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1966
Johannesburg College of Education
https://hdl.handle.net/10539/27433
Turner, J.D. (1966). The task of a university in under-developed countries. Symposium: A Journal of Education for Southern Africa, pp. 75-77, 79.

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The Task of a University in Under-developed Countries

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THE disappearance of the adjectives "colonial" and "dependent" has left a gap in our vocabulary which it has proved singularly difficult to fill. For some years the countries of Africa and elsewhere which had previously been under British and French rule were normally referred to as *emergent* or *emerging;* but questions as to what they were emerging out of or into did not always find ready or agreed answers. More recently it has become common to refer to these countries as *underdeveloped* but this too is a term which seems strikingly difficult to define. Nor is the common alternative, *developing*, greatly to be preferred to it. No country, however highly industrialised would be happy to think of itself as having achieved the maximum development of which it was capable. Some countries may have reached a high stage of development in one sector of the economy while remaining surprisingly underdeveloped in another sector. For example, the Republic of South Africa is highly developed as far as its gold and diamond industries are concerned but remains very underdeveloped in terms of the education and utilization of its manpower potential. Moreover the term *underdeveloped* seems derogatory to the inhabitants of those countries to which it is commonly applied. In his introduction to the 1964 edition of *Economic Analysis and Policy in Underdeveloped Countries* Professor Bauer remarks,[1] "in the title and elsewhere I would now replace 'underdeveloped' by 'poor' as the former is essentially an euphemism for the latter". While this may be true and while "poor" may be preferable to the alternative terms it nevertheless leaves something to be desired. It takes no account of countries in exceptional circumstances such as South Africa and, lacking the dynamism of the term *developing*, must have a depressing effect upon the inhabitants of the poor countries.

The other term in our title is equally difficult to define. Samuel Alexander described the University as "an association or corporation of scholars and teachers engaged in acquiring, communicating or advancing knowledge, pursuing in a liberal spirit the various sciences which are a preparation for the professions and for the higher occupations of life[2]". Almost every term in this definition itself requires further definition. Two concepts in particular seem to call for more comment. The first is the concept of *universitas* itself; to what extent can this *universitas magistrorum et scholarium*, this community of teachers and students, be said to exist at all in the average modern university in any meaningful sense of the word *community?* The second is an essential concept which is missing from Alexander's definition, the concept of service to the community, for the university is not only seeking to expand the boundaries of knowledge for the sheer pleasure and exhilaration which the quest of knowledge gives to the devoted scholar, nor because the scholar thinks that it is desirable to increase the sum total of what mankind knows about his own nature and that of the universe in which he lives.

He also believes that this knowledge will be of advantage, though not perhaps of immediate advantage, both to the particular community in which his university is situated and to the wider community of mankind. Nevertheless the particular community which nourishes and sustains the university is likely to gain the first benefits from any new knowledge which is revealed.

Such considerations as have been hesitantly and superficially sketched in the preceding paragraphs are of interest in any university community but are of compelling and supreme interest in a new university in a developing country. Indeed perhaps it is only in the particular that these generalities can be usefully discussed. The University of Basutoland, Bechuanaland Protectorate and Swaziland came into existence on the 1st January 1964 to serve the needs of the three countries whose name it bears. It was established by the Roman Catholic hierarchy of South Africa in April 1945, and was subsequently taken over by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. Until its nature was changed in 1964 it prepared students for degrees of the University of South Africa, entering a special form of relationship with that University in 1955. U.B.B.S. therefore inherited a university campus with some sound functional buildings, with a student body of over 100 students and a considerable number of members of staff.

1. BAUER, P. T. *Economic Analysis and Policy in Underdeveloped Countries* (First paperback edition, London; Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965 p.xi)

2. Quoted in OLUBUMMO, A. and FERGUSON, J. *The Emergent University*, London: Longmans, 1960, p.23.

The purpose of the university is stated in the preamble of the Royal Charter by which it was established as "the advancement of knowledge, the diffusion and extension of arts and sciences and learning", a statement which is further amplified in a section on the objects of the university, which are stated as being "to provide a place or places of education, godly learning and research, promoting the moral, cultural and economic wellbeing of Basutoland, the Bechuanaland Protectorate and Swaziland." Attention is thus drawn in the Charter to the traditional university functions of teaching and research. On the other hand attention is specifically directed also to the fact that the education, learning and research should promote the moral, cultural and economic well-being of the three countries served by the university.

The Charter goes on to say that the institution should be universal in every respect, stating that "there shall be no restriction on the practice of Christian observance within the university" and that "admission to the university should be denied to no one on the grounds of race, colour, sex or nationality." The opportunities offered to the university by these statements have been eagerly taken and there are at the university part-time or full-time men and women students of a variety of different races, nationalities and beliefs living and working harmoniously together. Of the 211 students at the university in 1965, 123 were from Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland; 33 were from the Republic of South Africa, 43 from Rhodesia and others came from as far afield as Zambia, Malawi and Kenya. The teaching staff is from an even wider range of countries, over a dozen nationalities being represented. This width and range of experience amongst both students and teachers gives an added dimension of interest to the work of the university. In spite of the clear intention of the charter that the university should primarily serve the needs of Bechuanaland, Basutoland and Swaziland the university is determined to preserve its international character, for it is believed that no institution can claim to be a university unless it has a substantial proportion of its students coming from countries other than that in which the university is situated.

The university is thus facing two directions at once. It is charged with the necessity of making a direct contribution to the needs of the countries whose names it bears and is endeavouring to do all that it can to remain sensitive in its reaction both to the continuing and to the newly arising needs of countries which are in a stage of rapid growth and development. At the same time the University is attempting to establish its position as a member of the international society of scholars and to gain a reputation for academic distinction. These two tasks are of course complementary for in making a significant contribution to local research needs, the university may well establish a reputation for interesting and ongoing research in a number of fundamental areas.

The difficulty of balancing research and teaching is always a difficult one for members of an academic community. In a university in a developing country it often seems to be virtually insoluble. The members of the staff are engrossed in drawing up curricula and syllabuses of a novel type related directly to the circumstances of the students, while they are also heavily committed to the organisation and growth of the building projects of the university, and with establishing appropriate administrative procedures. In the case of U.B.B.S. there has been the added difficulty that the university took over a number of students who were already working for the degrees of the University of South Africa and consequently found itself committed to teaching two sets of syllabuses, those for UNISA and those leading to U.B.B.S. degrees. In the early days of a university there is also the problem that the comparatively small number of students does not permit a teaching force of the size which would be desirable, so that a few members of staff are involved in teaching the whole range of courses in a subject, thus being forced to leave the particular special areas on which they would prefer to concentrate. All these preoccupations and difficulties mean that the time which is available for research is greatly reduced. On the other hand the countries themselves are urgently in need of basic research and are calling on the university to supply this; the members of staff themselves feel reluctant to give up research, which in any case they feel to be essential if the teaching work of the university is to be done with any degree of success. It is possible also that in a university in a developing country there might develop a conflict between that research which the individual member of the teaching staff wished to undertake because of his previous interests and local needs. Such a problem has not yet occurred in our university and there is no immediate prospect of the dilemma being presented.

The Charter of the university gives Senate the power to "grant Degrees of Bachelor, Diplomas, Certificates and other Distinctions". The University is not at present able to offer degrees higher than those of bachelor and to some extent this is bound to limit its research activities. Senate has, however, used the opportunity presented to it by the charter to establish a wide variety of Bachelors degree courses. At present it is offering Bachelors degrees in Arts and Science, a Bachelor of Arts in Economics, a Bachelor of Arts in Administration, a Bachelor of Laws and a Bachelor of Science with Education. There is also a Bachelor of Education degree which is a post-graduate degree in Education open to graduates who have already taken a

Post-graduate Certificate in Education and have a number of years of successful teaching to their credit. In addition diplomas are offered including the Diploma in Law, the Post-graduate Certificate in Education and the Certificate in Education with special reference to Secondary Education.

With the exception of the Bachelor of Education, all the Bachelors degrees are of four years duration and are divided into a Part 1, and a Part 2 both of which take two years of study. During Part 2 there is a concentration upon two majors which the student studies exclusively for two years. It is not permitted for students to carry any of their Part 1 requirements over into the second two years of study. In this way it becomes possible for them to achieve a distinguished standard in their two main subject areas. The first two years are spent in a preliminary study of the major subjects and also in a wider range of subjects which are necessary both to support the major subjects and also to give a wider general education. For the second of these purposes every student who is studying for a first degree must participate in the General Studies programme. This includes a course in the use of the English Language and a course of Foundation Studies embracing a series of lectures covering a very wide field both in arts and science, which is designed to give the scientist and the arts student a general overview of the whole field of human activity. In addition the students have to attend tutorial meetings on these Foundation Studies lectures and to study one particular subject in depth throughout the whole year. It is hoped that in this way concentration on the two major subjects of the degree will not be achieved only at the cost of the wider literacy and numeracy which is essential if the dialogue between art and science students is to be fruitfully maintained.

In all these studies the university is helped and supported by a large number of advisers from universities in many different parts of the world. The Senate of the university appoints for each major subject an external examiner who for a three year period advises that department on the syllabuses which it teaches and helps in the conduct of the examinations and in the maintenance of standards. Examiners have been drawn from other universities in Africa such as Salisbury, the University of Zambia, the Universities of Dar es Salaam and Ibadan and also from universities in Britain such as Glasgow, Oxford, London, Keele and so on. These valuable contacts, which are often reinforced by personal visits of the external examiners to the university, help to create that feeling of belonging to an international community which is so important for a new institution, while at the same time it guarantees that the degree standards of the university are those which are current in the rest of the English speaking world.

It is hoped that during 1966 there will be nearly 300 students in the university and that the number will have risen to 500 by 1970, thus achieving a steady and satisfying, if unspectacular, rate of growth. It is thought, however, that this target is only an interim one and that the needs of the three countries served by the University will imply the development of the size of the student body far in excess of the number of 500. In the same way it is to be expected that it will prove necessary to provide not only those degrees which constitute the immediate need but also honours degrees and higher degrees in a variety of disciplines. The range of courses offered by the university is at present limited to the fields of arts, science, economic and social studies, law, education and some agriculture; there are no courses at present leading to qualifications in veterinary science, medicine, dentistry, engineering or any of the other sciences which are particularly costly to organise. An interesting experiment in the field of Law, however, points the way to developments which might be fruitful in other subjects also

An arrangement has been made with the University of Edinburgh which will permit students from U.B.B.S. to proceed to Edinburgh after completing Part 1 of the degree in Basutoland to pursue two years of study in the University of Edinburgh returning to Basutoland for one term to complete their course. This may well be a model for other disciplines so that students, for example of medicine or dentistry, might be able to proceed to particular universities overseas to take a course of study which is closely integrated with the studies which they undertake in Basutoland for Part 1 of their degree. It may however, prove necessary in due course to establish some of these schools at U.B.B.S.

The sharing of a university institution by three nations which are not contiguous, which have separate govenments and which are all on the road to complete national independence is an exciting venture. Its difficulties can be readily appreciated, as can the great opportunity and stimulus provided for the members of the university by this situation. In particular the university has to ensure that its research and advisory functions are employed to the advantage of all three countries alike. For this purpose it has established an Extension Department, which has an Assistant Director in each of the three countries and which is conducting a large variety of courses in each country away from the university centre, as does the School of Education in its own field. An arrangement with the Swaziland government under negotiation which will enable the university to participate in certain agricultural courses at the Agricultural College at Malkerns in Swaziland. It is intended that as time goes on more Schools of

the University will be established physically in the other two countries. The University Council is determined to do everything in its power to ensure that the University is not in any sense remote from the real needs or from the immediate consciousness of the people of Bechuanaland and Swaziland and will attempt to ensure that they soon come to regard the University as their own.

As well as catering for full-time students and offering short courses on a variety of subjects through its Extension Department, the University is also offering some of its awards to part-time students. At the present time it is possible to take the Post-graduate Certificate in Education and the Bachelor of Education degree by part-time study. These part-time programmes involve attendance at two residential courses of two weeks duration at the University during school vacations, followed by a number of assignments throughout the year and the normal tutorials and practice teaching periods. The examinations at the conclusions of the courses will be the same as the examinations taken by full-time students and the normal arrangements for examination by external examiners will apply. So far the response from teachers has been most encouraging and it has proved impossible to accept all those students who have been qualified for entry. It is now hoped that the diploma in Law will be offered by a similar arrangement.

At the beginning of this article reference was made to that poverty which is a characteristic feature of the underdeveloped country. The countries served by the University are all poor and work on a deficit budget. Although Swaziland is hoping to balance its budget by the year 1970 there is no immediate prospect of Basutoland or Bechuanaland being able to do the same. Situated as it is in a remote valley 22 miles from Maseru the University is left in no doubt of the problems of the community it is trying to serve. Moreover this same poverty makes it more than ever necessary for the university to ensure that every penny is spent to the greatest effect and that no money is wasted either on buildings or on expanding its teaching force or its course offerings in directions which are not necessary. It also has to ensure that there is no human waste by taking great care that no student fails through lack of proper teaching or supervision, by wrongly drawn syllabuses or for any other reason whatsoever. In his book "*Educational Strategy for Developing Societies*" Professor Adam Curle[3] remarks, "If I were compelled to define 'underdevelopment' I would do so in terms of failure to make adequate use of human resources." The university is determined to do all in its power to ensure that the human resources of Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland are properly developed and that as far as it possibly can there will be no wastage of those scarce human resources which are channelled to the university for education. It foresees its task as a total one embracing first of all the task of fundamental research and investigation which will enable the governments of the three countries to determine the lines of development which might most successfully be followed, and secondly, by long and short courses for both full-time and part-time students, to provide those human resources which are necessary to carry these plans into successful effect. The members of the university, both staff and students are dedicated to the achievement of this end. They find that the very intensity of the need gives a sense of urgency and reality to the academic studies which they are pursuing. We believe that those who visit the university and even more those who come to work here cannot help but notice that in an international and inter-racial community dedicated, as this university is, to a common purpose there is an atmosphere of service which is an inspiration to all who are engaged in a common and significant enterprise. It may yet prove that, small as it is and of very recent origin, this University may have some lessons of value to teach other older and more famous institutions.

3. CURLE, Adam. *Educational Strategy for Developing Societies* — London: Tavistock, 1963. p.69.

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