Higher education in Madagascar was in crisis in the early 1990s. Campuses were taken over by squatters and vandals. Little if any teaching was taking place because senior members of universities could not enter buildings. The quality of education was extremely low, with little or no research conducted, the staff demoralized, and the students alienated. Enrollment rose above 44,000 due to “eternal students” who were paid a grant for as long as they stayed in university. Students repeated course years as many as five times. The internal efficiency of institutions was approximately 30 percent, and external efficiency was less than 10 percent in many faculties and departments. Curricula and teaching methods were outdated and there was no system for evaluating of the institutions’ performance. A large portion of the public financing was being wasted. Yet higher education was recognized by the government and the World Bank as being indispensable for generating the human resources needed for economic development and poverty alleviation. This article traces the development of a strategic partnership in higher education between the Government of Madagascar, the World Bank and other donors over a period of almost ten years.

To understand the processes undertaken to address this crisis, it is necessary to give a brief historical overview of the four phases of cooperation between the Bank and the Government of Madagascar.

Phase One: The Process of Assainissement, Review and Planning. With Bank support, the government took a series of courageous policy decisions to reform higher education. The aims were to improve quality and relevance, to diversify and modernize provision and to network with other institutions abroad. Through a series of bold, yet politically sensitive decisions, campuses were cleared with minimal coercion. The number of students was reduced — from about 44,000 in 1992 to 18,000 in 1998 — through a selective admission process, and repetition with scholarship was limited to two years. Gradually, facilities were repaired, services streamlined and improved, and conditions for teaching and learning restored.

Staff were encouraged to begin evaluating their own institutions and the services offered. They were requested to identify strengths and weaknesses, and to make the system more attuned to the country’s developmental needs. Under an IDA-financed project (CRESED I), self-evaluations began with programs and departments, proceeding to faculty and finally the institution. Institutional reviews were then collected and appraised by the Ministry of Higher Education, which began work on a costed national plan.

Concurrently, and with donor assistance, measures were taken to improve institutional management, financial housekeeping, and collection of individual student profiles. In the central ministry, basic statistics such as student pathways and financial data (e.g. unit costs and funding of supplementary lectures) were
collected, and a financial model constructed.

Major policy decisions were taken to advance **diversification, modernization** and **quality improvement** through greater academic autonomy. To advance diversification, two Higher Institutes of Science and Technology (ISTS) were created, offering short training cycles focused on the needs of industry and its involvement in the government of the institutions. Curricula were developed jointly, and delivered through cooperative programs. Additionally, private sector involvement was encouraged and supported by the government.

To facilitate modernization, steps were taken to introduce innovations. Institutions were encouraged to reallocate, within their existing budget, funding to student support and services. Discussion on the allocation of finance to departments on the basis of differentiated and weighted unit costs was introduced. The possible privatization of some services was also debated.

In quality improvement, progress was extremely slow. With donor assistance, the first short cycle courses were developed. Discussions were initiated about evaluation and accreditation of courses. As teaching groups became smaller, interaction between students and teachers increased.

**Phase Two: Detailed Preparation for Reform and Investment in Higher Education.** With a Japanese Policy and Human Resource Development (PHRD) Grant, the second phase began. A governing body for grant utilization was established, independent of the Ministry of Higher Education and representative of all sectors of higher education. Inter-institutional working parties were set up to consider major issues. These included: funding private higher education; modernization of curricula and increasing relevance to developmental needs; staff development policies; modernization of teaching methods; human resource management at all levels and in all kinds of institutions; and the establishment of quality assurance and program accreditation systems. A draft “Master Plan” was thus produced.

**Phase Three: The Preparation of a Follow-up Project.** The third stage was inaugurated with the design of a proposed second project – the Education Sector Development Project or CRESED II. During this phase, the Master Plan was harmonized with an overall government Plan for Education and Training (PNAE II). Donor relations were strengthened, and representatives gradually participated in discussions of future strategy and the facilitation of links with counterpart institutions abroad. A proposed Fund for the Development of Higher Education (FDES) was designed in close cooperation with other donors who provided a critical “sounding board” to sharpen and improve proposed interventions.

**Phase Four: The Establishment of a Foundation for Higher Education in Madagascar.** During the course of the work in higher education and through the finance afforded by the Fund and the work of its International Panel, the process has now begun of establishing academic credibility for the FDES. Steps have been taken to develop international networks needed for the establishment of a permanent successor body to the FDES to be called the Foundation for Higher Education in Madagascar.

1. **A Structural Innovation: the Fund for the Development of Higher Education**

In discussions on the proposed CRESED II Project, both sides recognized the need for the inclusion of a higher education component to support government strategy. An independent body ,under the supervision of a Board of Governors, was thus established to manage funds received from external sources. The independent governing body is representative of all sectors of academic life, industry and commerce, and government. It supports projects, proposed by any institution of higher education in Madagascar, in the university, non-university state and private sectors. Running costs are paid by Government. Proposals are judged against publicly-available criteria and standards required by the FDES and are submitted, reviewed and, if successful, financed according to an agreed Manual of Procedures. The Fund was instituted with an IDA-financed contribution of US$5.0 million.
Three kinds of projects may be submitted to the Fund: (a) curriculum development; (b) applied research; and (c) institutional development. Proposals must be prepared according to FDES guidelines and schedules, and submitted to the Council. They must be made in partnership with industry, commerce and/or institutions of higher education abroad. In judging individual proposals, the Council is assisted by a permanent and independent scientific peer panel and two experts, external and/or overseas. One goal is to open up higher education to the world of work. To facilitate this, institutions are encouraged to network with organizations at the cutting edge of economic development in Madagascar. Another goal is to introduce higher education to regional and international academic networks and standards.

Formative Evaluation and the International Panel. In order to make the Fund credible and to secure its academic standing and financial integrity, the government and the Bank agreed to establish an International Panel of six academics from other countries. The participation of these members was secured through the good offices and the financial support of embassies and diplomatic missions represented in Madagascar. Currently, six countries are represented: France, Germany, Italy, Mauritius, the UK and the US. The Panel provides a formative evaluation of the functioning of the FDES. It does not make decisions on individual proposals for development. However, it makes independent observations, judgments and recommendations concerning the equity, balance and transparency of the work of the Council, calling it to the bar of international accountability.

The Panel carries out visits and interviews, and consults available documentation on Council minutes. It reports yearly to the Council of the FDES. It is careful to conduct its work and to make its observations and recommendations in a constructive spirit of peer review, such as accreditation and evaluation procedures used in countries like the US, France, and the UK.

The Panel and International Networking. In addition to providing formative evaluation, the Panel has two further responsibilities. First, it acts as a two-way conduit to identify expertise needed for peer review by internationally known experts. This is sometimes achieved via diplomatic missions, or by direct access to institutions abroad through the Internet or CD-ROM. The aim is to identify the best peer review expertise and thus maintain internationally recognized standards. The other major purpose of the Panel is to offer a think-thank opportunity on most recent international developments in higher education. After each evaluation, Panel members report back to their respective governments and facilitate further contacts within their own countries.

Lessons Learned

The Bank’s experience in Madagascar provides many lessons, both positive and negative. Even the negative lessons have been the source of illumination for a future technology of service delivery – “today’s outcome is tomorrow’s inputs”.

First, the case of higher education in Madagascar underlines the long-term nature of educational reform and innovation. Evidently, continuous Bank staff involvement over the decade was important in ensuring the coherence of the reform process. Organizational and institutional memories were successfully secured. Informal pathways to the achievement of common goals were crucial in fostering a service which was sensitive to clients’ needs and values.

Client orientation and real and potent partnership implied from the start that all parties were encouraged to contribute, but this is often difficult to deliver. Only open dialogue promotes reforms where there are powerful vested interests, where elites exercise great influence and where there is turbulent political history. This provided learning experiences for Bank staff: development of new skills, especially listening; the realization that the Bank does not always know best; and the willingness to see proposals altered and even demolished in search of a common way forward. It demanded needs assessments which were conducted by the Malagasys themselves, with the Bank offering guidance and comparative examples.

Donor co-operation does produce dividends. Successful higher education demands multiple partnerships
and networks at home and abroad. Donors must work together, whilst recognizing different goals and traditions. This was difficult at first - there were some feelings of diffidence. Not only were program cycles and procedures different, but strategic approaches also differed. In some cases, basic preconceptions about the Bank, its cultural and economic hegemony and its developmental dominance, generated attitudes, values and a language register, which had to be cleared to pave the road to co-operation. This was time-consuming but essential.

Early recognition by the government and higher education institutions of the need for a flexible but firm policy framework has been crucial. It determined the directionality of change, affording a long-term perspective and keeping the system true to a number of basic guiding principles. This framework was produced with Bank assistance on the basis of a needs assessment by community members of their expectations for the system and their identification of strengths and weaknesses. Over the years, a rolling master plan was produced and updated, institutions produced their own development plans, and the two were harmonized. Incidentally, the master plan became a potent instrument in forging closer working relationships among donors.

Modernization and diversification of higher education is driven by a recognition of the increasing globalization of knowledge. Many African countries lack this recognition, and Madagascar is no exception. Countries are weak in producing new knowledge and pursuing local research agendas, and their access to a global stock of knowledge is weak or non-existent. How does one respond? Experience has taught that this issue cannot be solved by technology alone, since its dissemination and its associated skills and knowledge are not sufficient. The policy of the government has been to address this issue structurally and culturally. Awards by the Fund are made on the basis of partnerships between Malagasy and overseas institutions. A new Agency for Quality Assurance was established, and a formal convention was signed with a counterpart agency in Paris. The development of new programs is conducted conjointly with institutions abroad. The functioning of the FDES is overseen by an International Panel.

Administrative and financial reform have to go hand-in-hand with academic and scientific reform and with a tightening regime of quality assurance. Because resources are scarce and higher education is not a priority, resources locked up in outdated practices had to be liberated. An early retirement program for excess non-academic staff was introduced. New pedagogies required new uses for time and space. The introduction of short-cycle programs relied on identification of programs which were redundant, inefficient or no longer relevant. The more intensive utilization of physical resources, laboratories, and teaching rooms demanded better administration. The morale of teaching staff demanded fair and efficient in-service training, professional development and promotion.

The inclusion of commerce and industry and other branches of the world of work is crucial to governance, program formulation and delivery of higher education – through co-operative programs, placements, quality assurance and research funding. Additionally, non-university and private institutions were co-opted in all major initiatives, including FDES, and were encouraged to develop alternative forms of higher education.

Finally, a new ethos of academic accountability securing higher success levels can liberate resources tied up in an ideology of failure and reinforce academic confidence in staff and students. The management of those liberated resources demands new administrative skills and the devolution of responsibility to institutions, departments and individuals. A central principle of the government policy for higher education even in the dark days of phase one was the devolution of responsibility and empowerment of staff in planning their own futures. First, the autonomy of universities was secured. Then, authority was further disseminated into the very fabric of the universities, to schools, departments and program teams. Finally, greater autonomy was implemented at the personal and institutional levels.

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