



Academics without Borders

USF-AWB

Universitaires sans Frontières

Quarterly newsletter, 6, June 2012

Canadian Partnership with AHED-UPESED

For several months, we have been negotiating with the Canadian NGO "Academics for Higher Education and Development - Universitaires pour l'Enseignement Supérieur et le Développement" (AHED-UPESED) which has objectives similar to ours, and its all members are also volunteers.

However, its economic model is different from that of USF-AWB: indeed, for us applicants must pay themselves and the registration fee for members in 30 euros per year whereas for AHED-UPESED, members must pay an annual membership fee of 1000 Canadian dollars, i.e. they can be considered as regular donors. And thanks to this money, this Canadian NGO can finance various actions, particularly in the poorest countries: since its inception, it has worked in the following countries: Benin, Chile, Ethiopia, Ghana, Indonesia, Liberia, Namibia, Nepal, Nigeria and Rwanda.

As a merger did not seem possible at the present time, a closer partnership was signed between AHED-UPESED and USF-AWB to exchange information, to work in cooperation and to be more effective together. A situation worth watching? ■

Pr. Robert Laurini, President of USF-AWB.

Desperately searching for places of action

As USF-AWB has a pool of hundreds of people who are willing to act in many countries, but few requests for intervention are received: from two years, several presentations have yet been made in many countries (Algeria, Brazil, Spain, Italy, Lebanon, Morocco, Spain, Tunisia, USA), articles have appeared in several journals giving the expertise of the founders and of the members of USF-AWB and presenting ongoing activities. Unfortunately without outputting the desired results! We can see several reasons.

The first is that unlike businesses, universities have the culture neither to be assisted by external consultants, nor to employ interim professors as companies do. When a university has specific needs, its often relies on its own forces or it requires further assistance from State Departments. If a teacher is sick, either his course is canceled or a colleague replaced him immediately. If a university wants to set up a new syllabus, it often charges the most competent colleague to make a project, and sometimes he looks at

similar courses in other universities or countries: often this is insufficient because this colleague has a thousand other obligations to meet and the need assessment is very basic, while there are seniors experienced academics who have the time and the skills necessary to carry out such issues. The key-points seem to be the following:

- socio-economic analysis of a territory to extract the needs for higher education and research,
- setting up of projects for education and research guidelines in response to the identified needs,
- and appropriateness between training and the labor market.

The second reason is probably the fear faced by some small universities to expose their weaknesses and limitations: indeed adding an outside look can lead to criticize the methods in place, to disrupt entrenched habits or even to stress incompetences. Therefore, some officials or administrators of universities are not always favorable to the coming of an expert "to poke its nose" in their business.

The third reason is the immensity of the works to do. A Dean of a Moroccan University recently gave me a list of actions to be undertaken in his faculty with the help of USF-AWB. I asked him what his priorities were, and he replied "you might first come to help establish priorities." Since more than one year we expect the green light to establish priorities! Indeed, some universities have grown very quickly and struggle against countless problems without having the time to distinguish between emergencies and short- and medium-term priorities.

The fourth reason is financial knowing that many universities do not have the resources for their ambitions. AHED-UPESED solution is, thanks to its money to finance partially or totally certain cooperation actions: the possible drives could be entryism and less involvement of local universities. USF-AWB solution is rather that the applicants should pay: thus their involvement is maximum; they feel concerned by the interventions of our members and effectiveness should be optimal. Another track is the search for outside sponsors.

Taking all those difficulties into account, how to create an effective strategy to increase the notoriety of USF-AWB and the number of interventions? ■

Pr. Robert Laurini, President of USF-AWB.