



## Short communication

## The future of UNESCO: Strategies for attracting new resources

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UNESCO is 65 years old. At the first general conference there were 30 members; today there are 193. Membership growth has been accompanied by a demand for new services, but new financial resources to support those services have not been forthcoming (Martinez, 1995). In recent years, UNESCO has had a reputation for being top-heavy and mismanaged (Muller, 1995; Cristoff, 2003). Many of these problems have been successfully addressed. Over the last ten years the number of divisions and directors has been cut by half, from over 200 to about 100. Field offices were cut from 1287 in 1998 to 93. Thirty five cabinet-level 'special advisor' positions were eliminated. 295 staff took negotiated buy-outs, which helped eliminate a \$US 12 million deficit. To combat position inflation, many posts have been down-graded. A new Internal Oversight Service, established in 2001, helps improve performance by incorporating the lessons learned in a systematic manner (Wikipedia <http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/UNESCO>, downloaded, September 22, 2010). All of this is positive.

The problem is that none of this has addressed UNESCO's real dilemma, the imbalance between its program objectives and its resources (Martinez, 1995). This imbalance is caused by three things. First is the absence of change in the organization's structure. UNESCO still attempts to cover five 'sectors': (i) information and communications, (ii) culture, (iii) social and human sciences, (iv) the natural sciences and (v) education. These sectors are different from one another. More importantly, the advantage for having the UN monitor (much less improve) them is quite different. By trying to cover all five without sufficient resources, UNESCO is unable to perform well.

Second, within UNESCO, budget allocations continue to be approved by the general conference of member states, a meeting every two years. With 193 clients, priorities often reflect the interest of its members rather than content. Activities, such as conferences, are distributed so that all clients can be included. The distribution of activities can outweigh their utility.

Third is the issue of financing. A small number of countries finance the majority of the UNESCO budget; yet every member state has an approximately equal voice in the allocation of activities. Because the program is geared to the majority of countries which pay the least; the program is least relevant for the countries which pay the most. This mismatch suggests that the program will not adequately serve the interests of its major funders. Consequently, wealthy industrial democracies do not look to UNESCO to solve their own pressing problems.

On the other hand, those same industrial democracies look to other international organizations to solve problems and they do this not by changing the procedures for voting on the budget, but by making extra-budgetary contributions. These contributions are used to finance activities which the industrial democracies believe to be of critical importance. For instance, the regular FAO budget of \$US 910 m is supplemented by \$US 836 m for programs of particular importance to the financing countries. Thus of the total FAO budget 48% is supplementary. The ILO regular budget of \$US 383 m is supplemented by \$US 530 m in extra recourses. Thus of the total ILO budget, 58% is supplementary. The WHO regular budget of \$US 880 m is supplemented by an additional \$US 4915. Thus the total WHO budget 85% is supplementary. Last among UN organizations is UNESCO whose regular budget of \$US 631 m is supplemented by only \$US 358 m. Thus only 36% is supplementary, the smallest percentage of all.<sup>1</sup>

Budgets of UN organizations (\$US 000's).

	Total (% from additional funds)	Regular budget	Other funds
UNESCO	989 (36%)	631	358
ILO	912 (58%)	383	530
WHO	5,795 (85%)	880	4,915
FAO	1,746 (48%)	910	836

UNESCO (p. 19): <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001586/158606e.pdf>.  
FAO (p. 134): [http://www.fao.org/pwb/2008/index\\_en.htm](http://www.fao.org/pwb/2008/index_en.htm). WHO [www.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf\\_files/A61/A61\\_20-en.pdf](http://www.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/A61/A61_20-en.pdf). ILO <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/program/download/pdf/06-07/pb.pdf>.

One might reply to this suggestion by noting that other UN organizations are attempting to counter international problems of crisis of critical importance to the industrial democracies—the spread of infectious disease, agriculture pollution, global warming, and child labor. But should one be satisfied with the fact that UNESCO has the lowest percentage of co-financing among these UN organizations? Is it possible that UNESCO might seek to address problems of particular importance to the industrial democracies and hence interest them in co financing a higher percentage of UNESCO's budget to mirror what is done in ILO, FAO and WHO?

Perhaps there are particular issues concern to the industrial democracies which UNESCO could pursue aggressively. They occur

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<sup>1</sup> By way of comparison, the total UNESCO budget of \$US 989 million is, for instance, about one half the budget of an American research university.

across each of UNESCO's sectors, albeit not equally. This is a short list in the field of education. The assumption here is that one or more of these might be of sufficient interest to attract supplementary funding, and all of them are in UNESCO's professional sphere.<sup>2</sup>

*Education statistics.* The UNESCO Institute of Statistics has an admirable record but needs to expand in two arenas, both of vital interest to the industrial democracies (Charbonnier, 2005; Puryear, 1995; Global Education Digest, 2005; Bradburn and Gilford, 1990). One is quality control. Many countries habitually submit statistics which are systematically inaccurate. Ministries of Education may over-count the number of teachers and not update student population figures. Once submitted, the range of choices for UNESCO Institute of Statistics is narrow. More proactive techniques require additional resources.

A second arena is that of having a common standard of statistical quality across OECD and UNESCO members. The World Education Indicators (WEI) project has brought progress in many fields—perpupil expenditures, sources of finance and achievement.<sup>3</sup> This progress should now be generalized to all member states. It might include for instance, the resources necessary for low-income UNESCO members to regularly participate in international assessments, to improve the collection of statistics on education finance, and to upgrade the range of measures of literacy. This effort will require a specialized fund, with rigorous personnel and management objectives.

*Social cohesion role of schools.* While it is true that the press has been too quick to lay blame on faith-based schools as laying the intellectual and emotional underpinnings for terrorism, it is also true that schools are battlegrounds for ethnic and religious war (Heyneman and Todoric-Bebic, 2000; Heyneman, 2002). It is generally recognized that a world safe for everyone will require a consensus about the role of schools and the constituent ingredients of school climate based on universally accepted professional standards. UNESCO's role in defining this, adjudicating in instances of infraction, and helping isolate and sanction where infractions have occurred may be no less of a struggle than that of ILO in the case of child labor or WHO in the case of child pornography. Schools which exacerbate tensions are widely perceived to be a danger and it would be a constructive way for UNESCO to be on the forefront, with additional resources, to alleviate the problem.

*University codes of conduct.* Education corruption is widespread and getting worse (Heyneman, 2007; Sahlberg, 2009; Heyneman et al., 2008). UNESCO has been helpful in identifying the problem, but the solution remains elusive. One solution is to have a common ethical infrastructure as part of a general program of university recognition. A university ethical infrastructure would include a code of conduct for faculty, administrators and students, clear procedures for the fair adjudication of complaints, and a clear set of sanctions in cases of proven infraction. This would be helpful to the European Union, the United States and to any country which imports graduate students and/or labor in important technical fields. Designing and applying this standard rigorously would be a useful UNESCO product.

*Experimental methods in the assessment of university quality.* To date, education experimentation has been confined to elementary and secondary education. But the arena of higher education quality is of deep concern to industrial democracies. Because of administrative restrictions, there are only a few mechanisms available to design experiments in higher education. But many new experiments are in demand. These may include exit tests for undergraduates, faculty performance pay, university standards for access to broad band, the use of virtual curriculum, etc. Industrial democracies might be interested in contributing to a fund which would make such experiments, awarded on an open and competitive basis.

There are many other areas which might also be of interest. The point here is that it would be useful to have UNESCO play a role at the forefront of solving education problems on behalf of the industrial democracies in a way similar to its sister UN agencies and financed to do this through extra budgetary resources.

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<sup>2</sup> These are drawn from Heyneman (1999, 2002, 2003) and Heyneman and Pelczar (2005).

<sup>3</sup> The World Education Indicators project, originally financed by a grant from the World Bank, was an experiment to see if the statistical standards used among OECD members could be expanded to non-OECD members (see, for instance: UNESCO, 2006).