



IIEP Policy Forum, 2-3 July 2009

**Tertiary Education in Small States:  
Planning in the context of  
globalization**

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# INFORMATION NOTE





## **The importance of tertiary education in the global environment**

Tertiary education has always been an important topic, and is now a focus of intensified worldwide interest. The emergence of knowledge economies has underlined the importance of knowledge in development, and has demonstrated the extent to which countries need to secure advanced human resources to reap the benefits of globalization. In addition, the success of Education for All (EFA) policies with their emphasis on primary education has led to expansion of post-primary education, and in a growing number of countries secondary education has become part of compulsory education. In turn, this is bringing pressure on tertiary education to expand opportunities for secondary school leavers. This Policy Forum will consider the scale and quality of post-secondary opportunities in small states.

## **Tertiary education in a small states environment**

As a group, small states have in common a number of challenges and opportunities, including in the domain of tertiary education. According to the Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, 71 states and autonomous territories have populations below 3 million.<sup>1</sup> During the 1990s, issues such as external economic and political dependency, institutional capacity constraints, high rates of migration and income volatility were identified as common features of small states by various authors, including some working under the UNESCO and IIEP frameworks.<sup>2</sup> These issues remain serious considerations for planners. At the same time, forces such as increasing globalization and technological change have modified the environment of small states. Many small states have been directly affected by global trade liberalization and sometimes the removal of preferential regimes, and they have to adapt to rapid socio-economic change.

Some of the opportunities for small states arise because they are states rather than just cities, districts or provinces of larger jurisdictions. Policy-makers and planners in small states may be able to use the leverage from their status to secure advantages that would not be so easily available to comparable population groups in larger states. Opportunities may also arise from regional integration processes, decreasing communication costs and technological advancement. Many small states with high educational attainments have grasped opportunities for international outsourcing of services.<sup>3</sup>

From the perspective of both governments and families, tertiary education is the most onerous level of education because of its high costs and demands for facilities and equipment. It needs highly specialized human resources for teaching and research, and an

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<sup>1</sup> Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat (2007). *The World Population Prospects: The 2006 Revision - Highlights*. International organizations and scholars have made various attempts to develop criteria and classification systems for small states, but have not reached consensus. The major accepted criterion is population size, but the chosen cut-off point varies between 1 and 5 million according to different sources. The IIEP Policy Forum will not adopt a rigid definition, but will mainly focus on states with a population below 3 million.

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. Atchoaréna, David (1993): *Educational Strategies for Small Island Developing States*. *Fundamentals of Educational Planning* 44, Paris: UNESCO-IIEP; Lillis, Kevin (ed.) (1993): *Planning and Management of Education and Human Resource Development in Small Systems*. Paris: UNESCO-IIEP; see also Bray, Mark (1992): *Educational Planning in Small Countries*. Paris: UNESCO.

<sup>3</sup> Commonwealth Secretariat, The (2002): *Small States: Meeting the Challenges in the Global Economy - Progress in the Implementation of the Recommendations of the Commonwealth Secretariat/World Bank Joint Task Force*. London: The Commonwealth Secretariat.

adequate pool of applicants from among the secondary school graduates. Small states face particular constraints in the organization of a diversified tertiary education because of their limited pool of highly qualified human resources, the difficulties in achieving economies of scale in administration and management, and a low level of recruitment from secondary education.

Within this context, small states have developed distinctive strategies for the provision of tertiary education. Some states choose to access opportunities abroad rather than develop them at home. Others create multi-level institutions comprising both secondary and tertiary education under one roof; yet others share institutions with other small states through regional co-operation, and all small states now make strong use of distance education. One major question for policy-makers and planners concerns the appropriate mix of these elements.<sup>4</sup>

## **New challenges and opportunities**

Globalization and shifts in employment from agriculture to the service sector have sharpened awareness that major investment in human development, in particular at the tertiary education level, are needed. As a consequence, in the Caribbean for instance, several small states – principally Antigua, Dominica, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, and Trinidad and Tobago – have moved to universal secondary education, which is naturally boosting the social demand for tertiary education. The CARICOM region has already established an enrolment target of 15 per cent in the tertiary sector to be achieved by 2005.<sup>5</sup>

While many tertiary education systems are expanding their enrolments, there is a noticeable trend towards diversification of the institutional fabric. Formerly secondary or post-secondary colleges have been upgraded to university level, and new tertiary institutions such as community colleges have been created.

In addition, new forms of inter-institutional collaboration draw heavily on networks and new technologies. The Virtual University of Small States created under the Commonwealth of Learning, the University of the Indian Ocean, and the Caribbean Knowledge and Learning Network are cases in point.

Tertiary provision also includes an increasing number of cross-border initiatives. Offshore campuses or franchised programmes from large states may be offered as stand-alone enterprises or as partnerships with local institutions. These are commonly beneficial to both sides, but may require careful management. Issues include not only the ways in which external providers serve small states but also the ways in which small states are used as a base to serve larger states. Concerning the latter, the number of degree mills offering sub-standard and fake credentials has greatly expanded. Such enterprises can damage the reputations of the countries of delivery.

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<sup>4</sup> See e.g. Bray, Mark and Packer, Steve (1993): *Education in Small States: Concepts, Challenges and Strategies*. Oxford: Pergamon Press; Crossley, Michael and Holmes, Keith (1999): *Educational Development in the Small States of the Commonwealth: Retrospect and Prospect*. London: The Commonwealth Secretariat; Bacchus, M.K. (2008): 'The education challenges facing small nation states in the increasingly competitive global economy of the twenty-first century'. *Comparative Education*, Vol.44, No.2, pp.127-145.

<sup>5</sup> Roberts, Vivienne (2003): *The Shaping of Tertiary Education in the Anglophone Caribbean. Forces, Forms and Functions*. London : The Commonwealth Secretariat, p. 1.

These phenomena pose new requirements for regulation and quality assurance, as well as articulation of the tertiary education provision.<sup>6</sup> They may also raise issues of curriculum including language of instruction. Within the above context, small states have challenges and opportunities to secure alternative pathways which respond to social demand and harness resources in sustainable ways that still give policy-makers adequate control.

## **Objectives of the Policy Forum**

Some small states have already gained considerable experience in response to the challenges. It is time to take stock of their experience in order to gain insight into policy options for counterparts. The Policy Forum will address the following questions:

- In comparison with analyses in small states, conducted prior to and during the 1990s, in what ways do the global changes affect small states, and what are the implications for tertiary education?
- What policies and strategies have been implemented in the tertiary education sector in small states located in different regions and representing different development contexts?
- What innovative strategies can be identified with regard to new technology-based models (for instance e-learning), regional networking, co-ordination and governance of tertiary systems, financing, student support systems, quality assurance, and accreditation?
- What can be learned from these experiences for the development of sustainable, cost-effective and quality tertiary education in small states?

In preparation for the Policy Forum, IIEP will compile an inventory of small states that have recently engaged in reforms of their tertiary education sectors. Some five to six countries will be chosen for study from different development contexts and from different continents. Countries chosen tentatively for study are: Armenia, Fiji, Malta, Oman and Saint Lucia. The Policy Forum will be an opportunity to present and discuss country papers as well as findings from their comparative analysis. Many of the existing initiatives and cross-state partnerships operate within the Commonwealth. The Policy Forum will highlight these initiatives and partnerships, while also drawing on experiences and opportunities for other countries, for example in the French-speaking, Arabic-speaking and Portuguese-speaking communities.

## **Participants and follow-up**

The Policy Forum will bring together:

- ministerial policy-makers and planners from the education sector in small states;
- counterparts in other levels of government in small states, including Heads of State;
- senior planners and managers from tertiary institutions in small states, including Vice-Chancellors and persons of equivalent rank;

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<sup>6</sup> Martin, Michaela (2007): Cross-border Higher Education: Regulation, Quality Assurance and Impact. Vols. 1 and 2. Paris: UNESCO-IIEP.

- researchers working on this theme; and
- representatives from international agencies committed to the development of tertiary education in small states.

Specifically, the speakers will include:

- David Atchoaréna, Senior Programme Specialist, IIEP, France;
- Mark Bray, Director, IIEP, France;
- Michael Crossley, Professor, University of Bristol, United Kingdom;
- Sir John Daniel, President, Commonwealth of Learning, Canada;
- John Lespérance, Programme Specialist, Commonwealth of Learning;
- Mohammed Waheed Hassan, Vice-President, Maldives;
- Dame Pearlette Louisy, Governor General, St. Lucia;
- Michaela Martin, Programme Specialist, IIEP, France;
- Jamil Salmi, Tertiary Education Coordinator, World Bank, USA; member of IIEP's Governing Board;
- Stella Antony, Audit Director, Australian University Quality Agency, Australia;
- Bhoendradatt Tewarie, Pro-Vice Chancellor, University of the West Indies, Trinidad and Tobago;
- Saïf Alshmeli, Former Director of Planning, Ministry of Higher Education, Oman;
- Jacques Sciberras, CEO of Maltese National Commission for Higher Education, Malta;
- Arayik Navoyan, Vice-Rector of External Relations, French University in Armenia;
- Alain Arconte, President of CORPUCA;
- Rajesh Chandra, Vice-Chancellor of the University of the South Pacific, Fiji; and
- Mamadou Tangara, Chairman, University of the Gambia Governing Council, The Gambia.

The mix of participants will allow for fruitful policy dialogue on practical experience and conceptualization of the implications.

The event has been timed to articulate with the "2009 World Conference on Higher Education: The New Dynamics of Higher Education and Research for Societal Change and Development"<sup>7</sup> to be held at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, 5-8 July 2009, and it will build on deliberations at the 17th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (CEM) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 15-19 June 2009.

IIEP will place on its website case study and other materials prepared in advance of the event, and will maintain this website for follow-up after the event. In addition, IIEP will prepare a publication on the results of the Policy Forum, which will be distributed to policy-

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<sup>7</sup> See [http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-url\\_id=56642&url\\_do=do\\_topic&url\\_section=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-url_id=56642&url_do=do_topic&url_section=201.html)

makers and planners responsible for tertiary education in small states. Other appropriate forms of follow-up will be discussed during the Policy Forum itself.

## **Dates and venue**

The 2009 Policy Forum will be held on Thursday 2 and Friday 3 July 2009 on IIEP premises, 7-9 rue Eugène Delacroix, 75116 Paris, France.

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