribute to such a resolution include increased democratisation of decision-making, increased formal and informal contacts between the various stakeholders, and efforts by government to restrain from directing university affairs without sacrificing the need for these institutions to be accountable to them and the wider society.

To be successful in reforming the higher education systems, the government's responsibility should shift from control to providing an enabling policy

environment for both public and private higher education institutions. In this respect, governments should stimulate these institutions to meet national training and research needs efficiently (Salmi, 1994). This would also help to improve the perceptions of the community at large about the university and its services.

### *The institutional set-up*

For more than a decade, universities in developing countries, especially those in sub-Saharan Africa have been experiencing a deep crisis characterised mainly by a rapid growth in student enrolment and a decrease of resources. The rapid increase in student enrolment did not take into consideration the inadequacy of facilities, scientific and pedagogical materials, and the necessary rise in the number and quality of lecturers. This contributed to the weakening of scientific and pedagogical skills and to increased failure rates, repetition of classes by students, and training costs. The rapid increase in student enrolment also created a major imbalance in the distribution of students per field of training, with the humanities and general studies losing preference. This then led to the widening of the gap between training and employment and to the worsening of graduate employment (Shabani, 1995).

According to the SAREC report, *The ownership and cultivation of knowledge; the rationale for Swedish support to universities in developing countries* (1992), these factors have landed the African universities in a series of vicious circles:

- The large-scale expansion of the higher education sector coupled with dwindling resources has led to a serious qualitative crisis in both higher education and research. Poor capacity for research and postgraduate education contributes to a low standard of academic teaching and consequently to poor recruitment for research. A weak academic culture fails to support a tradition of knowledge and the production of ideas. Standards are further impaired because the teaching staff is given neither the time nor the resources for research. The academic environment is being eroded and is further undermined by an increasing 'contract mode' for research, and by the decreasing real wages of the teaching staff.
- A lack of national resources targeted at research helps produce intellectual and financial dependence on external sources for research development. Pockets of good research are developed, but no internal research tradition. The isolated pockets of research are wholly dependent on external financing. In the absence of internal funds for research, there is no system of peer review, nor of an internal academic tradition being developed. The researchers become wholly dependent on external policy for the financing, selection, and assessment of research projects, and also on external contacts for academic exchange.
- Poor capacity for management and administration often leads to projects being managed and co-ordinated externally, which further undermines the institution's own capacity to plan the use of its resources and its opportunities to implement policy decisions.

In institutions for higher education and in the education sector in general, staff is seen as the most crucial factor of the whole operation. The effectiveness and efficiency of the system relies on the competency and motivation of the

managers, the teachers, and the support staff. In many higher education institutions in developing countries shortages of qualified local staff exist, at managerial as well as teaching and research level. Staff development programmes attempt to close the gaps with projects and fellowship programmes. However, in many countries the institutions have difficulties in retaining their staff when greener pastures are within reach. The terms of service of the institutions are often not up to the expectations of the faculty and certainly not competitive as far as salaries are concerned compared to what the private sector can offer.

Many institutions in developing countries simply lack the money to improve the staff's terms of service or to establish a system of incentives. Their funds are often insufficient to support research, professional interaction through conferences and international meetings, or staff development. They rely on donor funds and projects to support this type of activities. This situation confronts many donors with a number of dilemmas. How can sustainability be an objective of co-operation under such conditions? Is it realistic to expect successful project implementation without addressing these institutional bottlenecks? Can support be stopped after the project period without risking the collapse of what has been built up by the project? SIDA/SAREC is one of the few donors that is prepared under certain conditions to pay supplementary salaries to local project staff in order to ensure that project activities will be implemented and staff will be retained for the institution.

Especially for poor partner institutions in the south, external support programmes provide instruments that enable them to retain staff. Education and training, research and publication opportunities, access to libraries, and contacts with colleagues abroad form necessary incentives for the staff, which the partner institution itself cannot easily provide. Although the results of these opportunities are only sustainable as long as the staff stays with the institution and/or the knowledge and skill are applied in a relevant manner, they are instrumental in attracting or retaining the counterpart staff that is needed to implement the project and carry on with these activities after the external support has stopped.

In any case, governments and institutions of higher education will have to work together to improve the financial situation of the education institutions. If government funds are not sufficient they should look elsewhere. Possibilities include more support by donors, non-governmental organisations, and the private sector. Besides, institutions of higher education should exploit their own professional capacity for the generation of institutional funds (Mwiria, 1992).

At the same time, the institutions of higher education should better manage the funds that they receive. Many institutions in the South do not have the cadre, know-how or means to professionally manage these complex enterprises. Systems of administration, personnel management, and financial management are inadequate or outdated. Better management of funds could be achieved through tighter accounting procedures, training programmes for university accountants and other administrators, a system of incentives that recognises good managers and earmarks them for promotion and further training, as well as through regular departmental meetings which review progress made and analyse processes. The management of limited physical facilities could be improved by using them more intensively and by experimenting with other instructional media and delivery systems such as distance learning (Mwiria, 1992).

The MHO programme objectives emphasise this need for strong institutional capacities at managerial and administrative levels in order to provide a conducive institutional environment for the projects but, as has been pointed out earlier, university managers seldom see improvements in management and administration as a priority area when negotiating donor assistance. It needs an outsider with authority or other convincing means to convince the management of the fact that good administration and management is one of the key factors in institution building and successful programme implementation.

The MHO experience has taught that the strengthening of central management and administration needs to be addressed through specific projects and the need for these projects either has to be spelled out in the strategic plans or, if that is not the case, ought to be identified in a dialogue between the management of the institutions and the administrators of the support programme.

#### *1.4. Sustainability at the co-operation level*

Twinning agreements between universities seem to be more effective when there are mutual benefits, when both institutions have the capacity to manage the relationship efficiently, when the link is between similar institutions or departments, and when there is the possibility of a longer term capacity-building commitment (Salmi, 1991:19). Considerable financial resources are required to realise good intentions, especially where it is a question of co-operation between institutions in a rich and a poor country (Dickson, 1988). In such collaboration, the benefits are quite different for the partners and the co-operation will be extremely unbalanced. Poor and deprived institutions depend on the linkages for the training of their junior staff, for teaching material and equipment, and for a host of other things. In these cases, the link agreements are, almost without exception, as unequal as would be expected. This remains so despite efforts to include clauses suggesting reciprocity (Brock-Utne, 1995).

According to Lagura (1995), the different levels of competency between partners requires projects to start at the level of capacity of the southern institutions. Northern partners should make an honest appraisal of their own state of affairs and be willing to join their partners in walking through the process of developing an appropriate institutional culture for research and technology. Therefore, inter-institutional co-operation with partners in the South should be developmental and evolutionary in character; assistance must be process, rather than merely output, oriented.

Symmetry of relations is stimulated by sharing the responsibility for the programme, including planning of activities and administration of financial aspects. However, in quite a number of collaboration programmes, the bulk of the responsibilities lie with the northern partners. Project allocated funds are usually not under the control of the developing institutions.

Decades of inter-university co-operation programmes in various forms have made clear that the successful linkage requires the participation and collaboration of both department/faculty and central university administration, in the North as well as in the south. The co-operation requires a strong commitment by the (northern) university that should be anchored not only in the enthusiasm and dedication of individual staff members responsible for project implementation, but also be given shape in organisational terms.

The MHO approach stimulates proper planning of co-operative agreements and areas of co-operation. The institutions in the South can select suitable Dutch

partners themselves. Hence, the partnerships are based on a mix of shared interests and compatibility, which could be a sound basis for long-term relationships. The process also stimulates commitment on the side of the institution in the developing country, while the Dutch partners are forced to show a real interest in the programme.

In principle, the MHO programme allows for an evolutionary process of co-operation between the partners, but none of the linkages has adopted this route. In general, the projects can be said to be rather ambitious, thus shifting the attention from developing feasible co-operation programmes to meeting deadlines and solving problems in project implementation. Enthusiasm, financial interests, and misjudgements may have been of influence in the excessive ambition of the plans, in addition to the fact that the institutions are informed beforehand on how much money is available for the co-operation projects.

It must be acknowledged that, over the years, the scene of inter-university co-operation has considerably changed due to changing economic conditions. This has not only affected institutions in the South but also in the North. In the North, the dictates of efficiency and research productivity are forcing individuals to assess how best to utilise scarce time in ways that directly translate into changes of improved personal and departmental rankings. In different ways both tendencies have put at risk some of the traditional benefits of conventional academic visit or exchange programmes (King, 1995). Also, considerations to generate income are becoming increasingly important at the expense of moral and social attitudes.

The changing financial situation that universities face these days, implies the risk that universities on both sides become more dependent on donor money to fund their core business. Some of the poorer universities in developing countries already depend on externally funded projects for a considerable percentage of their budgets. For a number of institutions in the North development assistance programmes are an 'important business' and source of income. In an increasingly commercial environment, education institutions are forced to treat knowledge, research, and teaching as commodities that represent a commercial value and they have to put a price tag on them in order to sustain their operations. This evokes the danger that partner institutions stretch the external funding of co-operation projects as long as possible. The chances for continuation of activities by the partners after the external funding has come to an end are likewise threatened. In other words, the current financial context in which universities have to operate does not augur well for achieving sustainable results of inter-institutional co-operation programmes at partnership level.

In this context, funding conditions of programmes may have an influence on the sustainability of the projects. Some programmes, like the MHO, fund all inputs of the co-operation programmes, including the time inputs of the northern partner. Other programmes primarily fund activities and investments, and the northern partners receive a partial compensation for their inputs. This is the case in the Norwegian-funded "NUFU programme", the DFID-funded "UK Higher Education Links Scheme" and the Belgian programme called "Institutionele Universitaire Samenwerking" funded by the VLIR (Vlaamse Interuniversitaire Raad). These programmes expect a relatively high contribution from the northern partners.

Both systems seem to have their pros and cons. Full funding of the northern contributions easily attracts interested partners and enables the Southern partner to shop for the best match in the North. This stimulates ownership in the South

and is likely to contribute to effective project implementation. However, the risk may be that the focus will be primarily on project implementation and that the partnership will wither when funds dry up. Partial funding of the northern contributions has the advantage that northern institutions participate for other than monetary reasons. Although this seems to provide a better ground for lasting partnerships, it may cause problems at the project identification and implementation level. Not many northern partners may be in a position or have the interest to enter into co-operation that may prove costly. As a consequence, those that are interested tend to be much more selective in the areas in which they want to co-operate. If not in funds, there needs to be compensation in research results or other benefits. In this set-up, the northern partners tend to have a greater influence on the identification of the areas of co-operation, which may not necessarily coincide with the priorities that the southern partners have in mind. This imbalance in interests is also not a perfect ground for long-lasting partnerships.

There is no hard data to compare the impact of both models on the sustainability of the partnerships, but it seems that both models lack sufficient guarantees for achieving sustainable partnerships, though for different reasons.

### *1.5. Donor policies and the sustainability of co-operation programmes*

Donor policies change over time due to shifts in interests and changes in insights. This happens at the macro level of overall international co-operation strategies as well as at sector and sub-sector programme levels. These levels influence each other. Experiences with policies at sub-sector levels lead to adaptations of macro-level policies and, vice-versa, sub-sector level policies follow changes in overall policy strategies. Changes in donor policies, especially when they occur abruptly, have an effect on the sustainability of the results of ongoing projects and programmes.

Over the years donor interest in aid to education has shifted from basic education to higher education and from vocational education back to basic education. Since the early nineties, relatively more funds have been directed at primary education with the argument that the rate of return on investments in primary education is higher than that for any other level of education<sup>11</sup>. In absolute terms though, the investments to higher education in developing countries have also increased. Gradually, the policies of most donor agencies concerning higher education have shifted from project-oriented interventions to a programme-oriented approach, with more flexible ways of financing and administration and a focus on institution building.

At a macro-level, donor thinking nowadays is sharply focused on the so-called sector-wide approach, an approach that in its ultimate consequence means a radical break from present strategies and modalities of international co-operation. It could well signify the end of regular co-operation programmes, including the inter-institutional co-operation programmes. But paradoxically, the formula of inter-institutional co-operation may well be an essential instrument in making the sector approach succeed.

What does the sector approach entail? Over the past few years development banks and donor agencies have been discussing ways and means of improving the chances for effective and sustainable development by co-ordinating assistance among donors, by pooling donor support, by enhancing local ownership of assistance programmes, and by taking the sector rather than the project as focal

point of intervention. The characteristics of the sector programmes comprise those identified by Harold (1995) for the World Bank Sector Investment Program, and are:

- *sector-wide in scope*
- *based on a clear sector strategy and framework*
- *(all) local stakeholders in charge*
- *all main donors signed on participating in the funding*
- *common implementation*
- *reliance on local capacity*

Sector programmes (SPs) are ambitious programmes that cover all public expenditures in the sector and support all the activities, policy, and institutional issues that are the responsibility of the ministry of the particular sector. Governments are expected to be in the driving seat of the process, and take prime responsibility for defining strategies, policies, and activities. Donors are expected to play a more supporting role, co-ordinating closely in the appraisal and monitoring of the programmes (Williams, 1999). Sector programmes have been or are being developed in about twenty countries. The results so far obtained are mixed, revealing the potential but also the weaknesses of SPs as they develop.

It is interesting to note that many of the observed weaknesses in the SPs are similar to those that plague inter-institutional co-operation programmes. Not surprising, when one considers that co-operation programmes that aim to address institution-wide issues are in a sense 'mini' sector programmes.

Also in the sector programmes, the pressure on agencies to allocate and disburse funds overrides the principle of ownership and partnership. Other bottlenecks, very similar to the ones discussed above with respect to the inter-institutional co-operation programmes are:

- Limited possibilities for open dialogue and implementation of policies in accordance with the wishes of the recipient country because the donor organisations have to operate within the framework of the development policies of their own country and because the demand for transparency and accountability towards the home Government has increased substantially in recent years.
- Incompatibility of administrative and financial procedures between the partners' organisations. There are problems in harmonising national (internal) and donor (external) funding and administrative procedures with the requirements of the recipient country.
- The ownership of the sector programme is usually restricted to government circles. There is little involvement of non-governmental stakeholders, regional or district authorities, or beneficiaries.
- Partner governments lack the required capacities to formulate or to accept appropriate sector policies, or are unwilling to involve donors in sensitive political issues or to deal with a consolidated donors front.
- The size of budget support is usually so large that dependency is difficult to avoid. SPs are management-intensive both for donors and recipient governments. They are complex and require considerable financial management and administrative capacity.

- The reliance on expatriate consultants remains considerable because, in most cases, there is not the institutional capacity to immediately cope with an integrated plan for the sector.

As far as the donor countries are concerned, high expectations exist on what recipient countries are supposed to do under the sector programme support within a very limited time span. The recipient governments are invited to write national plans and sector analyses, which receive increased attention by donor agencies as the preliminary step to design and formulation of sector master plans in developing countries. However, with many partners in the South, the absorptive capacity for sharing information and implementing findings into decision-making is still very limited.

The experiences with the sector-wide approach to date clearly indicate that a three-pronged method is needed to successfully adopt the approach and achieve its goals: national leadership needs to be strengthened, donor practices adjusted, and local capacity and expertise built.

National governments need to be capable of pursuing nationally defined policies and of entertaining more equal relationships with donors and funding agencies. At the same time, agencies have to evaluate and critically analyse the policies and practices of their aid operations. If government-determined aid co-ordination is to take place as is presently discussed, current agency procedures are likely to be as inhibiting as the lack of government capacity, which is often identified as the primary obstacle to improvement (Buchert, 1999). Local capacity needs to be rallied and developed in order to play an active role in the full sector programme cycle from conception through completion (Samoff, 1999).

To achieve this, capacity building at various levels is a necessity. At the national level policy management capacities need to be developed and adapted to the local realities and circumstances. If countries in the South are supposed to play a more pro-active role in defining their own development co-operation policies and in ensuring that operational modalities reflect local needs and conditions, then governmental actors require new capacities and skills to adjust to their changed roles. The building of indigenous capacity is essential and should be done systematically. This applies to all echelons within the government apparatus and, therefore, fits into a general process of decentralisation of government services.

Capacity building will also be necessary among the northern participants in the process (donor agencies as well as embassies) to enable them to manage new challenges. One of these challenges is related to the fact that there is no blueprint for SPs yet. Each selected recipient country, as related to the selected sector(s) in its country, requires a tailor-made SP. Staff among the bilateral aid agencies in the donor countries often do not have the necessary know-how, experience, and expertise to give shape to this tailor-made support.

The core of the problem in developing countries is the scarcity of human resources, their non-optimal utilisation due to institutional constraints, and the lack of access to necessary information. This observation points at the need for (continued) support to capacity-building programmes, either through training, the provision of fellowships, or the strengthening of national training and education institutions.

Although the need for capacity building in making sector programmes succeed seems obvious, it is not yet clear whether the national governments will identify this as a priority for sector support. And if they do, whether they will opt for the

current inter-institutional co-operations as a formula for capacity building. The southern partners or ministries may decide that co-operation needs to be continued on a different footing, in a way that gives the southern partner the power to decide on the themes, modalities, and on the partner institutions with which to co-operate.

At this point in time, we can only speculate about the influence of the sector approach on the scope and formats of inter-institutional co-operation and how this will influence the sustainability of the results in the long run. It will be interesting to see whether institutions in the South will opt for a continuation of long-term linkage programmes or a spectrum of fellowships, infra-structural projects and equipment purchases. All will depend on the strength and capacity of the institution's management, the quality of the internal planning and decision-making processes, and the level of involvement that the donor agencies take on.

Whatever the modality, local education institutions need support to enable them to generate the type of capacity that is most needed for national development. According to the report *Caring for the Future* (1996), higher education has a pivotal role of its own to play because institutions of higher learning influence the entire education system and, through it (whether directly or not), all of society. The quest for national development thus necessitates a well-developed system of higher education.

## 2.

### **Aiming for sustainability**

The previous chapter has made clear that sustainability is intricately linked to models of conditions, commitment, and co-operation. Conditions, as presented by national circumstances and institutional capacities. Commitment of the parties that have an influence on sustainability. Models of development co-operation that promote or hamper the achievement of sustainable results.

In the following paragraphs, a number of requirements are discussed that need to be fulfilled in order to increase the chances for sustainability of inter-institutional co-operation programmes.

#### *2.1 Conditions: the need for fertile soil*

Allegorically, development assistance can be seen as a seed that is planted in the soil of a developing country or institution. Whatever will become of the seed primarily depends on the quality and characteristics of the soil and the care that is taken to let the seed grow into a plant. When donors and recipients discuss development assistance, disproportional attention is given to the quality and quantity of the seeds and far less attention to the condition of the soil. Why is that so? Because it is easier for all parties involved. In this way, the discussion of controversial issues of internal policy, priorities, and politics can be avoided. For the recipients it is easier to have donor funds and donor expertise solve specific problems (short-term solutions) than trying, by internal measures, to address the causes of the problems.

This type of short-term support may be counterproductive in the sense that it often delays and hinders the recipient country and the recipient university institution from taking necessary long-term decisions. It enhances the risk of jeopardising - however good the intentions may be - the long-term development and, hence, the sustainability of university programmes and development at large.

Sustainability of inter-institutional co-operation programmes is inextricably linked to an enabling external environment and a conducive institutional set-up. Projects cannot survive in an institutional environment that does not provide adequate financial, technical, and administrative support. Likewise, institutions cannot function well without proper political and financial backing. National governments have the responsibility to create clarity about the position and importance of higher education in the context of national priorities and aspirations. If not in place, governments ought to formulate and execute a clear and coherent policy. These policies should match the available financial resources, so that the government can provide the institutions with stable and reliable funding.

Similarly, the institutions have the responsibility of undertaking strategic planning exercises within the boundaries of the policy framework, allocated budgets, and economic margins. This will create the necessary clarity about the mission of the institution, the share that the government can provide in fulfilling this mission, and the required contribution from external sources.

These strategic planning exercises at national as well as institutional level require capacities in analysis, planning, monitoring, and evaluation, which may not be available. However, policies and strategic plans are a prerequisite for the optimum co-ordination of available resources, including donor support, for development. They form the basis for sustainable results of development efforts.

In inter-institutional co-operation, the preparation of the soil should receive serious attention in order to enhance the chances for sustainability of programmes and projects. Ideally, the northern partner institutions and donor agencies need to give higher priority to their role as partners to help the institutions in the South and national governments respectively in designing scenarios for broader reform at institutional as well as national level. On such foundations, their traditional role as providers of goods, cash, and services can be expected to lead to more long-term sustainable results.

Evidently, this is a more difficult and sensitive role than merely providing expatriate teachers, books, and infrastructure. The question may be raised whether the donor agencies and northern institutions are capable and willing to face this challenge, and whether the local governments and partner institutions in the South will allow them to assume this role as a partner. This aspect is particularly critical these days now that the sector approach is gaining ground and donors – even more than in the past – prefer to refrain from what could be labelled as ‘interfering’ in national decision-making processes.

Nevertheless, there definitively is a need to carefully examine “the soil” before starting an institutional support programme, and to select a plot with “fertile” or at least “suitable soil” for this purpose. In practice, this soil survey does not get enough attention. One of the reasons being that a careful selection of candidate institutions with the right potential for the programme’s objectives tends to be in conflict with other political priorities and ideals. One of these ideals is that support should go to those countries and institutions that are most in need of support, i.e. the resource poor that can barely function without external support. Inevitably these are the institutions with the worst financial situations, the weakest administrative and managerial systems, and the lowest potential for sustainability. These institutions would hardly qualify as suitable candidates in linkage programmes if donors were looking for institutions with promising institutional environments.

Other reasons why programmes do not always land in the best soil have to do with commitments made under predecessor programmes, political preferences and priorities, and institutional interests. The MHO programme also suffers from such incongruity between idealistic objectives and practical realities. Although coined as a new programme, it is a modification of predecessor programmes of inter-university collaboration and, therefore, had to accommodate commitments to old but still continuing projects and mediate between a newly proposed demand-oriented identification process and an entrenched supply-driven orientation of Dutch institutions. This led to a number of uncomfortable compromises in programme execution. For example, based on their existing experience with inter-institutional co-operation programmes, the Dutch institutions would take the lead in the process of identifying and nominating possible MHO partners in the South. In order not to lose the benefit of experience gained and investments made in the past, priority was given to analysing whether existing co-operation programmes could be continued and adjusted in order to fit within the objectives and policy principles of the MHO programme. This procedure of building as far as possible

on existing co-operation projects and experiences, together with the policy directive that half of the funds should be spent in Africa, resulted in the selection of a number of weak institutions (in terms of financial situation and management) that actually did not fully meet with the criteria set for selection. As a result of these decisions and procedures, the programme started with a number of partner institutions in the South, which were more preoccupied with institutional survival than with institutional strengthening.

Sustainability was not a strong criterion in the selection process either. Although all institutions had to make institutional plans, experience has shown that most of these plans painted an unrealistic picture of the institutional capacities and possibilities. With hindsight, it is clear that this could have been avoided by insisting on an in-depth SWOT<sup>12</sup> analysis prepared by or with the assistance of independent outsiders from the country or region, and that, prior to the nomination of the institutions, a thorough analysis of the countries' development needs and opportunities should have been made.

## *2.2 Commitments*

The success and sustainability of projects not only depends on the provision of sufficient and appropriate means in a favourable environment, but also on the commitment of those who participate in the planning and implementation of those projects. The importance of the commitment of people as the most determining factor in development projects has been well demonstrated over the years. It is therefore crucial to generate this commitment at the start of the project, to nurture it during project implementation and - for the sake of sustainability - to maintain it after completion of the project.

Successes in inter-university linkages are not the sole making, nor the exclusive responsibility, of the collaborating partner institutions. The partners co-operate on a stage and according to rules that are designed and defined by national governments and donor agencies. As a result, four - not two - major participants influence the success and sustainability of international co-operation programmes in higher education. They are a) the national governments in the South, b) the partner institutions in the South, c) the partner institutions in the North, and d) the donor agencies and their intermediary organisations. They all play a role, be it direct or indirect, individually or together, in the success or failure of the projects and programmes.

The interests of the recipients in the university co-operation programme are clear-cut, professionally as well as financially. However, commitment is another matter, as it is measured against the degree of effort and sacrifice an institution is prepared to make in order to turn an enterprise into a success. Tangible indicators for the commitment of the institution to sustain a project are the level and speed of institutionalisation of project activities, the allocation of funds to cover the recurrent costs of the project, and the success in providing counterpart staff to take over the project activities. At co-operation level, commitment is evident in the willingness to invest resources in programmes of collaborative research and exchange of students and staff.

The commitment required from the northern institutions at project level is of a different nature. They can be better described as a professional attitude linked to righteous motives as well as commercial interests. Through the projects, the northern partners are expected to bring the partner institution to a level where they become interesting candidates for equal partnership. Some donors provide

almost full financial compensation according to commercial rates to northern partners to implement this phase of co-operation. After that, the situation drastically changes. The co-operating institutions have to find other funds to continue the co-operation as equal partners. Northern partners have difficulty in understanding why donors only support the first leg, which often is regarded as an asymmetrical 'relief' programme, and not the more symmetrical follow-up co-operations (Dulfer, 1995).

During the implementation of the projects, the financial and technical character of their contributions considerably taints the commitment of the northern institutions. The northern partners have been contracted to provide technical assistance, training, and equipment. The projects pay for collaborative research and for the exchange of staff. The projects also make it possible to send students from the North to the South. During the implementation of the projects, the northern partners' commitment is measured in terms of efficiency in project implementation and in the use of the given opportunities to conduct activities that fall beyond the immediate project objectives.

After project completion, the northern partners' commitment takes another turn. The northern partners have to change attitudes, and transform a teacher-student relationship into an equal academic partnership. From being providers of technical assistance, they must become research and exchange partners. At that level, the commitment of the northern partners to maintain co-operation is measured against their willingness to invest from their own resources in collaborative activities, or to find other funding that will enable them to do so.

It is generally agreed that true co-operation is based on a reciprocal relationship with mutual benefits. Co-operation will not be sustained unless the partners see those benefits clearly. The benefits need not necessarily be in balance in financial terms, as long as the partners are satisfied with their returns. For the southern partners the emphasis may be on access to information, fellowships, and research facilities, while the northern partners may be interested in access to research data, promising researchers, and field research opportunities for their own students.

A question that was raised in first chapter and still needs to be answered is how various conditions of financing influences the forging of long-term partnerships. Is the partial funding of the northern contributions a better soil for partnership building than a full compensation of northern services? Or is the opposite true?

In any case, what seems necessary to developing true partnerships, is that the partners plan for long-term co-operation from the start. This requires that both sides formalise this commitment in terms of agenda's, action plans and resources. The partners have to agree on areas and levels of co-operation and should preferably adopt an evolutionary process of co-operation. It would be good if they could agree on the control of resources, plan for their contributions, and monitor the progress of their endeavours. Together or separately they may look for external funds if they cannot provide the necessary resources from their own budgets.

The commitment of the donor agencies is, on the one hand, expressed by its policies and the modalities of the assistance programmes, and on the other hand, by its willingness to assist in providing favourable conditions for intervention and to share responsibility for the implementation. Donors can positively influence the quality and successes of inter-institutional co-operation by providing long-term support, striving for demand-driven projects, and supporting capacity building at

the central level. Donors further show their commitment by closely monitoring the progress of the projects and by adopting measures that stimulate ownership of the projects by the partner institutions in the South.

One way for donor agencies to express their commitment to the cause of higher education in developing countries is by collaboration among donors and addressing the wider development context of the institutions that they support with projects and programmes. An important role which donor agencies could play is to co-ordinate their efforts and inputs with other donors, to assist the national governments in formulating a clear policy framework for education, and to secure a funding base for institutions of higher education.

Although donor co-ordination and 'basket funding' get high priority in the sector support programmes, experience shows that intentions are usually stronger than deeds. It would be a great achievement if the sector approach did indeed result in better co-ordination among donors and their aid programmes. On the other hand, the broad-scale introduction of the sector approach may have two worrying effects on existing inter-institutional co-operation programmes: its introduction may disrupt the continuity of the programmes and their projects or, in the worst scenario, may lead to their abolishment all together. Needless to say, neither of these options will contribute to the sustainability of the programmes and what they aim to achieve.

### *2.3 Approaches for appropriate assistance*

The sustainability issue is primarily a concern of donor and funding agencies. The implementing partners, despite the shift from a project to a programme approach, still tend to work together in a project structure, thereby concentrating on implementation issues. Frankly speaking, donors are not very consistent when it comes to pursuing sustainability of project results. In evaluations, donors usually do not assess the performance of the partners on the basis of sustainability criteria, but according to achievements of agreed-upon results and on the basis of disbursement levels. In many instances they have to concede that it would also not be feasible to hold the partners fully responsible for the sustainability of the project results. The institutions can only partially control the factors that determine the chances for sustainability of project activities. And some of these factors are volatile, which makes their influence unpredictable.

If one of the aims of programmes is to result in enduring activities and lasting collaboration between partners, merely providing the opportunity for university co-operation is not enough to guarantee sustainable results. Donors need to gear the modalities of co-operation towards the goal of sustainability.

After reviewing the donor assistance programmes to the Universidade Eduardo Mondlane and the University of Dar es Salaam, Saint (1992: xxiv) came to the conclusion that, for these universities: "The most useful role for donors is to support the development of long-term institution-building strategies. Activities consistent with this approach include the preparation of updated university mission statements, efforts to strengthen and make management more professional, institutional linkage agreements to bolster particular departments, and research on higher education policy and performance. In settings of acute institutional deterioration, donors should consider contributions towards recurrent costs, particularly for education inputs, library acquisition, equipment and building maintenance, and efficiency-enhancing operating expenses".

Two questions come to the fore when reading this quote: should donors become directly involved in almost all aspects of the university and, if so, do their assistance programmes have the flexibility to effectively address these issues? The first question focuses on the partners' responsibilities, the second on instruments and processes of assistance.

The prime responsibility for the education system, including the institutions of higher education, lies with the national governments. If the local government cannot adequately support the institutions of higher education, but both the government as well as the donor(s) see a need for these institutions in the development scenario of the nation, the donor(s) may step in substantially. It is a matter of mutual agreement between the national government and the donor(s).

Answering the question of appropriate instruments, processes, and duration of assistance is more difficult. Over the years, programmes have become more flexible and broader in scope. Many current donors have adopted policies with a long-term view of institutional support to education institutions and capacity building. A convergence in donor thinking about inter-institutional co-operation in higher education is evident from the literature and the donor documents.

Increasingly, donor programmes are characterised by the following features:

- *long-term commitment*
- *broad-based intervention*
- *demand-driven orientation*
- *based on strategic planning exercises*
- *including improvement of management*

Having demand-driven programmes, donor agencies adopt varying and sometimes opposing strategies when it comes to implementation. In the literature on approaches to inter-institutional co-operation, two implementation strategies are often mentioned: 'blueprint' versus 'process'. When talking about a 'blueprint' versus a 'process' approach, authors usually highlight the distinction between highly programmed interventions according to project-cycle management procedures with fixed objectives, timeframes, outputs, and indicators for success (the 'blueprint' approach), against a more flexible framework of co-operation, which can easily be adapted to changing situations according to the needs of the partners and at the speed and contributions that the partners can afford (the 'process' approach). This approach requires a great deal of flexibility on the part of the donor and puts the full responsibility for the success of the project on the co-operating partners. Advocates of this approach argue that this is the best way of developing ownership and it stimulates the partner institutions in the South to develop the necessary capacities in planning, management, and financial administration. In a process approach, the commitment of the partners is constantly displayed, because their actions in planning, implementation, and management tell the story. It is therefore easier for donors to adjust the scope and size of funding according to proven capacities and performance records. On the other hand, as was mentioned before, donors are increasingly under pressure to justify how they spend the funds and have to cope with higher levels of accountability, reporting systems, and criteria. Due to this pressure, donors tend to maintain a high degree of technical control over design and implementation, following the above-mentioned blueprint approach and, in doing so, discouraging the other participants from taking ownership and control.

In general, it can be said that while the recipient institutions are encouraged to determine their own needs and priorities, these are restricted by the rules and regulations set by the donor agency (Siwela, 1995). Donors need to think critically about the relationship between their policies and intentions regarding support to institutions in the South and the modalities of assistance programmes that aim to provide support to these institutions (*i.e.* the relationship between ‘priorities’ and ‘instruments’).

The formulation of the assistance programmes is based on a number of assumptions, and prescribes ways of co-operation according to sets of conditions. These assumptions do not always take into sufficient account the variations in conditions that characterise the environments in which the institutions of higher education operate, and the variation in the needs and levels of development of these institutions. In addition, the policy of many donors of concentrating their efforts on fewer countries and institutions with the aim of increasing impact overlooks the fact that big programmes may over-stretch the absorption capacity of the institutions. Speaking figuratively, donor assistance programmes are like tools that can be applied in certain circumstances to solve specific problems. They cannot be expected to be appropriate to solve all kinds of problems. Different circumstances and needs require different approaches and instruments.

In other words, if donors want to assist institutions with different needs and circumstances, it would make sense to have flexible programmes that can be easily adapted to the needs of the various institutions according to the formula ‘*develop a tool that can solve the problem*’. If, on the other hand, donors provide their assistance in a general model that is applied to all circumstances and institutions, it would be better to ‘*find problems which the tool can solve*’, *i.e.* use the programme of assistance for those institutions than can be expected to benefit from the assistance approach.

The first approach would require a differentiation in university assistance programmes ranging from ‘relief’ type of assistance programmes for institutions in resource poor countries, to inter-university linkage programmes for institutions with a certain level of institutional strength and potential for sustainable results. This would expand the demand-driven character from the project level to the programme level. Most donors do have differentiated university assistance programmes. The essential thing to do is to properly match these instruments with the identified needs and circumstances of candidate partners in the South.

Ideally one would expect consistency between policies and implementation instruments. However, there are potential ‘contradictions’ between aid agencies’ ‘normal mode of operations’ and the approaches required to strengthen the institutions at central level and to achieve sustainable results. According to Moore (1995: 60), aid agencies are relatively unfamiliar with the local context and they are under pressure to adopt ‘blueprint’ type approaches for all their disbursements except very small discretionary funds. Their relatively bureaucratic procedures and ‘alien’ status in host countries make it difficult for them to meet the needs of institution-building projects: flexibility; sensitivity to local circumstances; focus on process rather than on meeting targets, especially expenditure targets; willingness to experiment and learn; and long-term commitment. It seems necessary that donors solve this discrepancy between their own bureaucratic procedures and the programme policies they pursue.

Another aspect that requires the donors’ attention concerns co-ordination among donors. Donors are aware of this fact, but to date little has been achieved in

terms of putting good intentions into practice. This lack of co-ordination and the fact that donors stick to their own policies and procedural requirements may have negative effects on the effectiveness of the assistance. External support that is planned in accordance with individual policies rather than be integrated into university institution-development initiatives carries the risk of eroding rather than strengthening institutional capacity (Wield, 1997). This is a real danger at education institutions that are heavily dependent on donor support, as explained by the former rector of the Eduardo Mondlane University in Mozambique: “The large number of existing linkages and agreements, and different donors involved in the funding of these linkages, which all have their specific objectives and priorities, creates problems at the central level as the institutional support becomes very fragmented and strategic plans become like jigsaw puzzles where university management has to try to enter the agreements into the spirit of the university strategy. This problem is aggravated by the fact that the budget from the local government forms only a minor part of the total budget. The university is obliged to implement its development strategies, having direct management over only a small part of its funds” (Matos, 1995:183). The recipient often has to conform to these donor conditions as a price for getting support.

As a working hypothesis, one may state that the larger the gap to be filled between ‘core funding’ and the revenue requirements of a given establishment, the larger the number of interlocutors. It demands setting aside personnel and thus resources for generation of gifts. Donor’s interests are not necessarily committed to a stable series of priorities - they have their own backers to accommodate - nor, for that matter, are they committed to the same timeframe as that of the university. In this situation it is important to reach a degree of accommodation which ensures that “the donor tail does not wag the university dog or that the cacophony of conflicting demands, special pleading requirements, does not exercise such leverage over the ‘responsiveness’ of the university that its purpose is compromised in the medium, if not the long term” (Neave, 1997:5).

A great step forward is taken when donors accept uniform reporting systems based on the reporting systems of the institutions, thereby avoiding that ‘donor supported’ activities are separated from ‘other’ university activities (Wield, 1995).

However, the institutions should take the initiative in co-ordinating donor assistance, because donors cannot co-ordinate themselves. They need to be co-ordinated through a university-based strategy, based on detailed consultation among themselves and other stakeholders (Wield, *ibid.*).

#### *2.4 Preconditions for effective assistance*

What, then are the requirements for effective assistance to universities? It is clear that there is no simple solution to the complex problems. Some of the basic principles have been laid down in SAREC’s policy document on Swedish support to universities in developing countries (1992). It states that some problems are best served by internal solutions and internal actions are a prerequisite for external support to be constructive. It is unlikely that individual projects are capable of breaking the vicious circles that characterise higher education in many developing countries. Instead, there must be action at several levels simultaneously. When discussing support to a certain university and the possible form of that support, one should also consider whether the policy environment is supportive.

Efforts must be aimed at increasing the recipient's opportunities to carry responsibility at different levels. The effectiveness of development assistance will depend on the policy at the national level, the policy of the institutions, and on the policy of donors.

Clear national responsibility is therefore one of the first conditions for good development assistance. The donors' willingness to assist the university must be matched by national commitment and should not lead to the state grant being reduced or diverted.

If external support is to be meaningful, it must be planned in relation to a national policy. Such a policy should define the system of higher education and research, the institutions that should be a part of it, and the mission and functions of the different types of institutions. Underlying the policy must be a realistic plan to finance the system.

In its approach, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) stresses the importance of full intellectual partnership with its recipients in developing countries<sup>13</sup>. Plans and priorities are defined jointly, with most research carried out exclusively by the recipients. IDRC's mandate requires that the organisation provides the necessary structure for recipients and staff at all levels to take responsibility, to innovate, experiment, and learn, thereby developing a far greater range of their capacities.

Such an operating style calls for delegation of decision-making processes and learning. It is important, therefore, that even greater responsibility and authority in defining, planning, executing, and controlling the research agenda is passed on to the research partners. This will entail the acceptance of higher risk, but it is seen to be imperative to the evolution of responsible partnerships and genuine empowerment.

The importance of a devolution of the decision-making process is also advocated by the UNESCO in its UNITWIN programme<sup>14</sup>. Proposals should be initiated by the higher education institutions themselves and should be part and parcel of the institutional development plans of the respective universities. This bottom-up approach is essential. Secondly, the proposals should be firmly supported by the national authorities, including the national UNESCO Commissions, not only politically and intellectually but also in concrete, financial and material terms. In the third place, priority should be given to projects that foresee a clear international dimension in their activities and can be associated to other projects, in larger networks (Chitaron, 1996:24).

The British Council<sup>15</sup> emphasises the importance of the chances for financial sustainability. A key criterion for approving a link between universities is whether or not it will be sustained when financial support is withdrawn. In this respect, the choice of priority areas (for example, environmental issues), key institutions, and dynamic and high quality staff are crucial. The British Council's experience has taught that sustainability depends on a strong local infrastructure and high internal efficiency, a high level of staff commitment in the UK and overseas, and on the availability of other sources of funds.

Despite the differences in programmes and approaches, all donor agencies are aware of the fact that the financial sustainability of a development project is always something difficult to achieve, if we mean by that the success of a project to derive funds from its own activities. In the field of education such sustainability is even more difficult to achieve and very rarely obtained.

Education must almost always be supported by some external funds. That is true

all over the world and it is understandable. In accepting this as a fact, the Aga Khan Foundation has adopted the approach of establishing endowment funds, which generate funds to meet the recurrent costs of programmes. This is the case in their support programme at the AKU in Pakistan<sup>16</sup>.

## *2.5 Towards a systematic summary*

This chapter provided an analysis of the different factors that influence sustainability in international co-operation programmes in higher education. While analysing these factors, many recommendations have been formulated for the various participants in the programme. In the following pages the contents of this chapter have been summarised in a matrix format. Requirements for sustainability at project, institution, and co-operation level have been matched with corresponding responsibilities for the main participants in inter-institutional co-operation programmes.

**Sustainability in inter-institutional co-operation programmes: matrix of aims, requirements, and actions**

	<b>Project level</b>	<b>Institution level</b>	<b>Co-operation level</b>
<b>Academic sustainability</b>	<p><b>Aim:</b>  <b>Project activities have been institutionalised and project results are being continued by the partner institution after the external intervention has ended.</b></p>	<p><b>Aim:</b>  <b>A well organised and managed institution with capable staff that efficiently performs its mission.</b></p>	<p><b>Aim:</b>  <b>Partners have established a true partnership with mutual benefits.</b></p>
	<p><b>Requirements:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>successful project implementation</i></li> <li>• <i>proper project design based on a sound institutional appraisal</i></li> <li>• <i>realistic objectives of co-operation</i></li> <li>• <i>adequate number of capable and motivated counterpart staff throughout the project cycle and beyond</i></li> <li>• <i>regular monitoring of progress</i></li> <li>• <i>local ownership of the project</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>Requirements:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>proactive and effective leadership</i></li> <li>• <i>planning and management capacity</i></li> <li>• <i>stimulating civil service regulations</i></li> <li>• <i>good personnel management</i></li> <li>• <i>outward-looking orientation</i></li> <li>• <i>positive inter-institutional relationships</i></li> <li>• <i>esteem from the community at large</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>Requirements:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>institution-wide commitment on both sides</i></li> <li>• <i>shared vision about the long-term aims and perspectives of the co-operation</i></li> <li>• <i>clear agreements about the control of resources</i></li> <li>• <i>sufficient resources to develop and maintain a co-operation</i></li> </ul>
	<p><b>Actions by National Government:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• monitor co-operation programmes and projects</li> </ul>	<p><b>Actions by National Government:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• formulate and execute a clear and coherent national policy framework for (higher) education</li> <li>• grant more management autonomy to the institutions</li> <li>• ensure competitive terms of service for the staff of the institutions</li> </ul>	<p><b>Actions by National Government:</b></p>

	<b>Project level</b>	<b>Institution level</b>	<b>Co-operation level</b>
	<p><b>Actions by Partner in the South:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• take responsibility for the planning and design of projects</li> <li>• base the identification of projects on strategic planning exercises involving the participation of stakeholders</li> <li>• provide sufficient and capable staff to collaborate and take over the project activities</li> <li>• timely integrate project activities in the structure and system of the institution</li> <li>• link project activities to other activities at the institution</li> <li>• provide proper administration of project activities and results</li> </ul>	<p><b>Actions by Partner in the South:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• develop adequate capacities in management, organisation, and administration at all levels</li> <li>• provide good personnel management and favourable working conditions</li> <li>• carry out strategic planning exercises involving internal and external stakeholders</li> </ul>	<p><b>Actions by Partner in the South:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• create institution-wide commitment</li> <li>• formalise this commitment at institution level</li> <li>• agree with partner on areas and level of co-operation</li> <li>• adopt an evolutionary process of co-operation</li> <li>• agree with partner on the control of resources</li> <li>• plan for contributions</li> <li>• monitor the progress</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Actions by Northern Partner(s):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• plan projects in accordance with the absorption capacity of the partner institution</li> <li>• share responsibility in planning, management, and administration of the project with partner</li> <li>• provide adequate management and administration capacity at linkage and project level</li> <li>• develop management and problem-solving skills at project and faculty level at the partner institution</li> <li>• provide technical inputs of high quality</li> <li>• timely hand over the project tasks and responsibilities to the partner</li> <li>• link project activities to other activities at the institution</li> </ul>	<p><b>Actions by Northern Partner(s):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provide assistance and advice that will help to improve the organisation, management, and administration of the partner institution</li> <li>• assist the partner institution in making its services more relevant to the community at large</li> <li>• help partner institutions in the South to keep in touch with the outside academic world by means of information exchange, staff exchange, fellowships, participation in seminars and conferences, etc.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Actions by Northern Partner(s):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• create institution-wide commitment</li> <li>• formalise this commitment at institution level</li> <li>• agree with partner on areas and level of co-operation</li> <li>• adopt an evolutionary process of co-operation</li> <li>• agree with partner on the control of resources</li> <li>• plan for contributions</li> <li>• monitor the progress</li> </ul>

	<b>Project level</b>	<b>Institution level</b>	<b>Co-operation level</b>
	<p><b>Actions by Donor Agencies:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• design rules and regulations for co-operation that stimulate efficient implementation of projects</li> <li>• provide sufficient funds for implementation of projects</li> <li>• regularly monitor the progress of project implementation</li> <li>• regularly check the institutionalisation of projects according to agreed criteria and time frames</li> <li>• adopt realistic expectations about long-term and institutional effects of projects</li> </ul>	<p><b>Actions by Donor Agencies:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• assist national governments in the formulation of clear and coherent national policy frameworks for (higher) education</li> <li>• assist governments and institutions in designing scenarios for (institutional) reform</li> <li>• adopt approaches that stimulate ownership and the development of institutional capacity at central level</li> <li>• grant responsibilities for project implementation and administration to the partner institution in accordance with its institutional capacities</li> <li>• co-ordinate assistance programmes with other donors</li> <li>• co-ordinate administrative requirements with other donor agencies</li> <li>• be realistic about the influence that inter-institutional co-operation can have on the strengthening of the partner institution as a whole</li> </ul>	<p><b>Actions by Donor Agencies:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provide co-operation frameworks that stimulate the development of symmetrical relations</li> <li>• insist on collaborative planning of areas and level of co-operation</li> <li>• provide sufficient resources for the partners to develop and maintain long-term co-operation outside and beyond the project cycle</li> </ul>

	<b>Project level</b>	<b>Institution level</b>	<b>Co-operation level</b>
<b>Technical sustainability</b>	<p><b>Aim:</b></p> <p><b>Project hardware and software are being properly used and maintained.</b></p>	<p><b>Aim:</b></p> <p><b>An institutional set-up that guarantees the proper use and maintenance of infrastructure and equipment.</b></p>	<p><b>Aim:</b></p> <p><b>Partners maintain the technical infrastructure needed for their academic partnership.</b></p>
	<p><b>Requirements:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>appropriate equipment and software installed</i></li> <li>• <i>staff trained for use and maintenance</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>Requirements:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>adequate facilities to house hardware</i></li> <li>• <i>reliable infrastructure to operate hardware and software</i></li> <li>• <i>technical staff available</i></li> <li>• <i>good management of infrastructure, hardware, and software.</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>Requirements:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>commitments on both side to maintain / update the hardware and software</i></li> <li>• <i>clear agreements about the joint maintenance of hardware and software</i></li> </ul>

	<p><b>Actions by National Government:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• apply friendly regulations for the importation of hardware and software</li> </ul>	<p><b>Actions by National Government:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>provide sufficient physical and financial means to build necessary infrastructure</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>Actions by National Government:</b></p>
	<p><b>Actions by Partner in the South:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provide sufficient technical staff for operation and/or training</li> </ul>	<p><b>Actions by Partner in the South:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• develop adequate capacities and procedures for the management of infrastructure, hardware, and software</li> <li>• plan and budget for the operational costs, maintenance and replacement of hardware and software</li> <li>• appropriate personnel management</li> </ul>	<p><b>Actions by Partner in the South:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ensure institutional commitment</li> <li>• utilise income-generating potential of hardware and software</li> <li>• agree with partner on scenario for joint maintenance of hardware and software</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Actions by Northern Partner(s):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identify hardware and software that is relevant and appropriate in the local institutional context</li> </ul>	<p><b>Actions by Northern Partner(s):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• assist the partner in developing capacities for the planning and management of infrastructure, hardware, and software</li> </ul>	<p><b>Actions by Northern Partner(s):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ensure institutional commitment</li> <li>• advise partner on income-generating potential of hardware and software</li> <li>• agree with partner on scenario for joint maintenance of hardware and software</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Actions by Donor Agencies:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• appraise the identification of hardware and software</li> <li>• monitor the use and maintenance of hardware</li> </ul>	<p><b>Actions by Donor Agencies:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• monitor the management of infrastructure, hardware, and software, including the budgetary allocations for operational costs, maintenance and replacement</li> </ul>	<p><b>Actions by Donor Agencies:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• stimulate maintenance of hardware and software by providing research funds for the partners beyond the project cycle</li> </ul>
<b>Financial sustainability</b>	<p><i>Aim:</i>  <b>Recurrent costs are secured.</b></p>	<p><i>Aim:</i>  <b>A sound financial basis.</b></p>	<p><i>Aim:</i>  <b>Partners invest in their partnership.</b></p>

	<p><b>Requirements:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>adequate and timely counterpart funding of local costs</i></li> <li>• <i>good financial management and administration</i></li> <li>• <i>external stakeholders find services and products of projects useful and affordable</i></li> <li>• <i>'market' knows about products and services of projects</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>Requirements:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>stable and reliable core funding</i></li> <li>• <i>diversification of funding</i></li> <li>• <i>useful and relevant services</i></li> <li>• <i>cost-effectiveness of the investments (value for money)</i></li> <li>• <i>efficient organisation and administration</i></li> <li>• <i>autonomy and accountability in financial management</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>Requirements:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>both partners find the co-operation valuable</i></li> <li>• <i>the partners plan for long-term and mutually beneficial co-operation</i></li> </ul>
	<p><b>Actions by National Government:</b></p>	<p><b>Actions by National Government:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>provide the institutions with stable and reliable funding</i></li> <li>• <i>grant institutions autonomy in financial management</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>Actions by National Government:</b></p>
	<p><b>Actions by Partner in the South:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>integrate project activities in the financial structure and system of the institution</i></li> <li>• <i>timely include recurrent cost and reservations for depreciation and maintenance in regular budgets</i></li> <li>• <i>link project activities to concerns and needs of external stakeholders</i></li> <li>• <i>bring the project activities under the attention of decision makers within and outside the institution</i></li> <li>• <i>co-ordinate donor projects and inputs</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>Actions by Partner in the South:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>invest in external relations management</i></li> <li>• <i>establish good relations with government</i></li> <li>• <i>adopt a 'market' orientation</i></li> <li>• <i>broaden the funding base of the institution</i></li> <li>• <i>stimulate activities that generate external revenues</i></li> <li>• <i>develop a system to regulate staff time allocations and revenue sharing of income-generating activities</i></li> <li>• <i>develop adequate capacities in financial management and administration</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>Actions by Partner in the South:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>discuss with the partner expectations regarding benefits from the co-operation and possible contributions</i></li> <li>• <i>develop with the partner a long-term plan of co-operation including funding possibilities/opportunities</i></li> </ul>

	<p><b>Actions by Northern Partner(s):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• plan the projects in accordance with financial carrying capacity of the partner institution</li> <li>• share responsibility in management and administration of project funds with partner from the start</li> <li>• provide training in financial administration at project and faculty level</li> <li>• link project activities to concerns and needs of external stakeholders</li> <li>• bring the project activities under the attention of decision makers within and outside the institution</li> </ul>	<p><b>Actions by Northern Partner(s):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• advise and possibly assist partner in the development of efficient administration structures and procedures</li> </ul>	<p><b>Actions by Northern Partner(s):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• discuss with the partner the expected benefits from and possible contributions to the co-operation programme</li> <li>• develop with the partner a long-term plan of co-operation including funding possibilities/opportunities</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Actions by Donor Agencies:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• monitor the inclusion of recurrent costs for projects in the regular budget of the partner</li> <li>• monitor projects for plans/attempts to generate external revenues</li> </ul>	<p><b>Actions by Donor Agencies:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provide support for the development of efficient administration structures and procedures at the partner institution</li> </ul>	<p><b>Actions by Donor Agencies:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• facilitate the transition from project co-operation to partnership with subsidies for joint activities</li> </ul>

### 3.

## Summary of findings

In inter-university co-operation there is no unanimous definition of sustainability. Quite commonly, a distinction is made between financial, technical and academic sustainability. Academic sustainability focuses on academic, managerial, and administrative knowledge and skills to continue a research and/or teaching programme. Technical sustainability means that infrastructures and equipment provided by programmes can be operated and maintained by the institution. Financial sustainability focuses on the provision/ availability of sufficient financial means to run these programmes. Depending on the objectives and emphasis of the co-operation programme, sustainability aims at the continuation of project results, a capable institution, or viable linkage between partners. Financial, technical and academic sustainability plays a role at all three levels of co-operation.

The experiences of the collaborating institutions and donor agencies over the past decades point to many factors that influence the chances of sustainability of a project or programme. The major requirements and conditions for sustainability in co-operation programmes in higher education are:

- *an enabling external environment*
- *good reputation of the institution*
- *a conducive institutional set-up*
- *appropriate modalities of the linkage programme*
- *successful project implementation*
- *ownership of the project*
- *institutionalisation of activities*
- *funding potential of activities*
- *mutual benefits for the co-operating partners*

It is clear that concern for the sustainability of projects is most strongly felt by the donors. Although the partners have become more sensitive to the issue, they tend to focus on the implementation of project activities. The project mode in which they co-operate breeds a short-to-medium-term perspective. Their enthusiasm, ambitions, and interests form another limiting factor as far as their being conscious of the feasibility and realism of their plans is concerned in relation to current and foreseeable constraints and challenges.

The institutional partners, donor agency, local governments, and programme administrators all need to work together to increase the chances of sustainability of projects and programmes. The donors' willingness to assist the university must be matched by a national commitment. If external support is to be meaningful, it must be planned in relation to a national policy. Local governments should take the responsibility of providing an enabling environment for (higher) education institutions to fulfil their missions and to provide the institutions with stable and reliable funding. This responsibility also includes increased democratisation of decision-making and efforts by government to restrain from directing university affairs without sacrificing the need for these institutions to be accountable to them and the wider society.

Over the years inter-university co-operation has shifted from individual projects to long-term and broad-based university support programmes aiming at HRD as well as institutional strengthening. The expectation being that specific attention to institution building and management will help to improve the sustainability of the projects as well as the partnerships between the institutions. However, what programme developers sometimes tend to forget is that designing theoretical models based on idealistic principles will not automatically lead to expected results. There is a need to make the objectives of the programme operational in clear and concrete activities of which the outputs can be measured. Concepts like 'institutional strengthening', 'added value' of a programmatic approach, and 'institutionalisation' of activities need to be clarified from the start. The expected 'added value' of broad-based linkages over and above a set of projects does not come about by simply concentrating more activities in one linkage, but by achieving coherence and synergy between projects.

Furthermore, what donors do not always want to acknowledge is that university co-operation programmes with their specific aims, conditions, and procedures are instruments that may be applied in a useful and appropriate manner under certain economical and institutional conditions, but cannot be expected to be appropriate under all circumstances. Different circumstances and needs require different approaches and instruments. It seems useful to look at programmes like MHO as tools that are designed to do certain tasks. It is hard to fix a screw with a hammer.

At the same time, donor agencies should not be unjustifiably optimistic about their own capacity to support institution building and should be modest about what their assistance can be expected to achieve. This observation underscores the importance of co-ordination of donor assistance. A concerted effort by the donor community could achieve considerably more in terms of the effectiveness of the aid provided as well as in terms of influencing the political environment.

Another issue that should receive the serious attention of donors is the consistency and continuity of their policies. Policy frameworks of donor agencies often have flaws regarding internal consistency, resulting in conflicting requirements and unrealistic expectations at project level. In the case of inter-institutional co-operation programmes, policy clashes occur between the aim of poverty reduction on the one hand, and that of achieving sustainable project results on the other. Many donors concentrate their development assistance in Africa on the basis of poverty indicators. They want to help the nations that are most in need of foreign assistance. However, in these resource poor environments striving for sustainability of university projects is rather problematic, if not impossible.

These inconsistencies at policy level are reflected in the design and implementation of co-operation programmes, resulting in contradictions in the programme's assumptions, objectives, and procedures. The MHO is no exception, and its more important internal contradictions are:

- The aim of strengthening the institution as a whole through the identification and implementation of a set of often unrelated projects at sub-institutional level.
- The emphasis on developing local ownership vis-à-vis the North-centred structure, instruments, and procedures of the programme.

- The aim/hope of achieving sustainable results vis-à-vis the selection of partner institutions in very resource poor environments.

Donor policies may also not comply with the administration and management of their assistance programmes. There are potential 'contradictions' between the administrative requirements of aid agencies and the strategies required for the strengthening of institutional capacities and the development of local ownership of the projects. The complex and elaborate rules and procedures of project administration are time consuming and require specific know-how. This is disadvantageous to the partner institutions in the South. They lack the experience and time for planning, project identification and formulation. This hampers their involvement, and results in their having to grant the initiative in these matters to the northern institutions. It increases their dependency on the northern partners.

The partner institutions in the South need to be given the responsibility and authority to define, plan, execute, and control the projects. This entails the acceptance of higher risk, but it is imperative to the evolution of responsible partnerships and genuine empowerment. It makes sense, as some programmes stimulate an evolutionary process of co-operation between the partners, beginning with small manageable projects and as capacities increase, to step -up the complexity and size of the collaboration. The partners should be restrained from embarking on ambitious projects that shift the attention from developing feasible cooperation projects to meeting deadlines and solving problems in project implementation.

At the same time, the northern partner institutions and donor agencies should focus more on helping the national government and institutions in analysing and diagnosing the problems of university institutions in their societal context and by contributing to reform and change of systems and processes. Since in most programmes, influencing the institutional and external environments of projects falls beyond the scope of the programme, the success of the projects depends on these environments. It is recommended that the external and institutional environments be targeted as programme activities. A sector approach seems potentially more effective in influencing these external environments, creating a platform for discussion between the local government and donor agencies about the needs and conditions for development of a (sub-)sector. It will be a challenge in the years to come to create the necessary synergy between initiatives that change the external environments on the one hand, and assistance programmes that strengthen institutions on the other.

At project level, successful implementation is one of the factors contributing to sustainability that requires proper planning and adequate institutional support. More and more donor agencies and recipient organisations are convinced that project planning should be based on and linked to a thorough institutional appraisal in which the institution and independent local stakeholders should play an important/leading role. Ample time should be taken for adequate institutional appraisal and donors should allow for flexible project implementation within a broad framework agreement. A goal-oriented project planning approach leaves not much flexibility once the plans have been laid down on paper and have been agreed upon. It has limited possibilities to adjust the course of a co-operation programme, to quickly adapt the co-operative venture to changing situations, to accommodate experiments, or to follow a process-approach in developing co-operation. Participatory development and institutional change do not fit easily within current segmented project cycles.

While planning, attention in all phases of the project cycle should be paid to measures that enhance chances for sustainability. Targeting sustainability in project design increases the probability of achieving satisfactory levels of sustainability compared with leaving it to chance. For the World Bank (1990) this means that in project design special attention should be given to those factors that are seen to have a major influence on sustainability: appraisal, physical design, initial project funding, and provision of monitoring and evaluation. This focus on sustainability needs to be maintained throughout the whole project implementation period. It may require more rigorous methods for monitoring programme progress on the basis of performance indicators for institutionalisation and sustainability of activities.

Intensive monitoring of project sustainability, especially if it is done by the programme-administrating agency, may be at odds with the aim to increase local ownership. However, if the partners and programme administrators agree on the need for performance monitoring, they should also be able to agree on monitoring procedures that are acceptable to all.

Lastly, it should be accepted that in poorer countries some degree of dependency - over a long duration - may not be just a risk but a reasonable precondition for longer-term institutional sustainability. Some donors provide budgetary support to cover wages and operating costs for a limited period of time in order to sustain the operations of the institution and the project. Support of this type must not be provided if it is likely to prevent necessary organisational changes, or the costs cannot be covered by the institutions themselves at a later stage.

In general, assistance programmes should be realistic and pragmatic in dealing with partner institutions whose conditions can be expected to remain weak in the foreseeable future. Instead of chasing after unrealistic expectations, they should aim for a step-by-step development programme whose pace will be determined by the absorption capacity of the institution and the supporting capacity of its external environment.

## **Annex 1.**

### **The Joint Financing Programme for Co-operation in Higher Education - MHO**

#### *The Programme, its objectives and policy principles*

MHO forms part of a sector programme of The Netherlands' bilateral programme specifically set up to support higher education in developing countries. The primary objective is to increase the capacity and the quality of human resources in developing countries and, in doing so, to contribute to the development of those countries in which programmes are funded.

This direct contribution to the development of a country is not regarded as an immediate objective of the MHO programme but rather seen as an underlying objective. The immediate objectives of the programme are more concrete and are to be found at the level at which the activities are carried out - in (the institutions of) higher education. The MHO objectives are formulated as follows:

- 1. Helping to develop, strengthen, and improve the general functioning of institutions of higher education in developing countries ('institution building'). The aim is to achieve a sustainable enhancement of their institutional capacity.*
- 2. To contribute to meeting quantitative and qualitative manpower deficiencies ('human resource development').*

In the context of the MHO programme 'institution building' is understood to have the following meaning: helping to develop, strengthen, and improve the general functioning of institutions of higher education in developing countries. The aim is to achieve sustainable enhancement of their institutional capacity. The concept of an institution refers to the totality of an organisation, including its purpose and objectives, its organisational structure, physical infrastructure, physical, technical and financial resources, its human resources, institutional culture and the way it is embedded in a wider institutional environment. In more concrete terms, institution building is a process in which an institution improves its ability in the planning, management, and implementation of its mandate.

Regarding the second objective of the MHO programme, 'meeting manpower deficiencies' refers to the overall need of the society in question for manpower with technical and professional skills. Within the MHO context, 'human resource development' does not refer to the further education and training of the staff of the institutions of higher education; staff development in this sense is seen as part of the process of 'institution building'. It is closely linked to the external efficiency of the education provided and the relevance of tertiary training for the process of national development.

The relationship between both objectives could be read as follows: the MHO invests money in the institutional development (IB) of selected southern institutions in order to enable them to optimise their role and function to meeting the need for human resources in their region/country (HRD).

The MHO seeks to realise these objectives by setting up linkages of inter-institutional co-operation between Dutch institutions of higher education and similar institutions in developing countries. The core of the programme consists of the mobilisation of Dutch expertise in the framework of such linkages.

The programme is guided by the following policy principles:

- *MHO activities are carried out in those countries that have been targeted for bilateral development by the Dutch government.*
- *MHO concentrates its activities in a relatively small number of institutions in the South. Concentrating resources this way makes it possible to carry out a sizeable number of projects in each of these institutions.*
- *Inter-institutional linkages with institutions in Africa will be given priority (at least 50% of available MHO funds should be spent in Africa).*
- *The overseas partner's requirements are central. What the Dutch institutions have to offer must primarily be directed towards satisfying this demand. The institution in the developing country should play a crucial role in identifying, formulating, and implementing projects.*
- *High priority is given to the pursuit of sustainability of the results of MHO activities.*
- *Donor co-ordination is crucial.*
- *Willingness of the partner institution to make a reasonable financial contribution of its own, and above all by its willingness to pay local costs itself.*
- *The Dutch institutions contribute 15% of the cost of their own input into the projects.*

MHO support is concentrated on a limited number of southern institutes. This offers the possibility of financing a relatively large number of projects at each of these institutions. It is thought that this will have a big impact on and provide substantial support to the development of these institutions. The multiple relationships with various Dutch institutions of higher education will also facilitate the provision of a wide spectrum of disciplines. At present, MHO finances linkages with twelve institutions in the South, seven of them being in Africa. Each linkage consists of several (usually 8-10) projects.

The basic idea behind the concentration policy is that a linkage in which a sizeable and coherent package of projects is financed, will produce better overall results in terms of the MHO programme objectives (and especially Institution Building) which will be more significant than just the sum total of the results of all the individual projects. In this sense concentration is expected to generate so-called added value over and above the financing of individual projects.

The activities that can be funded through the MHO programme are manifold and range from the setting up of new departments, staff training, and the development of teaching materials to improving facilities such as libraries and documentation centres and strengthening the planning and management capacity of the institutions.

The MHO programme is administered by Nuffic on behalf of The Netherlands' Minister for Development Co-operation. The minister defines the broader policy framework and funds of the MHO. Nuffic is tasked to develop and implement

policy, manage and administer the programme and its funds, and monitor ongoing linkages and projects. The authority of taking final decisions about the selection of MHO partner institutions in the South, the approval of indicative plans for co-operation with these partners and the funding of the projects to be carried out in the framework of such co-operation, has been assigned to an autonomous committee of experts, appointed by the Minister for Development Co-operation.

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