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The Islamic Azad University And Iran's Social Development

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Simbar, R. The University of Iran, Iran. The Islamic Azad University And Iran's Social Development

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Abstract
Higher education in an era of emerging organizational model, being recognized as one of the principal social affairs and a delicate endeavour, can not and should not be left with the government alone. In an attempt to lighten the government's responsibility to provide the nation with higher education, Islamic Azad University was established in Iran. With the growing tendencies of Iranian families in making their children enter university along with the soaring demand for higher education, the government itself could not have been able to satisfy the needs.

Meanwhile, training and education can be seen as the main factors in improving living conditions and standards in the modern world today. All societies, more or less, consider education, especially higher education as their main concern, and prepared to pay the price for it. This paper argues the IAU's role in Iran. The Impacts and implications between IAU and Iranian society would be discussed.

Higher Education and Development
A review of the complex and dynamic processes of internationalization at different levels in higher education reveals that these processes are prompting increasingly rapid change in two rather different aspects (Teichler,99). First, there is now a wide range of border crossing activities, many of them resulting from institutional rather than governmental initiatives, and these are certainly still on the rise. But we can also see more substantial changes towards systematic national or supra-national policies, combined with a growing awareness of issues of international cooperation and competition in a globalizing higher education market. Under the first heading there is a growth of specific, clearly visible international co-operation, including activities such as student and staff mobility schemes, co-operative research activities and foreign language teaching to support them; under the second, we can see trends towards internationalization, regionalization of the actual substance and structure of higher education, such as, proposals for convergence in institutional patterns, study programs or curricula. (Kweik, 2000)

The contemporary university was born of the nation-state, and it was only in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, following the establishment of clear national economic interests, that universities acquired their identification with science and technology. Their regulatory and funding context was, and still is, national; their contribution to national cultures was, and still is, significant; students tended to be, and still are, trained to become national functionaries; and universities played, and still play, a considerable role in what some have called the military industrial complex of nation-states. In this perspective, they are very much national institutions. It is appropriate, therefore, to see current trends as part of a process by which national systems of higher education are being challenged by new forces of internationalization. Universities are thus object as well as subject of "internationalization" or "globalization". They are affected by and at the same time influence these processes.

Two Concepts of "globalization" and "Internationalization" changed to be main themes during 1990, to debate higher education policy and to research on higher education. Now, some can claim that higher education policy is still predominantly shaped at a national level. However, a number of different ideas, many of them can be categorized under the general title of "internationalization", have begun to challenge the predominance of the nation-state a the main determinant of the character of universities and colleges, and of the experiences of their students, their graduates and those who work in them. Internationalization is contributing to, if not leading, a process of rethinking the social, cultural and economic roles of higher education and their configuration in national systems of higher education.

Globalization, particularly the removal of barriers to free trade, and integration of national economies has potential as a force for reducing poverty levels in the world. The goal of poverty reduction is mainly due to policies adopted, the management of the processes, and the politics in decision making. (Stiglits, 2002). Views from the South that could inform those policies are often ignored by international development agencies.

There is evidence of the devastation of globalization on developing countries as the poverty gap has increased despite the fact that globalization was meant to benefit all members of the global community. To date it is estimated that 40 percent of families in the world survive on less that one dollar a day. This is in contrast to the subsidies given to farmers in countries like the US where the subsidy is about $1.00 per day per animal. The negative impact of globalization has been felt more by those in developing countries. For example, Africa has had 4% decline in GDP, a decline in per capita income that has resulted in a drop of living standards. This has happened within a context where the world income has increased annually by 2.5% (Stiglitz,p.12)

Countries from the South are at risk of being further marginalized if their higher education institutions fail to participate in the knowledge production networks and activities that would make them relevant and more responsive to needs of a new economy. A concern has been raised by academics from the South about lack of collegiality and concern amongst academics from the south and those from the North within a competitive environment. Competition has resulted in student losses to private for profit higher education, loss of Jobs, and in some cases the threat of closure of institutions. Competition in academia has continued to perpetuate the negative effect of globalization such as increasing inequality both between academics within institutions and between academics in different institutions and countries (Muller and Cloete 2001).

Globalization is characterized by increased connectedness as well as major inequities between countries and within countries. The digital divide between the North and South often presented in globalization debates is real but also problematic in the sense that the division cannot only be explained in terms of the division between the North and South, because there are cities in the North that are worse or similar to some cities in the South. There is poverty and illiteracy in the North and instances where people live under worse conditions than those in the South. There are also pockets of technological advancements in both the North and the South that shifts the parameters to the “haves” and “have not” rather than just the North and the South.

In the globalizing economy higher education has featured on the WTO agenda not for its contribution to development but more as a service to trade in or a commodity for boosting income for countries that have the ability to trade in this area and export their higher education programs. Higher education has become a multi- billion dollar market as the quantity of education is increasing rapidly and it is reported to double every five years. It is reported that the export of higher education service has contributed significantly to the economy of the US. In 1999 it is estimated that the US, being the largest provider of education services, earned $ 8.5 billion of the $ 30 billion market, from this trade alone (Heyward, 2002). The share for Asia is estimated at $ 10 billion.

Higher education has in the past contributed to development by providing national economies with the necessary human resources but criticized for not dealing directly with poverty reduction issues. The World Bank report on higher education presents an argument for the indirect role that higher education can play in development and in poverty reduction as part of the World Bank’s development strategy. Three key arguments are presented in the report. The first argument is that higher education can contribute to economic growth by supplying the necessary human resources for a knowledge driven economy, by generating knowledge, and by promoting access and use of knowledge. The second argument is that higher education has the potential of increasing access to education and in turn increasing the employability of those who have the skills for a knowledge driven economy. The third argument is that higher education could play a role in supporting basic and secondary education by supplying those sub-sectors with trained personnel and contributing to the development of the curriculum.

The IAU: The Necessity of Iranian Society

It can be claimed that IAU has been established as a necessity for Iranian intelligentsia after the Islamic revolution; the origins of this necessity could be summarized as follows:

1. Continuing changes in the world regarding educational systems and higher education standards.
2. Islamic educational teaching and its emphasis on seeking knowledge.
3. The increasing demands of different layers of the society for educated individuals.
4. The growing rate of population and increasing demand for having higher education.
5. The necessity for privatization of higher education and exploiting private sector facilities.
6. The need to reform the educational system in Iran.

Before IAU was established, only a handful of universities have been practicing, though as a result it could not meet the increasing demand of the society for higher education. Those limited number of universities were founded mainly in the capital of the country, Tehran, and few major cities making it had to enter higher education for Iranians. In this situation, the development of higher education proved to be a necessity. The public sector seemed helpless and unable to do the task. The only possible and practical way out of this problem was relying on private sector and mobilizing the efforts in programming and planning for private higher education. In this direction, Iranian people have welcomed and supported the IAU as a way to pave towards developing higher education in Iran. In this way, the IAU with Islamic characteristics, popularity, flexibility and geographical distribution turned out to be the most rational and positive a response to Iranian rightful desire.

The IAU, a non- for – profit, non-governmental system of higher education, was founded in 1982 to do the needful for specialized manpower and development. The IAU is fully accredited by the Supreme council of Cultural Revolution and its constitution was approved by the Iranian parliament. Its spiritual founder, late Imam Khomeini denoted Ten million Rials to this University in its first days of activities. The university manages its financial affairs independently without any governmental financial support. Public supports and students' tuition are its budget resource. Twenty years ago, the University, buildings were small in number; but gradually it succeeded in developing itself, proving that nothing succeeds like success, its achievement is comparable to those of state universities and sometimes overriding them. Concerning millions square meters of land in possession, the IAU is dynamic and fast changing university and its steady expansion is mirrored in its broad range and increased in number of its undergraduate taught courses.

The IAU invites and welcomes all students who wish to further their education in the university programs. About 20 years of experience highlights the university's outstanding achievement in the promotion of higher education. It plays an effective role in materializing the agreed upon goals and objectives of the 21st century, the age of knowledge as declared by noted scholar's world over.

Students who complete the Islamic Azad University programs master the true breadth and depth of understanding both in terms of theory and practice. This will enable them to work creatively within their disciplines. These graduates have shown good academic standing and performance in other parts of the world. About one million students are studying in 170 campuses around the country, a fact evident enough that the university has outreached its goals to provide higher levels of education which undoubtedly promises a good future for the university.

The IAU: A Window of Opportunity for Iranian Families

The IAU as a product of Islamic revolution has played a valuable and vital role in promoting the culture and science in the society. Before Iranian revolution, higher education centres in Iran were limited. Many Iranian families were not able to send their children to university. But now, with establishment of IAU in 170 cities of the country, higher education has become available. Many students now, are able to study in their hometown close to their families. Meanwhile, many parents themselves are completing their studies in the same universities, e.g. in part- time programs. Since establishing the IAU, the many changes have been brought about in the country.

As the IAU established its branches in far- reaching, parts of the country, the rate of immigration from small towns to big cities have been remarkably decreased. Meanwhile many Iranian families

enjoy seeing their children's studying in their own cities, as the IAU made the higher education facilities available in different regions. Furthermore the IAU increased the possibility of life- long education. Before establishment of IAU, many Iranian young people were willing to go abroad to pursue their studies. This was an economic loss and many of them remained abroad, but now the number of these students is remarkably decreasing. The IAU helped promote the entire cultural and scientific lives of the society.

Training and education can be seen as the main factors in improving living conditions and standards in the modern world today. All societies, more or less, consider education, especially higher education as their main concern, and are prepared to pay the price for it. It has been told that an educational expense is placed secondary to defence and military expenses. The main objective of higher education is to promote society's cultural lives and assist with development in its different aspects.

It's worth mentioning that the IAU played a very important and vital role in this regard. The IAU offered different assistance to Iranian people and the government.

The IAU provides the possibility of education in different Iranian provinces in both graduate and post-graduate levels. The IAU has paved the way for thousands of Iranian students, teachers, experts, lecturers and common ordinary people to continue their studies. Meanwhile The IAU's main role in research area as a university, is training researchers. It makes the facilities of research available for students and professors. This university sponsored thousands of students to finish research projects in different areas. The main and major IAU centre of research is located in Tehran, capital city of Iran. The Higher centre for Research and Sciences in Tehran (Poonak) is very rich in research equipments and facilities. Many famous Iranian professors and researchers do work and teach in this giant scientific centre.

It should be noted that the IAU contributed to increasing the number of university students in Iran and furnished more opportunities for employment. These opportunities have been created in many far-reaching areas mostly deprived provinces that did not have the chances before owing to traditional beliefs. Many Iranian families would not permit their female children to go to other cities for studying. The IAU solved this problem by establishing university branches in more than 170 of Iranian cities.

The IAU without taking any budgetary benefit from government, managed to cultivate thousands of students. This is a great assistance both to people and government. Meanwhile it created job opportunities for thousands of unemployed in Iran as university staffs, or lecturers. When an IAU branch starts working in a city, the economy of that city shows a rapid improvement. Transportation, housing and road construction and many other economic activities flourish as students arrive in the city, and that city finds new scopes and opportunities.

The IAU is considered to be the largest university in the whole Middle- East, much to our national glory, having passed two decades, the university now focuses mainly on quality of education and tries to find better ways to make the university more efficient. The expansion of IAU means development of thinking and mental faculties, having more educated persons, ensuring more political and social participation in the part of citizens and all of these achievements improve the political environment of Iran. Higher education as a means to an end, serves in spreading freedom, institutionalizing tolerance and encouraging dialogues between civilizations.

CONCLUSION

The IAU is a magnificent example of privatization in higher education. This model as it is, may used by many states in developing countries; as these states posses characteristics common among them. Islamic countries are the most beneficial of states using this successful model. As the major problem, in many developing states is over-responsibility of governments and their over- charging in different affairs including higher education, the IAU model in Iran can make them escape from this crisis.

In this Iranian model, some claim that developing the higher education may lead to "rising of expectation" in the country. Rising of expectation is a problem in many states especially in developing countries. As the number of graduates increase, so do their expectations. They want better jobs, better accommodations, better living conditions. These expectations may lead to a kind of political crisis namely the modernization crisis. As the expectations increase, and the government can not afford them, a kind of disparity and disturbances increase among young generations. They can not accept the situation and this situation may lead to unrest and crises. For this reason some strategists recommend that the number of students in higher education should be limited. But this argument can not be acceptable. In the case of IAU, this university postponed the want of job for some years. This delay may help the government think and plan carefully for future. The other important implication to be considered is the distinction between higher education and employment management. It seems that governments should separate these two items and plan for them separately. Job creations depend on other variables and problems in the country. Those problems should be recognized and solved through long term policies. It dose not mean to cease the development of higher education because of unemployment. They are two different variables. Which require to be treated separately?

The other important issue to be considered is the role of IAU in enlightening the level of public culture in the country. The increase in the number of graduates in the country makes them more understood and more active in the country's life. It can lead to increasing participation of people in their social, economic and political affairs. It may lead to institutionalizing of political and social activities in the country, and rejecting of dictatorship and totalitarian governments.

The last but not the last is human resources. The IAU has been successful in training of skilled human resources. They have been employed in different public and private sectors and many of them are waiting for job vacancies. Generally speaking, the IAU is a distinguished example of privatization of higher education in Iran and developing states. It helped the Iranian government solve the higher education problems in the country. It has contributed to promoting the level of science and culture in the country and in short, it opened a new window of opportunity for Iranian new generation.

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