



# **INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON SUSTAINABLE BIOMASS PRODUCTION AND UTILIZATION: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

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## **COLLABORATIVE PROGRAM AMONG INTERNATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITY OF STUDENT MOBILITY AND INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING\***

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### **Abstract:**

In the era of globalization, the need for standardization of human resources is becoming more and more important. International student mobility is one of being promoted for the reasons with real benefits for the individual student, the receiving educational institution and country. There has been an extensive inventory is available of the major problems involved in the process, and of the preconditions that need to be met in order to solve them. This presentation is to clarify several considerations of challenges and opportunities of the problems and the sustainability of student mobility that have to be taken in to account when international higher education institutions (such as the University of Lampung and Yokohama National University) are moving toward such program.

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### **1. Introduction**

International student mobility is being promoted for a variety of reasons with real benefits for the individual student, the receiving educational institution and country. In the last decade many meetings have been organized to discuss the practical, legal and political bottlenecks which influence international student mobility. There has been an extensive inventory is available of the major problems involved in the process, and of the preconditions that need to be met in order to solve them.

The University of Lampung has quite long experience in such collaboration: staff exchange, joint research and research meeting with several Japan University lead, 1<sup>st</sup> by Tokyo University of Agriculture (1979-1983), 2<sup>nd</sup> by Nagoya University (1991-2000), Niigata University (2000-2003) and some other Japanese Universities. Collaboration was also conducted with the University of Kentucky (1981-1991) dealing with staff exchange (especially in graduate level), material development and exchange (teaching, publication,

and information. These activities were relatively easier to be executed since the mobility mostly handled by academic staffs and the funding mostly from the international agencies such as USAID and JSPS.

Lately, the University of Lampung has been moving toward student mobility and exchange. In 2004 the Rector of the University of Lampung and the Director of CNEARC had signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and renewing in 2008 with now called Montpellier SupAgro, France involving the activities of students and research exchange in the graduate level, joint research, staff exchange, and academic material exchange. Furthermore, recently with the similar activities, MOUs had been signed by the Rector of the University of Lampung and several international university such as the University of Kentucky (2008), Tokyo University of Agriculture and Technology (2008) and in this seminar with Yokohama National University (2009).

While the problems of realising student mobility and exchanges (undergraduate, graduate, academic staff level) are now widely addressed, less attention has been paid to the subsequent benefits mobility may bring: improving the quality of education and research, and strengthening the capacity of institutions to internationalize their programmes and services. At a first glance, the beneficial relationship between student mobility, academic improvements, and institutional strengthening seems obvious. Participation in exchange programmes, structural agreements with institutions on course level can be effective avenues for mobility, yet the emergence of joint or double degree-programmes perhaps provide a more sophisticated and structured level of institutional collaboration.

Some universities suggest that the delivery of more joint and double degrees would increase opportunities for mobility. It may be argued that this positive relationship equally applies to collaboration between an institution and institutions of other world regions. The objective of this presentation will be to clarify and address some condition among international higher educations such as between the University of Lampung and Yokohama National University.

## **2. Opportunities and benefits**

**Student mobility** is one form of international academic cooperation and seems to be most effective if the mobility is optional (not compulsory), when both student and the

institution benefit from the exchange, and it regards students yet to be settled into a career, as they are most likely to have the resources and mindset both to go abroad and succeed.

The advantage of organizing student mobility in the framework of international cooperation programmes is that student activities will be orientated following the themes and orientation of the cooperation programmes. The disciplines and field of research are clearly defined in the design phase, so students easily choose the most appropriate field of works they have to follow. Students can be selected following the defined criteria of the programmes and students and or young lecturer/researchers can be selected corresponding to the development needs of different faculties or departments of the beneficiary universities. In international cooperation programmes the fellowship source is consistent and stable and the value is usually enough to properly support the student when abroad.

Arrangements made on bilateral bases –institution to institution- are most effective as specific terms and conditions can be negotiated and agreed upon by both institutions prior to the exchange.

Mobility periods for one full academic year are considered to be more advantageous because they give the student the opportunity to develop cultural, social, linguistic and other competences and students tend to be more satisfied regarding their overall integration when spending one year abroad. A full year mobility study period is also easier to plan which affects the course structure and logistic aspects such as accommodation, arrivals and overall orientation of the students. Short term mobility (credit or horizontal mobility, less than a year) can be beneficial in case of short term research projects and/or in case there is a lack of adequate personal financial resources of the undergraduate students and insufficient funding from the university and/or government agency. In general short term mobility is considered easier to manage and less expensive.

There are different views regarding periods abroad resulting in non-degree granting. Some considered these to be an advantage, when considering these involve internships in institutions, short stay visits in laboratories, etc. Others however stated that while mobility periods without academic recognition may be rewarding from student perspective, they imply a delay in the expected year of graduation which is not favourable for the institution.

**Double and Joint Degree** is one of the considered opportunities and benefits of academic collaboration through joint programmes is that it gives the opportunity to combine

the best practices and qualities from different partners. Through close academic collaboration during the planning of a new programme, the course contents has to be reviewed and the input of different institutions contributes to the enhancement of the scientific and didactic quality of the programme.

The collaboration in joint programmes feeds academic research along projects of common interest to both institutions to execute a programme that it can almost never achieve on its own. Cross border collaboration enriches the perspective from an academic point of view and becomes especially enriching in cases where students are able to conduct a part of the programme abroad, getting new cultural and professional exposure.

Collaboration in joint programmes is also considered to be important in providing a common platform to discuss and approach supra- regional and national subjects such as food security, energy, climate change, environmental quality, and poverty in an international context and on international level.

Moreover joint programmes are considered to be instrumental in creating centres of excellence, by allowing for a better utilization of existing academic resources, particularly to academic collaborations in regions and on topics where combined activities may overcome resource constraints of the individual institutions. In addition, joint programmes create more opportunities for close collaboration between higher education institutions with complementary competencies to facilitate academic research and cooperation.

Joint programmes work as a catalyst for the strengthening of staff capacity for education and research, resulting in the increase in quality and quantity of joint research and publications, job opportunities for alumni, scope and frequency of teaching staff exchange and expansion of scope of international networking among alumni. The collaboration also allows for the improvement of the quality of education by ensuring international standards and training.

Joint programmes are considered to improve competitiveness in the home country with other local higher education institutions, because international degrees are held in higher esteem by local audiences. Engaging in joint programmes is therefore considered to be important to higher education institutions in developing countries which are struggling to get recognition for their programmes by the locals and international students too. Home



grown programmes (although important for the development of indigenous higher education systems) may not attract international students.

### ***3. Opportunities and benefits to the students***

The main advantages of student mobility and joint/double degree programmes are considered to be for the students. In general it is considered useful for students to reflect on the cultural and research environment of the home institution from an outsiders perspective through the enrolment in another –foreign- institution by participating in a joint programme.

The opportunity for students to get familiar with other, diverse learning settings and the opportunity for students to improve their language skills in the field of their studies. As English is the language used most commonly this also is considered to also used most commonly to bring advantages for employability perspectives of the students. Furthermore, mobility through a joint programme is considered to contribute significantly to the general gaining of an international perspective, to prepare for an increasing global economy and society and learn to analyze international trends. The opportunity for students to learn a different culture in depth by living in a country for a longer time (as opposed to as a tourist) and to develop intercultural competences ('soft skills') through intercultural composed learning groups and to improve their breath of experience, social awareness and global citizenship in international culture.

Participation in a joint degree program improves the overall employability perspectives of students both at home and abroad, and gains the ability to adjust to the international labor market

In term of the cost, joint degrees are considered to be more cost- and time-effective when weighed against pursuing a full degree in a foreign country. At the same time, studying abroad still means a much higher financial burden for students than if they just stayed home, especially if no grants or scholarships are available.

Lastly, faculty exchange is considered to bring similar advantages to staff as to the students, though it is mainly considered to focus on knowledge sharing and knowledge generation in an international arena both through research projects and as activities linked to the collaboration such as international conferences and other events.

#### 4. Challenges

Mobility and joint/double degree programmes also carry disadvantages for the institutions. The programmes require more attention compared to developing own programmes. They tend to be difficult to administer, and require extra staff and funding. Legally they are difficult to implement because home countries do not always have a legal framework for joint certification and they may not be recognized by foreign universities. Many universities do not have autonomy and find it difficult to convince government authorities about the merits of international cooperation.

Apart from these hindrances there are also other obstacles which make the implementation of mobility programmes problematic. What follows is an overview of the obstacles and challenges that are well known.

1. *Cultural differences within the higher education institutions.* Some higher education institutions are very strict with their time schedules; participation is the students own responsibility. If a student misses one course he/she has to replace it with a big assignment while in other institution students are not used to this system.
2. *Differences in academic calendar.* The start of the semesters may be different from the ones in many countries. This implies a prolonged total duration of the study.
3. *Generating student interest to get involved in an exchange programme.* It is not always easy to find motivated students who are willing; financially able to participate in a joint programme with another institution. Some countries do not feature prominently enough on the other students' horizon to attract significant numbers of students.
4. *Lack of comparability between quality assurance and accreditation systems/different degree structures and credit point requirements.* The participants underlined the difficulty of designing and agreeing on one joint quality system. One of the difficulties will be the selection of a quality system, as there are different types of quality systems around (within institutions). The final choice is often pragmatic, resulting in the taking on board of the system that is commonly used, while this is not necessarily the best to be used. In addition, even if there is understanding on the quality assurance between the partner institutions, this does not automatically lead to accreditation and/or results in recognition of the programme and the degree on administrative level.

5. *Brain drain of talent.* Mobility may lead to (institutional) brain drain both on international as on national level. One way to prevent this to happen is the compulsory return to the working place after granting study leave including pay-back of the grant / salary if not complying. However, some employers are prepared to pay these costs.

6. *The costs of mobility programmes for institutions.* Joint degrees require an initial investment. Teachers, students and companies may want them, but the university management needs be convinced to make the investment. It was noted that the joint degree programme is especially costly at the beginning when the programme is set up and that there is a need for sufficient financial resources for both the institution and the students. The institutional costs for running the programme are quite high. Professional staff are needed full-time just to manage, do recruitment, marketing and administration. Faculty exchange for co-teaching or training of trainers adds extra expenses. Local faculty with international certification or training may command higher salaries. And, local regulations may put limits on the ability to charge tuition.

7. *Disadvantages to students.* The disadvantages to students are considered to be several. One of these is considered to be cultural differences in communication which may hamper the willingness of the domestic students to cooperate with foreign students. The communication between the institution partners need to be considered. In addition, it is often said that a joint or double degree programme is "cost effective" for the student, while this can only be judged against whether the student would have gone abroad for a full degree programme. In fact, travel costs can add a significant burden to a student who otherwise may have chosen a cheaper location or not gone abroad at all. There are limited funds available to students for travel via scholarships and grants, and joint programmes are therefore often only accessible to those who can financially afford to get involved, which increases the gap between those privileged within society and the rest. In this regard, travelling to more than one country is considered to be (too) costly for students and for this reason a programme involving 3 partners can be less attractive.

Another point is that the possibility of failure of courses due to adjustment issues, e.g. the adaptation to a new environment and culture with subsequent loss of morale and faith in the joint degree system



8. *International skills and competences of the staff involved in the joint degree programmes.*

Some of the staff involved lacks the capacity to provide the education in English. To change their hesitance/resistance is a process that takes time. Sometimes it is easier to first discuss the content briefly in the home language before it is thought in English.

9. *Problematic recognition of joint degrees.* The joint degree diploma on behalf of the different institutions involved in the joint programme, may not legally be accepted by national law in many countries. Further, another home country may not recognize a joint degree or even double degree if the foreign university is not accredited in the home country. Resulting in that employers may not be recognized or be allowed to hire a student with a joint degree for the same reason.

10. *Joint curriculum development.* The obstacles towards joint curriculum development involve requirements towards the curriculum set on a national level. On a different note, a challenge involving curriculum development, is the domination of imported programmes with only few indigenous or local contents. This risk is especially high in case of indigenous higher education systems which are not fully matured yet. At the other hand, home grown programmes although important for the development of indigenous higher education system may not attract international students.

## 5. Best practices and recommendations

The student satisfaction rate should be taken into consideration as an important factor for the success and sustainability of a programme. The overall satisfaction rate from the student highly depends on the support received upon arrival and during the stay, the quality of the organization and the study plan, the quality and cost of living. The majority of the students appear to prefer study stays abroad in which the organizational burden is largely born or at least facilitated by the cooperating institutions.

Governments should allow institutions flexibility in the programmes (e.g. by giving autonomy to the institutions) to meet the needs of society, give exceptions (less regulation/ monitoring/ restrictions) to certain programmes and to realize that there is mutual benefit in the programmes not only for the partners involved but for (international) society at large.

The administrative management of a programme must be taken very seriously and investment in administrative staff is a must. The importance of a political of both governments is important to actively support international academic mobility through joint programmes, especially their role and responsibilities in solving obstacles towards the implementation of joint programmes that can only be solved on governmental level, such as the recognition of credentials (including the legalization of joint degrees) and quality assurance. The role for the government in supporting the setting up of programme standards/regulation of higher education and policies governing mobility and the possibility of providing financial grants for students need to be considered.

If a joint degree cannot be awarded, this should not be an obstacle for running a joint programme and one must be willing to be creative. Issuing a local degree along with a separate certificate signed by all partners can be a solution to the problem. Moreover, a double degree is often easier to accomplish than joint degrees, from both legal and administrative points of view;

A recommendation towards the donors of the joint degree mobility programmes included that donors should consider cooperation programmes that benefit all higher education institutions in the partnership, thereby stimulating a bottom-up rather than top-bottom programmes to meet local needs (home). There is a need that the university management to run the programme to actively lobby, and to keep the joint programme and the results under the attention of the university management. A strong argument for investing in joint degree programmes is the issue of ranking. Joint degree programmes may improve the quality profile of weaker institutions, provided they can find a stronger partner to collaborate with.

With regards to the development of curricula, it was recommended that a whole new curriculum should be designed when starting up a joint programme, joining the best of each institution, taking the best practices and courses from both institutions. In the design of the curriculum both the strengths and the differences in the existing curricula should be used to create centres of excellence in academic research. Differences in curricula are an advantage as it allows for complementarities and synergies. However, the use of existing course templates for the degree can be a good approach to start with. Any two parties willing to

work on harmonizing existing templates should probably have enough compatibility of vision and values to overcome other challenges that may appear in such an endeavour.

There is common understanding that the parties involved should agree on the quality standards and the quality approach before starting up the joint degree programme. The individual quality assurance systems of the institutions should be accepted by all partners in the partnership, and further both partners should develop a joint quality assurance approach for co-operation. Lastly, for strategic reasons, the partners should aim for the joint programme to meet society's needs in the home country. These needs are identified as the demand labour market (especially the private sector), the employability perspectives of students, as well as the usefulness of the practical courses/programmes for the home country.

## **6. Main challenges in international collaboration**

The following will provide an overview of the elements that are considered to be the main challenges in the organization of collaboration between higher education institutions.

1. *The importance of sustainability by all partners.* At the same time sustainability was considered to be one of the most difficult to achieve within a partnership. The costs in terms of finances and resources are especially high in the start up phase of the joint programme
2. *The financial sustainability of the joint degree programme.* As mentioned before, the costs of running a joint programme are high, yet there are only few that manage to ensure the sustainability of the joint programme without external funding. This whilst the continuity of the external financing is often not ensured.
3. *Anticipation on the extent geographical and general cultural differences.* Examples of these differences are clashes in academic calendar among international institution, differences in language, differences in time zone, which affects communication between the partners, and cultural differences of all sorts. Fundamental differences put enormous pressure on administrative and academic coordinators and involve a high coordination workload for participating higher education institutions.
4. *Legal obstacles affecting the organization and smoothly running of the collaboration.* These include long and complicated procedures for students and staff involved in exchange

such as residence permit requirements, immigration regulations, requirements to gain permission from governmental authorities to engage in the collaboration.

5. *The number of the partners involved in the collaboration when the joint degree is set up* can be a pitfall. Some cooperation projects start with many universities and in the end it becomes a bilateral collaboration, because the others dropped out for various reasons.

6. *Different financing cultures*, regulations and tuition fee policy. There are different ways of cost allocation. High tuition fees will shortly limit student's access to the programme.

7. *Agreement on the quality assurance system to be used* and/or to accept the quality assurance of the partner institution and further the overall to agree on the quality control of the joint programme can be a difficult process when the systems differ in both institutions and when national requirements are to be met.

## **7. Key elements for success, best practices and recommendations**

A number of good practices and recommendations to start and maintain successful collaborations include the following:

***Finding a partner and exploring the collaboration*** -- **Finding a partner** implies that one needs to work on the visibility of the institution concerned in order to increase the potential to find partners. This can be achieved by joining networks and associations, but institutions are also strongly advised to first explore the possibilities of drawing partners from existing networks. It is best to start off with natural relationships like academic collaboration or student exchanges and build upon long-term relationships, before finally launching into a joint programme.

One could set up criteria for partner selection such as number of partners involved, competencies, quality and/or reputation of the institution, resources available, similarity/diversity. When looking for a partner one should be realistic about who the partners can be and one should not give in on this. Another criteria for selection could be to increase the attractiveness of institutions that are less visible by offering an attractive "package" deal with other –better known- institutions.

While searching, one should adopt a 'win-win' thinking, meaning to search for a partner with whom the partnership is expected to lead to mutual gain and mutual satisfaction for all in all aspects to keep the cooperation at all times and at all levels attractive.

In general 2 types of partnerships were identified: partners can either be compatible (in content and with similar expertise) or ‘partner’ out of reputation. Similarity in academic and research activities, academic status and qualifications makes collaboration a lot easier.

It is important to start the collaboration **small** and limit your number of partners, deepen and widen later. Good relationships among the institutions is an essential requirement, as well as clear communication and absolute trust among the team members and regular communication during the setting up of a programme and afterwards.

**Finding common grounds** with partner was considered important. In order to know the ground of your partnership and to explore this fully one should identify the strengths and weaknesses, the opportunities and threats, and the overall mission and goals of the collaboration. This will require one spends time together with the future partner institution and that one needs to do home work on the common grounds.

Institutions and people have to invest their own time and resources in order to initiate the collaboration. It was suggested that initial funding allows for people to meet, to talk, to exchange ideas. This way they can find out whether they share common interests. It was also acknowledged there are other driving forces besides academic interests, such as personal and cultural ones.

#### **8. *Organizing the collaboration and objectives***

The agreement for collaboration could be best signed at faculty level around a single project with clear objectives. At the same time ensuring support from the high level management **is** considered to be essential for the overall success of the partnership. Strong support from the rector and administration is needed in order to execute the joint programme and to have sufficient support when faced with the challenges mentioned earlier.

When organizing the collaboration one should not assume but clearly define the management and administrative roles and responsibilities within the partnership. It is advised to establish key management units and to identify the best persons. However, staff interest and participation on faculty/horizontal level is valued important as opposed to a top down approach. It is important to ensure that there is sufficient funding available for the set up and running of the collaboration (financial capability), sound administrative capacity and cooperation (e.g. not multi level coordination), and infrastructural support.



Furthermore, one should indicate **communication and coordination strategies**. It is advised that partners balance their work and that there should be comparable duties in order to achieve co-ownership.

The need of a sound management and administration on all levels involved has to be highlighted, following a pre-agreed 'project' planning (including deliverables and timelines) on which the partners should agree beforehand. It is advised to formalise the collaboration with clear roles (including the project coordinator) on both sides to ensure accountability. The partner institutions involved in the collaboration are advised to establish a system, policies and procedures for the execution of the partnership and to identify possible hurdles and bottlenecks in the organization, and in doing so to be aware of the cultural differences.

Equally to the organization, also the objectives of the collaboration should be clearly defined as well as the expectations and key result areas. The institutions involved in the partnership should work together on a joint vision and agree on the key result areas. They are advised to involve critical stakeholders. The partners should discuss and plan these together.

A single common tuition fee for the joint programme should be agreed upon and differences in exchange rate should be taken into account. The management of scholarship programmes could become the key challenge for the solution of the problem of different finance cultures. Each partner institution receives fees according to the number of students it receives.

## ***9. Sustainability***

To ensure the sustainability it is needed to institutionalize the partnership and to ensure full institutional support through commitment on leadership level. In order to do so, the partnership should be formalized by a legal document that commit the institutions involved to the partnership (e.g. a MoU and/or MoA). This legal document should ensure that the institutional commitment is safeguarded when people running the partnership leave the institution.

Moreover, the importance of the commitment from management for sustainability reasons is very important. If the management changes, the institution should ensure handover explaining the co-operation and full process. Further it is advised to

institutionalize the feedback of the outcomes of the partnership, for example through dissemination of the results.

Moreover, sustainability can be ensured by building further on the capabilities from the start of the partnership, to learn from and act on successes and failures and to build further on linkages. Further suggestions to foster sustainability included to offering attractive courses and user friendly modules that appeal to a need on the market and government support. In the latter case active lobbying to promote the partnership could help.

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This paper was summarized from the power point presentations and discussion in the Second EAHEP Workshop Student Mobility, Joint Degree Programmes and Institutional Development 16-17 February 2009 Crown Plaza Mutiara, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

- European trends in policies and practices for international collaboration in higher education (Robert Wagenaar, Groningen University of The Netherlands)
- Student mobility & joint programmes in higher education (Kai Ming Cheng, University of Hongkong)
- The strategic importance of joint and double degree programmes for academic institutions in Malaysia (Morshidi Sirat, National Higher Education Research Institute, Malaysia)
- Landscape of types of student mobility and their academic objectives (Philippe Gourbesville, Polytech-Nice Sophia, France)
- Student mobility and institutional capacity building. Building exchanges between master programmes in management of natural resources and rural development (Jamalam Lumbanraja, University of Lampung, Indonesia)