

**CHAPTER ONE**  
**INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Throughout the world, higher education is under pressure to be more effective, efficient and cost conscious. This is even more important in developing countries, including those in Southern Africa, due to their low economic bases and declining economies.

Higher education institutions in these countries are expected to serve national manpower development needs as well as effect social justice in terms of access and equity. But because of severe economic restrictions, a critical issue for these countries is how to expand and diversify higher education provision without any significant increases in the public funding of universities.

At the same time, higher education has to compete for government funding with other sectors of education as well as other sectors of the public budget.

Even South Africa, with better economic resources, is under great pressure to provide tertiary education opportunities to its massive non-white population.

Thus there are strong pressures in the Southern African region to dramatically increase participation in higher education, with no likelihood of significant new resources becoming available to the higher education sector in these countries. This makes it imperative for these nations to look for alternative methods of increasing higher education provision.

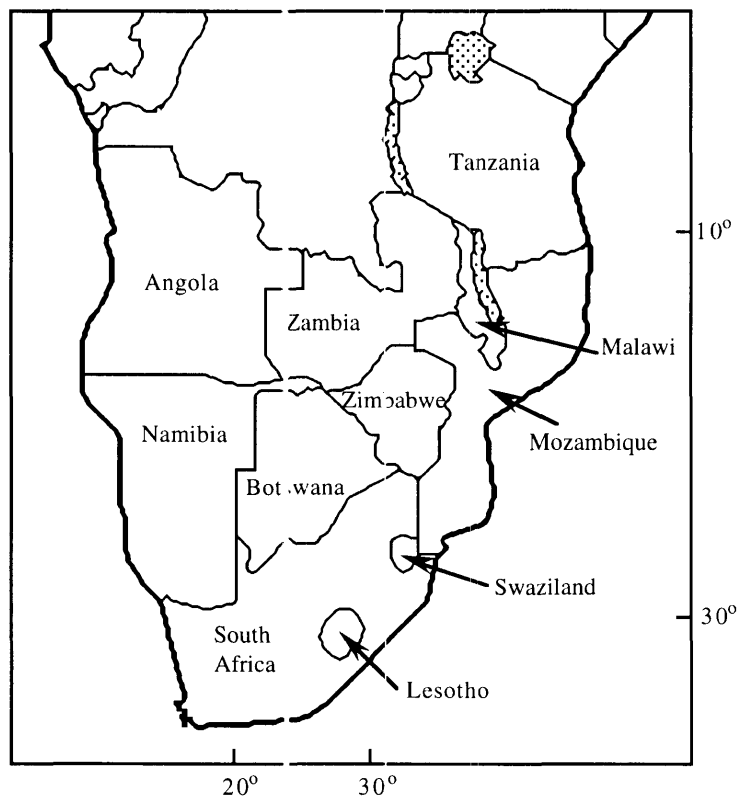
How then can the Southern African countries meet their common higher education needs, in the face of common economic problems resulting from scarcity of resources?

When nations in a given geographical region have a common educational need to be met in the face of small and dispersed populations and struggling economies, the obvious solution to the predicament is for two or more of those nations to co-operate. If they pool their resources they might effectively address the common need.

One form of co-operation that readily springs to the minds of many people involved in such circumstances is the establishment of a regional institution to serve all member states. *But are regional institutions really the solution or*

*can the problem be solved through other, more functional types of co-operation such as inter-institutional co-operation in course development?*

One region experiencing this predicament is the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC).



**Figure 1: Map of SADC Member States**

A study of nine of the members of SADC (namely Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe), which was commissioned by the SADC Regional Training Council and the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC) in 1986/87 (Sibanda and Northcott, 1989) identified a need for tertiary (including higher level) distance education as well as a common need for particular courses. Some of the more pertinent findings and recommendations from that study were:

1. There is a high potential for the utilisation of distance education in the region;

2. There is a great need for funds to set up distance education programmes that cannot be met by individual countries because of the deficiency of their economic base;
3. There is a big gap in (and a need for) the provision of distance education at vocational, technical and higher education levels in all countries;
4. With the exception of Zambia, universities in the SADC region only offer a very limited range of distance education programmes;
5. There are very small numbers of students enrolled in distance education programmes per country at the above named levels.

The common needs, the low numbers of distance education students per country, the unfavourable economic climates, all point to the need for co-operative programmes. Even if the low numbers of students were to be attributed to the narrow range of distance education providers and courses on offer, broadening that range might still prove unjustifiable, on economic grounds, for countries to undertake individually.

The tenth member, the Republic of South Africa, a recent addition to the organisation, has the well established University of South Africa (UNISA) which is a distance teaching university. Granted the need was identified prior to South Africa joining the organisation, but even with UNISA now in the region there is still a need for more higher level distance education centres in the region and therefore there is still need for regional co-operation in the provision of higher level distance education. As Julius Nyerere of Tanzania noted (Sibanda and Northcott, 1989:213) in the days prior to South Africa gaining democratic rule and acceptance by the rest of southern Africa and the world at large,

Our [SADC] purposes are not simply greater independence from South Africa. If South Africa's apartheid rule ended tomorrow, there would still be a need for the states of Southern Africa to co-operate, to co-ordinate their transport system, to fight foot and mouth disease together, to rationalise their industrial development.

South Africa's coming into the picture merely adds one more member to SADC, with a few distance education providers, notably the University of South Africa (UNISA), which would still not be sufficient to handle the needs

of the Southern African region as a whole. Besides, even South Africa itself may need to expand its distance education base. In fact it is obvious that President Mandela of South Africa is under enormous pressure to provide multi-modal tertiary education opportunities to the massive non-white population, if the new "vision" is to be maintained.

Under the circumstances, one obvious form of co-operation would be the establishment of a regional distance teaching institution. In fact suggestions/proposals have been made for the Southern African region to establish a regional Open University (Sibanda and Northcott, 1989; Leibbrandt, 1990). A 1988 World Bank report (Perraton, 1993:258) made a suggestion for one or more regional centres for distance education in the African continent.

But, given the history of regional institutions both in Southern Africa and other regions, *are regional institutions really the solution or should the region consider other forms of co-operation such as inter-institutional co-operation in course development*, which might fulfil the need equally well, and perhaps, at less cost or risk to member countries?

In attempting to answer the above question one other factor to be borne in mind is the fact that *each of the SADC countries wants to "do its own thing" – that is part of the independence story*. But SADC members are aware of the inability of the existing individual education systems to meet the region's demands for suitably trained manpower, as well as of the decline in the economies of member countries which hampers the improvement of tertiary education provision in the individual countries. Hence their need and willingness for co-operation. However, the choice as to the most appropriate kind of co-operation would also be guided by observations such as the one by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), of which most SADC countries are members, that third world countries (and this, too, includes members of the SADC region) have expressed a preference for

Practical, down to earth collaboration that will impact on range and quality rather than for grand, expensive schemes that benefit only a few.

(Commonwealth Secretariat, 1988:68)

Sibanda and Northcott (1989:217) make reference to *an earlier lack of support in the region for an Open University of Southern Africa*, as well as a proposal resulting from the 1986/87 study commissioned by the SADC Regional

Training Council and the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC) for an Institute of Distance Education for Southern Africa (IDESA), which could adopt any of the following modes of operation (Sibanda and Northcott, 1989:226-229):

Mode A – recommends that IDESA be a central agency that facilitates or coordinates co-operation among distance education providers which share in the preparation of courses, while they also individually provide the delivery of courses and student support services.

Mode B – still recommends that IDESA be a central agency but in this case it contracts for the preparation of course materials with a range of distance education providers. Thus it becomes a central collection point and distribution centre.

Mode C – sees IDESA undertaking the preparation of course materials itself, so that it will have, on its staff, course developers, editors and designers but not subject matter specialists, who it will contract as and when necessary, from wherever they may be found.

These modes of operation are illustrated diagrammatically on the following page (page 7).

The above modes of operation for IDESA obviously emphasise inter-institutional co-operation in course development. The question still remains: "Which of the two options – a regional university or inter-institutional co-operation in course development – is more practicable than the other?" – the answer to which can only be obtained from a parallel study of the two.

While Sibanda and Northcott do not advance reasons for the rejection of an Open University for Southern Africa, the following account of the reasons behind the rejection of a proposal for an Australian Open University might shed some light on the issues involved. Even those who are thinking in terms of an Open University for Africa on an international basis (Perraton, 1993:258) might find this information illuminative.

The three preferred modes as developed in Jevons *et al.* (1987) in the final report of the project are as follows:

**MODE A: Central support agency** Many distance education providers are supported by IDESA. They share the preparation (P) of course materials and collaborate in other ways facilitated by IDESA. They provide delivery and student support (D) and in most cases also teach face to face (T)

Many

P (share) + D + T

One

IDESA

**MODE B: Central contracting agency** IDESA contracts with a range of distance education providers for the preparation of course materials.

Many

P (contract) + D + T

One

IDESA

**MODE C: Central provider** IDESA prepares materials, using subject experts from elsewhere. Delivery and student support are normally decentralised.

Many

D + T

One

IDESA

P (contract)

OR OCCASIONALLY

Many

T

One

IDESA

P (contract) + D

**Figure 2: IDESA: Modes of Operation**

Source: Silbanda and Northcott, 1989.

The idea of an Australian Open University was rejected on the grounds of the heavy initial expenditure, the large numbers of students that would be required to make it viable and the heavy expenses and complications of communicating with students scattered all over the country (CTEC, 1986:224). And, of course, there was also resistance from existing distance education providers, as well as interstate rivalries.<sup>1</sup>

Africa is a much larger continent than Australia and, unlike Australia, it does not have a well developed electronic communications system, thus making communication with students that much more complex.

Africa also consists of a number of independent countries with different political systems, governments and aspirations, together with rivalries and jealousies between any pair of countries. Therefore, an African Open University, even with devolved services in the form of regional centres, might still experience the same kind of problems, albeit on a larger scale, that regional universities in that continent experienced, eventually leading to the dismantling of those universities. The issues surrounding regional universities will be dealt with in detail in the next section of this chapter.

Regional universities have been investigated extensively in a number of contexts, and in the area of sustainability, they have been found wanting. Their documentation is substantial. Therefore the literature on the issue will be dealt with at this point, as a preamble that establishes the necessity of considering inter-institutional co-operation in course development as an alternative.

Reference will be made to two former regional universities namely the former University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland (UBLS) and the former University of East Africa (UEA); and to two regional universities that are still operational. These are the University of the South Pacific (USP) and the University of the West Indies (UWI).

### **THE UNIVERSITY OF BOTSWANA, LESOTHO AND SWAZILAND (UBLS)**

UBLS was established in 1964 (Meek and Jones, 1988:13; Association of Commonwealth Universities, 1977-78:1738), as the University of Basutoland, Bechuanaland Protectorate and Swaziland (UBBS) following an agreement between the High Commission of the Territories of Basutoland,



Bechuanaland Protectorate and Swaziland and the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (on behalf of the Roman Catholic Church) of Pius XII College, Roma, which was affiliated with the University of South Africa (UNISA).

The following events led to the evolution of UBBS from Pius XII College. The South African government declared its intention not to admit any more students from outside South Africa after the end of 1953 (for students from Basutoland, this ruling would apply as of 1958). Also as from the early 60's, Pius XII College began experiencing financial problems when its major benefactor, UNISA, unilaterally decided to withdraw its financial support for the College. In addition, because of its denominational nature the College was having difficulty attracting foreign aid. In the same period – early 50's to early 60's - the College was already involved in the education of students from, among others, the other High Commission Territories *viz* Bechuanaland Protectorate and Swaziland (NUL Calendar, 1994/95:47-48), so that these Territories also had a stake in the welfare of the College.

The above mentioned events that occurred in the early 50's to early 60's led to negotiations between the Catholic Church, the Basutoland Government, the University authorities and the governments of Bechuanaland and Swaziland (NUL Calendar, 1993/94:48) to establish a Trans-National University to serve the three High Commission Territories. Pius XII College became the natural choice. As highlighted in the NUL Calendar (1993/94:48), because the College had, from its early years, been serving all three High Commission Territories, they could already envisage it as destined to become a "University of the High Commission Territories".

In addition to the reasons advanced above, it might not be presumptuous to propose that one of the most likely reasons why Bechuanaland Protectorate and Swaziland did not establish their own national universities at this point or previously, was the lack of national economic viability. Logically, one university would be sufficient to serve three small and inadequately resourced countries and the use of the former Pius XII College would obviate initial establishment costs. Member countries had a common tie – they were all Protectorates of the British government and the regional university might therefore enjoy regional funding by Britain. They also enjoyed a common cultural heritage – a chieftainship form of government; all had resisted being conquered by South Africa though all shared a border with it and were therefore economically influenced by it; and all had members of their ethnic

groups residing in South Africa. The above-mentioned factors favouring the establishment of a regional university to serve these three nations led to what Bhindi (1992:27) refers to as an expression of solidarity with each other for a valued enterprise (education) and for economic effectiveness [and efficiency]. Such institutions are built on the basis of an economic model of co-operation which decrees that the structure should be within the context of available resources (Bhindi, 1977:9) and which reflects the influence of external environmental forces (Croft, 1993:137), in this case resource scarcity, the influence of the colonial protector and affiliations to well established, prestigious and well resourced universities, at least in the beginning.

UBBS became UBLS in 1966 when Bechuanaland Protectorate and Basutoland changed their names to Botswana and Lesotho respectively, following the independence of all three countries from British rule.

Though the university received equal funding from all three governments, it originally (1964-1970) had little physical presence in Botswana and Swaziland, which led to pressure by these two countries for the establishment of campuses in each of the countries – the Gaborone campus in Botswana and Kwaluseni campus in Swaziland.

By 1973, the campuses in Gaborone and Kwaluseni were offering Part 1 degree courses (the first two years of four-year degree programmes) only. The remaining two years of the programmes could be completed at the Roma campus. By 1974 the campuses in Gaborone and Kwaluseni were offering full degrees in humanities (Association of Commonwealth Universities, 1977-78:1954), though the same degrees were still on offer at the Roma (Lesotho) campus.

UBLS disintegrated in 1975 when, in response to pressing national manpower needs, the National Assembly of Lesotho declared the Roma campus (main campus) of UBLS to be the National University of Lesotho (Association of Commonwealth Universities, 1977-78:1738; Meek and Jones, 1988:13), thus rejecting the regional ethos upon which the university had been instituted.

How long UBLS could have survived as a regional university even if Lesotho had not initiated the break when it did, is still questionable. It might merely have been a question of time. That Botswana and Swaziland each pressured the governing authority of the university for their own national presence is

an indicator that they were not satisfied to contribute equally without equal benefit, especially with regard to capital investments. It is extremely likely that they had been also experiencing political pressure for a visible university presence as a national symbol. The establishment of the Gaborone and Kwaluseni campuses was a positive attempt by the university to address these issues. But would the two countries have stopped at this? The fact that the Gaborone and Kwaluseni campuses were, by 1974, already offering full degrees in the humanities, which were also on offer at the Roma campus, was surely the initial step towards the campuses claiming fully fledged autonomy. Thus the Lesotho Government unilateral action probably achieved in the short term what would have inevitably developed over a longer term.

The abrupt dismantling of UBL3 no doubt left the Botswana and Swaziland authorities not only stranded, but confused, and with the responsibility of making hasty decisions to cater for their students. Political moves like this one by Lesotho aggravate and cause insecurity among the other members of any co-operative enterprise. Needless to say, incidents like this make governments and institutions wary of this kind of co-operation.

On the other hand there is some anecdotal evidence that subsequent to the establishment of the Gaborone and Kwaluseni campuses, a disproportionate level of resources was channelled to these new campuses in an attempt to build them quickly, which could have left the Lesotho government feeling it was not getting its fair share of the resources. Thompson *et al.*(1976) endorse this observation. According to these authors, "decentralisation was the most widely debated issue", the "perennial and most controversial issue [being] how to apportion resources fairly". The final blow, they maintain, was the dispute between the Vice-Chancellor and the Government of Lesotho in which the latter claimed that the Vice-Chancellor was deliberately favouring the campuses in the other two countries. So there could also have been the issue of equity/inequity in the distribution of resources and benefits, and the associated rivalries which, apart from Botswana and Swaziland desiring a national presence, could also have been influential in the establishment of the two other campuses. The NUL Calendar (1994/5:49) has this to say about the cause of the split

Cooperation between the three campuses was not always consistent and equal, as interests and concerns about development and future plans differed between the three campuses,

which shows there was more to the split than Lesotho's dissatisfaction with the regional university's inability to meet its manpower needs. The above quotation suggests there was general dissatisfaction among all participating countries.

### **THE UNIVERSITY OF EAST AFRICA (UEA)**

UEA (the University of East Africa) was established in 1963 and comprised Makerere College in Uganda, the Royal University College in Kenya and Dar es Salaam University College in Tanzania. The three had different teaching functions in order to avoid costs that might accrue due to duplication. Makerere College was charged with hosting the Faculties of Arts, Science and Medicine; the Royal University College with Technology and Commerce, while Dar es Salaam hosted the Faculty of Law.

UEA dismantled in 1970. Thompson *et al* (1977:196) attribute the dismantling to economic and administrative reasons but add that political considerations may have also contributed to the decision.

Southall (1974) suggests that with UEA, which was more a federation of universities than a regional university, and whose federation was never intended to last indefinitely, debate concerning the dissolution should centre around the manner of dissolution not the timing thereof. It lasted 8 years instead of the anticipated 10-15. The account of its existence as elaborated by Southall (1974) shows clearly that it was, throughout its lifetime, plagued by the same ills that led to the demise of UBLS viz, national politics and issues of equity/inequity in the distribution of resources and benefits among the nations concerned.

Rothchild in Southall (1974:138) makes the following observation with regard to African federations – that their durability is more the exception than the rule. He says

Federal systems have remained operative for relatively brief periods of time, followed by fissure into separate, sovereign parts or movement towards unitary systems ...

This observation may seem cynical but there are numerous examples, along the length and breadth of Africa that support it. Of course the problem is not specific to Africa. Neemia (1986) describes experience with integration in the

third world as generally characterised by crisis, stagnation or even dissociation as a result of the inability of such co-operation to address the issues of equity/inequity and the resultant conflicts among partner states.

With reference to the UBLS case, Thompson and Fogel (1976) suggest two questions that should be asked in such cases, one of which is

Can independent nations collaborate in running one national institution?

In a related publication, Thompson *et al* (1977), the above question is phrased differently, but the issue is made even clearer:

Is there a future for regional universities, even when the "economics" of the situation is manifestly against setting up national universities? [that is] will economic common sense triumph over 'academic nationalism'?

It could be that the African nations are not yet ready for that level of co-operation, at least not at this stage of economic and political development. It could be that during the planning process, greater attention should be paid to the cost-benefit factor for member countries. It could be that all things being equal, each country would like university independence and autonomy. Whatever the case, experiences such as the above need to be taken seriously into consideration when contemplating co-operation. When such federations or regional co-operative ventures dismantle, they are bound to leave some members better off than others. Members who are left worse off than their colleagues are likely to harbour feelings of resentment and animosity that might endanger any further prospects for similar kinds of co-operation.

In contrast, lower levels of co-operation such as information sharing, have proved to be lasting, even in Africa. One example is the Distance Education Association of Southern Africa which started about two decades ago and is still functional and growing; and whose founder members are distance education institutions (at secondary level) in Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland.

### **THE UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC (USP)**

USP (The University of the South Pacific) was established in 1968 at Laucala Bay in Suva, Fiji, to serve 11 English speaking island groups which were

associated with the United Kingdom and New Zealand. Laucala Bay was chosen so the university could utilise the then New Zealand Air Force Flying Boat Base which was likely to become available as the flying boats were becoming obsolete (Aikman, 1988:35). The university now has a second campus at Alafua in Western Samoa (Association of Commonwealth Universities, 1994:1650), and distance education centres in all but one island (Association of Commonwealth Universities 1994:1651).

The university serves the island nations of the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and Western Samoa. According to Neemia (1986: 1-4) these island nations are generally small economies with differences in physical size, economic prospects, political systems and structures even if there are no major differences in political ideologies. Each has its own peculiar political problems. These island nations are dependent on a few affluent countries for budgetary (financial, exports and imports) assistance. The island nations are also characterised by three main cultures – Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia, with striking differences as well as similarities within each culture group.

While USP is still functioning as a regional university, and despite any successes it might have achieved or is achieving in its capacity as a regional university, there are very strong indications that some of the member countries are dissatisfied with the services they are getting from the university. For example, by 1988, the Cook Islands, Kiribati and the Solomon Islands were already expressing dissatisfaction with USP. Short (1988:281) notes that though still a member of USP, and too small for a national university, the Cook Islands government expressed dissatisfaction with USP and preferred to network with universities elsewhere than with USP. This is because the Cook Islands see USP as a Fijian national university which serves primarily the needs of Fiji. Short supports his stand by referring to Fiji's dominance over other members in councils and meetings and on issues of centralisation versus decentralisation. He quotes, as an example, Fiji's inability to take seriously the Cook Islands request to relocate the Institute of Pacific Studies in Rarotonga [as a decentralisation move].

Bauro (1988:302) also indicates that though Kiribati has not expressed a desire for a national university, they are still dissatisfied with USP as a result of Fiji's dominance over other members. Bauro adds that Fiji enjoys a greater share of

the benefits of the regional venture than other members and that Fiji's immigration laws restrict the numbers of staff that can be employed from the other islands.

In the same vein, Maenu'u (1988) also expresses strong dissatisfaction on the part of the Solomon Islands with some of the services they are getting from USP, such as USP's inability to meet the Solomon Islands' manpower needs, as well as its denial of the Solomon Islands' wish to host the Institute of Marine Resources. In the same article, Maenu'u also expresses strong dissatisfaction with the inequitable distribution of resources in favour of Fiji and would prefer to see the Solomon Islands develop stronger relations with the University of Papua New Guinea instead.

Expressing an opinion on behalf of Vanuatu, Tahi (1988:329) says they are satisfied with USP but encourages USP to establish faculties in different areas so that it does not appear to be serving predominantly the interests of Fiji.

On the other hand, Western Samoa, while satisfied with USP and hosting USP's second campus, has also established a national university to cater for its growing population and to address its specific manpower needs (Mualia, 1988:336).

It is obvious that though USP is still functional as a regional university, it is plagued by the same ills that led to the dismemberment of UBLS and UEA, which fall into two broad categories and are interrelated. The two are (1) **equity or inequity in the sharing of scarce resources and benefits** and (2) **the impact of national politics on regional universities**. These are the critical issues. The specific complaints are symptoms rather than the cause of tensions.

How then has USP managed to survive in the face of the apparent discontent of member countries with its services? In an introduction to Part Two of the Institute of Pacific Studies publication (1988) entitled "Pacific Universities – Achievements, Problems and Prospects", USP is said to owe its continued existence to the fact that most foreign nations which support it financially, particularly Australia and New Zealand, will not support national universities that will compete with it (pages 33-34). This observation is reiterated by Fairbairn (1992:16). While the donor efforts are in this case supportive of regional co-operation, they may also be seen as deliberately undermining national efforts. Crocombe and Meleisea (1988:369) describe the

donor countries' efforts as supporting USP's "rear-guard actions that undermine the efforts of individual country governments in seeking more equity".

### **THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES (UWI)**

UWI (The University of the West Indies) was established in 1948 as a university college in association with the University of London. It attained university status in 1962. It serves 14 spatially scattered, economically and politically diverse countries in the English-speaking Caribbean and Belize in Central America (Association of Commonwealth Universities, 1986:2372). The 13 other countries are Antigua & Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, Montserrat, St. Christopher & Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent & the Grenadines and the Republic of Trinidad & Tobago. The total population of member states in 1986 was 4 million, ranging from 12 000 in Montserrat to 1 million in Trinidad and Tobago.

The first campus was established in Mona, Jamaica. The second campus started operating in 1960 in St. Augustine, Trinidad; the third in 1963 in Cave Hill, Barbados. According to the 1994 Commonwealth Universities Yearbook, the university now has distance education centres in 10 of the countries that do not host campuses.

Apart from Guyana withdrawing its support in 1962 to establish its own university, UWI still enjoys the support of the other members. Even Guyana still maintains relations with UWI.

On the basis of the literature available on the subject, UWI is apparently not plagued by the same ills that are bothering USP and that led to the downfall of UBLS and UEA. This is despite the fact that UWI shares similar characteristics with the universities mentioned previously such as: serving small, economically and politically diverse nations, for which the idea of regional co-operation could have been perceived more by the colonial masters than the nationals; with the resultant universities modelled around the well established, prestigious and well resourced parent universities. This is not, in any way, meant to dispute the necessity for regional co-operation nor the fact that on their own, individual national universities might not have been a viable proposition.



The following factors could have contributed to UWI's continued success:

- UWI is obviously making an effort at achieving equity in distribution and sharing of resources which is evidenced by an apparent fair distribution of courses (teaching functions) in the three campuses such that while general degrees are common to all campuses, professional degrees are distributed among the campuses (e.g. Agriculture and Engineering are in St. Augustine, Law at Cave Hill) while the final 2 years of the clinical programme in Medicine are offered in all three campuses (Association of Commonwealth Universities, 1994:2412).
- Current funding is on a per capita, Full-time Equivalent (FTE) basis with a discount for students from non-campus universities (Association of Commonwealth Universities, 1986:2373), which shows the university administration's empathy with member states.
- There are variations in academic salaries to reflect local (campus) conditions (Association of Commonwealth Universities, 1986:2374).
- There is no statutory restriction as to nationality for appointment or tenure. However, this reflects university policy and not the practices of the country hosting the management of the university, which could be different as in the case of USP and Fiji.
- The presence of campuses and university centres in other countries is an indication of the university's attempts at decentralization and response to the countries' need for a university presence. While still maintaining a regional commitment and maintenance of standards, the university is also emphasising greater devolution of power to individual campuses.
- In addition, the university's central administration has, as of 1990, been separated from that of the Mona campus (Association of Commonwealth Universities, 1994:2412). This way it may not be mistaken for a 'Mona campus administration'.

However, while devolution of power can be a positive step towards sharing of resources and power, it can also create problems. In the case of UWI, there are already concerns as to whether the regional university headquarters will be able to assist a campus which is experiencing financial problems, when all

along, the costing and financing of campuses had been done on a campus by campus basis.

The overall picture here is that national politics are not interfering with the operation of UWI and that the university is doing its best to achieve equitable sharing of resources. There is, of course, also the possibility that though the nations served by UWI do wish to have national universities, they realise the futility of establishing individual national universities. Again there is the issue of decentralisation to the point where the campuses are autonomous. Can UWI still be regarded as a regional university with devolved services in the form of multi-campus, or has the devolution resulted in a federation of three autonomous universities, each of which still has the commitment to serve all member countries? Even if the latter is the case, the federation is apparently working, whereas that of the East African universities failed.

## **FACTORS UNDERMINING REGIONAL UNIVERSITIES**

The following is an analysis of the factors that undermine the successful operation of regional universities on the basis of the preceding four Case Studies; an analysis Crocombe and Meleisea (1988:358) refer to as "the rhetoric of regional co-operation versus the reality of national interest". As indicated earlier the factors that operate against regional or trans-national universities fall into two broad categories viz. *equity in the sharing of benefits and national politics*.

### **Equity in Sharing**

Members' *perceptions*<sup>2</sup>; (Neemia, 1986) regarding equity or inequity in the sharing of resources and benefits seem to be the main source of tension among members of co-operative enterprises. Equity is evaluated on parameters such as nationality, ethnicity, locality, social class, etc.

If all nations had adequate resources, everyone of them would establish its own university(ies), which would focus on national manpower needs. It is the scarcity of resources that forces nations to establish trans-national universities, with the hope that those universities will serve member countries equally – a hope which may not be very practicable, viewed in retrospect. For example, the host country is bound to gain more financially in things like services, taxes

and capital investments, which then become a source of dissatisfaction for other members (Dalton, 1988:103 Crocombe and Meleisea, 1988:357).

Whether the university derives its funds from member countries or from donor countries (especially where country contributions are equal), the funds are meant for regional co-operation, so members expect to derive equal benefits. The observation that though Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland contributed equally to UBLS funding but the university had little presence originally in Botswana and Swaziland, is an indication of dissatisfaction regarding the equity in contributions and the inequity in benefits.

The university's policy could be to serve all members without discrimination, only to be undermined by the host country's national laws as in the case of Fiji's immigration laws which restrict numbers that can be employed from other countries. Noting that the employment issue or any other issue or dispute where the university has to comply with the host country's regulations, is not the fault of the university, does not help ease the other members' feelings of dissatisfaction.

Nations seem to consider the presence of a university in the country as a national symbol. Thus such nations cannot be satisfied with a university that is operating from another country and has no physical presence in their own country. Regional institutions combat this by establishing campuses or centres in member countries but even this move is not always satisfactory to the members concerned.

A regional university serves members with different needs and aspirations and it may not always be possible for such a university to meet all its members' diverse needs. An example of this is UBLS's failure to meet Lesotho's manpower needs, or USP's inability to meet Western Samoa's manpower needs. Such failures, however, may lead to discontent with its services, and to the establishment of national universities which may undermine the regional effort.

By its very nature, a regional university is bound to serve different ethnic groups. Dissatisfaction could arise over one ethnic group's dominance over others as in the case of Fiji's Indian population and its purported dominance over other groups. For a more detailed and comprehensive discussion of co-operation and conflict in heterogeneous systems as an intricately woven

interplay of race, nationality, ethnic groupings, locality, sex, informal interest groups and relations within and across these groups, Van den Berghe (1973) is invaluable.

### **National Politics**

Differences in national politics, especially differences in political ideologies, can lead to tensions among members and subsequently to the dismantling of regional universities.

Fiji experienced two military coups in 1987. The first was in May, the second in October. Following the first coup, the other members of USP tried to withdraw their students and find them places in other universities or to establish their own universities. The second military coup saw the Extensions Services building of USP taken over by the military, some academic staff arrested without warrants or charge while still others were assaulted. The military also shot into the air to intimidate students. All of this is bound to be very disconcerting to member governments and they might want to protect their people by establishing their own universities or networking with other universities.

Similarly, Lesotho's military coup in 1970 must have been a great source of concern for other members of UBL. The dismantling of UBL in 1975 could still have been a political manoeuvre by the Lesotho government for it to gain greater control of the university.

Rothstein in Neemia (1986) concludes that the practical problems that developing countries experience do not have regional solutions. This seems too extreme a view. Perhaps the third world is, as yet, not ready for this level of co-operation and should consider lower, less complex levels of co-operation. In any case, in the examples of regional universities reviewed, the concept does work, but only up to a point. Perhaps such universities should not be expected to last indefinitely in the first place, but a mechanism should be built into their establishment that allows for a smooth transition to independent national universities over time.

One wonders why it is that despite the promise of regional co-operation to solve the problems imposed on nations by inadequacy of resources, such co-

operation is hardly ever sustainable. The following is a theory that attempts to explain this phenomenon.

### **The Centre-Periphery Theory**

The centre-periphery theory, which is about political spatial units, has its origins in the physical sciences' centripetal and centrifugal forces. The Concise Oxford Dictionary (1990:182) defines these forces as:

*centripetal force is the force that acts on a body, causing it to move about a centre*

*centrifugal force is an apparent force that acts outward on a body moving about a centre*

Thus there are two opposing forces such that one works towards the centre while the other works against the centre.

Gottman (1980:15-19) says that in a political spatial unit the centre is the place where the seat of authority is located while the peripheral location refers to the condition of being in subordination to the centre (the seat of authority). He adds that under 'normal' conditions, the peripheral position is accepted even if somewhat resentfully, but for a variety of reasons (cultural, ethnic, economic or political), the periphery may rebel against the centre, forcing a reorganisation of the spatial unit so as to achieve equity.

Alexander (1980:143) suggests that what brings about the rebellion for organisation is **people's perception** of their relationship with the centre.

Bose (1980:213) suggests a solution to the centre-periphery issue as devolution of power to the peripheral regions so that they will not harbour feelings of animosity towards the centre. If the regional universities studied in this document are anything to go by, Bose's suggestion does work but only up to a point. It has been successful in UWI and some of the countries that have a USP presence seem to be satisfied with that presence. It did not work for UBLS and UEA but, of course, there were other forces (national politics) in operation.

It can be expected, therefore, that the above-mentioned concerns or at least parts thereof, were taken into consideration when, subsequent to the study of the needs, economic conditions, demographic factors and possible solutions, undertaken in 1986-87, SADC member countries opted, instead, for a regional institute – the Institute of Distance Education for Southern Africa (IDESA). Interestingly, IDESA has been accepted in principle, but not yet implemented (Perraton, 1993:257). It would not be surprising to find that the apparent slow pace of implementation has something to do with its location and the associated issues of equity.

It is pertinent, at this juncture, to point out that though some of the regional universities reviewed above, like USP and UWI, have a distance education component, none of the four universities were established as distance education universities *per se*. Perhaps their experiences as distance teaching universities could have been different and more encouraging. However, the lessons from the experiences detailed above should be useful. Besides, factors such as location and its influence on a national university presence and the related issues of equity would still have been causes for concern even if these universities were established as purely distance teaching universities.

Against this background, it is pertinent to ask, at this point: "What about inter-institutional co-operation in distance education course development? Would it be any different?" As will be demonstrated in Chapter Three, this option has not been, previously to this work, as extensively investigated or documented as the federated or regional universities – which justifies its choice as the object of this current research.

## **THE RESEARCHER'S BACKGROUND**

The researcher's interest in the problem stems from her past involvement with distance education. She has been involved with distance education since 1981 when she joined the staff of the Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre as a course writer and later became an editor of instructional materials.

In the period 1981-1990 the author attended several short courses and workshops on different aspects of distance education such as course development, course delivery, management of distance education institutions and programme development, in the hope of discovering new ways of

meeting the needs of many isolated but competent would be students in Lesotho.

During 1991 and the first half of 1992, the researcher successfully completed a Master of Educational Administration degree at the University of New England in Australia. Part of the course work was on distance education and her dissertation was also on an aspect of distance education – The Role of Study Centres. The topic for the dissertation was chosen for its significance in the operation of the Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre and would, in due course, also be beneficial to the National University of Lesotho and the National Teacher Training College. Furthermore, the topic was such that it enabled the researcher to balance her knowledge of, and experience in, course development with one very significant element of course delivery, namely student support – that is those services and activities aimed at assisting the distance education learner to cope with this mode of study and to attain autonomy in learning.

Her interest in cross-institutional co-operation in course development stems from her past involvement with course development and her intended future involvement with the same; as well as its possible application within educational institutions in her country, Lesotho, in the Southern African region and world-wide.

### **Lesotho's Need for Tertiary Level Distance Education**

The Kingdom of Lesotho is a small country – 30 350 sq. km, one third the size of Tasmania in Australia, and a population of about 1.6 million as computed from the results of the 1986 population census. The latest (1992) population estimates by the International Monetary Fund (IMF, 1994) and the World Bank are 1.84 and 1.86 million respectively, with a growth rate of 2.7 (World Bank, 1993).

Lesotho's geographical position is almost unique and confers considerable disadvantages. It is entirely surrounded by one country – the Republic of South Africa (RSA) – and has no direct access to the sea. In addition, the Republic of South Africa is economically superior to Lesotho, so that Lesotho is geographically, economically and politically "trapped" inside South Africa (ILO, 1979). This situation renders Lesotho dependent on decisions made by the surrounding, more powerful neighbour.

## Lesotho's Economy

Lesotho's economy depends largely on agriculture (crops and livestock), despite the fact that only about 15 percent of the country is arable as a result of its mountainous topography that ranges from 1 500m to over 3 000m above sea level. In fact ILO (1979) and ISNAR (1989) place the proportion of arable land at 13 percent, and ILO (1979) warns (page 94) that its potential is severely limited because of, among other factors, a high potential for erosion and poor management practices leading to overstocking and overgrazing. Livestock products constitute the main export. ISNAR (1989:4) notes that the contribution of agriculture to Lesotho's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has declined from 38 percent in 1978 to 20 percent in 1984. The World Bank Atlas 1994 places the contribution of agriculture to Lesotho's GDP at 11 percent (World Bank, 1993:19), which marks a definite decline.

While diamond and clay deposits are the only recorded mineral resources, in 1977/78, mining contributed to only 2.3 percent of the GDP (calculated from ILO, 1979:269 figures). This was before the closure of the one and only diamond mine – Lets'eng La Terai.

Two factors that have contributed considerably to Lesotho's revenue are remittances of migrant labourers employed in the mines and collieries of South Africa and the South Africa Customs Union. There is already a decline in the mine labour employment with increase in mechanisation in the mining industry and a decline in the value of gold in the world market, which, undoubtedly will decrease Lesotho's revenue from this source. Even the apparent growth in industrialisation does not contribute enough income for Lesotho to be economically independent.

Lesotho is, therefore, a poor country. In 1992, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) placed its GDP at 2025.9 million Maluti, (equivalent to 2025.9 million Rand, or approximately \$1800 Australian) to an estimated population of 1.84 million. Economically, therefore, it is highly dependent on international aid. Now that South Africa is no longer considered a pariah by the major nations of the world, it can be expected that Lesotho will attract much less aid money than previously, while the world's attention focuses on South Africa. Lesotho's attraction to the international world lay in its geographical position making it an ideal site for keeping an international



"watch" on South Africa, and its altitude providing a scenic view for tourist purposes. Instead of watching, the affluent nations will now rush to secure commercial and political advantage in the new nation (RSA) by financing infrastructural development for its non-white majority population.

One other major and exportable resource of Lesotho is water, which will be sold to South Africa through the Highlands Water Project, probably the largest engineering enterprise underway in Africa. Another major resource of the country which, according to the country's Fourth Five Year Development Plan (1986:14), still has to be developed, is its labour force. It is this latter underdeveloped resource with which the research is concerned.

### **Lesotho's Education System**

The Western type of education started in Lesotho in the latter half of the 19th century. It was introduced by the Christian missionaries, notably the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society, the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches. The country having been a British Protectorate, the education was British oriented to provide basic manpower requirements for colonial rule (e.g. clerks and interpreters).

Today the system of education, controlled by the Ministry of Education, is a tripartite arrangement between the churches, the community and the government, such that while most schools are owned by the churches, a few by the community or the government, the government pays the salaries of the teachers in all, and is in control of the education system. The education system is such that there are seven years of primary schooling, followed by five years of secondary education. Of the latter, three years lead to Junior Certificate, followed by two years for the Cambridge (United Kingdom) Overseas Schools Certificate "O" levels (Ordinary levels). Graduates from secondary schools may, depending on examination grade and preference, proceed to the National University of Lesotho (NUL) or to universities outside the country: the National Teacher Training College, the Lesotho Agricultural College or any of the Technical Colleges in or outside the country.

These are the further education opportunities for secondary school leavers provided they satisfy the entry requirements and are accepted for the very limited places available in higher education institutions each year. The

question is "what happens to those who fail the examinations, or whose grades are too low for entry to the university or colleges"?

A further critical problem is what happens to secondary school graduates who would like to engage in higher level studies but cannot find a place at the National University, or cannot afford to take time off from their employment (few employers indeed are prepared to grant paid study leave to their employees, or even to allow time off work for study purposes) or other commitments to engage in full-time studies either in the country or in other countries, close or distant. Whether or not such people find their way into employment, in most cases poorly paid, there comes a time in their lives when they need to either obtain a certificate or to improve their qualifications/expertise even though they cannot be re-admitted into schools. This is the point at which *distance education* in Lesotho has enormous potential. The writer is of the conviction that these people and the country as a whole would experience enormous benefit from a broadening of the scope of distance education provision at university level. At the moment the provision is still in its rudimentary stage and very limited in scope.

Concern by the Lesotho government, as expressed through its Ministry of Education, for those people who, for deeply entrenched opposition to education on purely cultural or economic grounds, were denied any opportunity for secondary education resulted in the establishment of the Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre (LDTC) in 1974. LDTC serves three distinct groups of clients – those requiring basic literacy and numeracy skills, those requiring basic occupational skills and those needing Junior Certificate (JC) or Cambridge Overseas School Certificate (COSC). While LDTC does cater for those people requiring JC or COSC certificates, it does not (and indeed cannot) provide for those who might benefit from tertiary level, specifically higher distance education.

Figures extracted from the NUI statistical reports indicate that the National University cannot accommodate all applicants who qualify for admission. For example, in 1989/90, out of a total of 612 applicants who qualified, 173 (29%) were not admitted. As in Australia, inability to admit every eligible applicant is due to lack of government funded student places and financial resources for the provision of specialized staff. Statistics for 1990/91 (NUL statistical reports) show that 78 of the applicants were not admitted to NUL. For a country whose population is merely 1.8 million, and whose labour force constitutes one of its

major resources the, 29 percent as in the 1989/90 statistics is a highly significant wastage. It should be noted that these figures relate only to those able or willing to engage in full time studies. If we were to include those who would willingly study while still pursuing their full time employment, the lost potential for substantially tertiary educated public and private sectors, guarantees some change, even if only a little, to the current slow pace of national development. As indicated earlier, this is a reflection of only those people who are prepared to take time off from their other responsibilities to engage in full-time studies. The numbers might be significantly higher if degree level studies could be conducted concurrently with, for example, employment.

Tertiary level distance education is a function of demand by adults who for cultural, social, economic and/or geographic reasons, either missed out on the opportunity for tertiary education or who, for the same reasons, would wish to pursue studies while at the same time engaging in full-time employment; and school leavers (at the COSC level) who cannot be admitted to conventional universities. It also represents an awareness, on the part of governments and existing universities, of the need to cater to the demands of these groups within given economic climates. The researcher is inclined to believe that there are people in Lesotho who fall into these groups and who would, therefore, benefit from tertiary level distance education.

### **The National University of Lesotho (NUL)**

Having indicated earlier that tertiary level distance education in Lesotho is, at the most, in its rudimentary stages and limited in scope, further explanation is necessary.

Lesotho has a few tertiary education institutions among which may be mentioned the National Teacher Training College (NTTC), Lerotholi Polytechnic, Leloaleng Technical School, the Technical School of Leribe, The Lesotho Institute of Public Administration (LIPA), the Centre for Accounting Studies and the National University of Lesotho. Each of these institutions serves a different clientele from the other, with the exception of the three Technical Schools which serve the same kind of client, but at different levels.

NTTC offers certificates for primary and secondary school teachers. It does not offer teaching professional studies at degree level. Lerotholi Polytechnic offers

courses in civil, electrical and mechanical engineering, and secretarial courses at secondary or post secondary levels, not at degree level. The two Technical Schools, one in the southern and the other in the northern region of the country, also offer technical and vocational training at secondary level, not at degree level. LIPA and the Centre for Accounting Studies, as the names suggest, deal with administrative and accounting studies respectively, none of which lead to attainment of degrees. NUL is the only institution that offers studies leading to degrees. None of these institutions makes use of distance education methods.

The National University of Lesotho operates through two campuses. The main campus is situated in Roma, 34 km to the south east of Maseru, the capital city. The other campus is the Institute of Extra Mural Studies (IEMS), situated in Maseru city itself. IEMS also operates two outreach centres, one in the northern and the other in the southern regions of the country.

Degree level studies, conducted at the main campus, are mostly at the Bachelor's level. These are Bachelor of Arts in the Faculties of Humanities, Law and Social Sciences; Bachelor of Arts with Education; Bachelor of Commerce, Bachelor of Science and Bachelor of Science Education (1993/94 University Calendar).

NUL also offers a Post Graduate Certificate in Education and, depending on funding and availability of both appropriately qualified staff and research facilities (and, one assumes, adequate funds) may offer Bachelor of Laws, Masters degrees in Arts, Education and Science; and the Doctor of Philosophy (NUL Calendar, 1993/94:56). At the time of writing, there is still no evidence that the needed funds, facilities and staff have yet been made available.

NUL also offers undergraduate certificates and diplomas in different fields. All of the programmes on offer at the Roma campus are through conventional means of full-time, on campus education.

IEMS offers undergraduate certificates and diplomas in Business Studies and Adult Education on a part-time study basis (where students learn by themselves and from text books most of the time; receive face-to-face lectures/tutorials in the evenings or at weekends, but do not get the other forms of support that are usually provided for in distance education (e.g. self-instructional materials/study guides, supplementary instructional media,

study centres etc.). They also have to live within reasonable access of the institution or its outreach centres). Strictly speaking, this is not distance education.

Two part-time degree level programmes in the form of Bachelor of Education and Bachelor of Adult Education were introduced as from the beginning of the 1993/94 academic year. It has come to the researcher's attention that practitioners at NUL tend to refer to their part-time programmes as distance education programmes but as indicated above, these part-time studies do not offer as wide a range of support services for the student's learning as is provided for in the distance education mode and of course the economic context in which it is conducted. Even allowing for the fact that Lesotho is a poor country, the Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre is a living example that more can be done for the distance education learner. Thus while NUL may claim to have initiated degree level distance education studies, if they are referring to part-time studies as explained above, it could be argued that NUL does not as yet have degree level distance education programmes.

Three issues emerge from this account:

1. the scope of and access to university level studies generally is severely limited;
2. university education caters mostly for those people who can afford to engage in full time studies, either ex-school or by taking paid or unpaid time-off from their normal work and their other responsibilities and commitments;
3. university education caters for those people who can be admitted to the university and can either afford to pay the required fees or get sponsors.

NUL requires fees for the academic year to be paid in full before the beginning of the year. This requirement as well as the amounts of money involved is enough of a disincentive for those people who cannot afford the fees (and these form the majority); or who cannot obtain sponsorship from the government or other funding agencies due to the competitive nature of the offers. Granted, at the moment the government of Lesotho sponsors (through a Loan Bursary Scheme) every student who is admitted to NUL so that placement is more a problem than funding. However, with the flexibility in enrolments and pacing that distance education allows for, there is just the

slightest possibility that more people would be able to afford the required fees and thus more people would engage in studies at that level.

If university education is limited in scope and caters mostly for those who are able to engage in conventional studies, what becomes the fate of those who are capable of and willing to engage in university education but who do not fall into this cadre? What of those who would pursue degree level studies in areas other than those on offer through the conventional mode and cannot afford, for various reasons to study with universities outside the country? These make up that group whose needs and aspirations can only be met through distance education.

It would seem highly desirable for NUL to increase the scope of its programmes as well as access to education through the use of distance education methods. This could be done in different ways depending on what would be most suitable and affordable.

The size of Lesotho and its financial resources are such that it is unlikely that the university will ever be capable of buying in the intellectual expertise and relevant resources which would be necessary to provide comprehensive research and teaching across the whole education canvas. Any country would prefer to be self-sufficient in its education offerings at all levels but as this is obviously not possible in the short term, the need for educational expertise and provision must be satisfied by other means.

Expertise could be loaned by more affluent countries. It could be hired from the more affluent countries. The country could send its students to institutions outside the country, which implies an enormous cost factor (and in some cases considerable delays and loss of valuable time on the part of the students who have to await their turn for nomination and funding for study in other countries). So this is impracticable unless the country attracts a great deal of foreign aid.

Whatever the means used to acquire greater expertise, and/or accomplish a wider provision of tertiary education it must be done from a cost-effective basis. One potential source is for NUL to introduce the distance education mode to its activities and then co-operate with other distance education providers outside the country.

That most governments and conventional universities in the SADC member countries have done so little to date in the provision of university level distance education can be attributed to two reasons. They either lack an awareness of the value of distance education, or they consider it a second-class kind of education (that is not good enough) when compared to conventional education.

If NUL should decide to co-operate with similar institutions in other countries (given political endorsement) in the provision of distance education, then it would be advisable for Lesotho to look at those institutions that have identified a similar need and those areas of co-operation that will yield the highest benefits while incurring the lowest risk.

The above account shows why Lesotho needs higher level distance education. The 1986/87 study of the SADC region identified the necessity for tertiary level distance education as well as the need for common courses in the region. The common needs, coupled with the common status of most member countries as having a low resource base, all point to the possibility of addressing the need through co-operation in the provision of higher level distance education. However, the foregoing account of regional universities, which shows them to be laden with problems, is what generated the researcher's interest in the subject of cross-institutional co-operation in course development as an alternative means of co-operating in the provision of higher level distance education.

## **OVERVIEW OF THESIS**

Against the foregoing account of experiences with regional universities, Chapter Two will highlight the objectives of this research as well as the potential uses of the study. Chapter Three will review the literature pertaining to co-operation generally but with a special emphasis on educational programmes, particularly those concerning cross-institutional co-operation in the development of distance education courses. Chapter Four will explain the methodology employed in the study, as well as its underlying concepts and limitations. Chapter Five will deal with the analysis of the results, while Chapter Six will discuss the results reflected in the previous chapter. The discussion will review the findings as they relate to the objectives. It will culminate with a brief comparison of regional universities and cross-institutional co-operation in the development of distance education courses,

thus providing guidelines on which choice between the two models of co-operation in educational provision can be made. The concluding chapter, Chapter Seven, will discuss the implications of the study for Australian higher education institutions, higher education institutions in the SADC region and globally. It will also indicate areas that require further research.



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**CHAPTER TWO**  
**OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The fore-going discussion of some regional university experiences suggests that they may not be the best option for regional co-operation in the provision of education. What then, of the other option, i.e inter-institutional co-operation in course development? Would it be any more productive or successful than the recorded performance of regional universities?

But first, what do we know about it? How and why are such co-operative course development ventures, involving two or more institutions, initiated? Have any such enterprises been initiated, developed and implemented by higher education institutions, for an Australian clientele, or for clientele from other countries or cultures? If so, have they been successful or unsuccessful? In either case, what factors have operated to generate the success or failure of these ventures?

The literature suggests that this option has not been as extensively researched or documented as that of the establishment and operation of regional universities. It is this deficiency which has initiated this current research, which aims to examine those factors which might influence success or failure of institutions choosing, or being forced by circumstances, to co-operate in the development of distance education courses and course materials.

As indicated previously, the universities referred to were not distance teaching universities though some of them, like USP and UWI, do have a distance teaching component. It is hoped that lessons gained from their experiences can be useful in making informed decisions regarding options in regional co-operation in educational provision.

The focal point of this study concerns cross-institutional co-operation in the development of tertiary distance education courses.

That SADC member states have already identified the need for tertiary level distance education has been addressed in the introductory chapter. The concern with distance education stems from the recognition of its potential to achieve large-scale, quality education in a cost-effective and cost-efficient manner. More will be said on this matter in the literature review.

In attempting to establish the factors that affect the success or failure of cross-institutional co-operation in distance education course development, four basic questions must be addressed:

1. Are these factors of a technical or social nature, or are they
2. a combination of the two?
3. Are they operative at
  - the institutional (administrative/management) level?
  - the individual (academic) level?
  - the team (operational) level?
  - or are they:
4. a consequence of the interaction of all three?

The study was conducted among Australian higher education institutions because of the expectation that Australian higher education institutions could offer pertinent examples. Another consideration was the question of pragmatics – the researcher was resident in Australia during the course of the study. Besides, the study is not expected to produce a prescriptive solution to problems of educational provision in Southern Africa, but to yield lessons that can assist in making informed decisions.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The broad objectives of the study are:

To determine the circumstances under which higher education institutions would engage in cross-institutional co-operation in the development of distance education courses, and then to analyse the factors which might influence the success or failure of such an enterprise.

The specific objectives then become:

1. **To determine the benefits of cross-institutional co-operation in course development.**

2. **To determine the kind of person** (personality traits or personal characteristics or leadership skills) **it takes to effect a successful co-operative venture of this kind** i.e. see the need, plan, implement and see it through to completion.
3. **To identify the characteristics** (especially the capacity for desirable interpersonal relations) **of an effective cross-institutional course development team.**
4. **To analyse the administrative implications of cross-institutional co-operation in course development.**
5. **To determine those contexts within which cross-institutional co-operation in course development is most likely to succeed or fail.**
6. **To compare the prospect of cross-institutional co-operation in course development with that of establishing and operating a regional university.**

#### **BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

It is probably reasonable to assume that very little, or nothing at all, in life "just happens". In most, if not all cases, things happen because someone or something initiates or precipitates their occurrence. Even where people do things "for the fun of it", the implication is that there **is** a purpose even if it is no more serious than enjoying oneself. Things happen in response to some kind of stimulus (**motivation**) which can be either intrinsic or extrinsic.

Similarly cross-institutional co-operation in the development of distance education materials cannot "just happen". There has to be a reason or motive that drives institutions, or people within institutions, to engage in this kind of venture. There has to be a driving force behind the initiation and implementation of this kind of co-operative venture which is strong enough to sustain the effort and see it through to fulfilment.

Where higher education institutions perceive the need for, or are aware of the benefits of such a venture, it would be interesting to establish who it is that perceives the need or benefits – is it academics, or administrators or both? This is important because the level at which the perception occurs (academic or

administrative – as well as any interaction between the two levels), could have an effect on the success or failure of that co-operation.

Course development, like many other (if not all) forms of work, is a socio-technical system. The course team members, the administrators and/or the coordinators constitute the social arm of the system while the technical arm comprise the necessary equipment and resources.

One assumption made at this point with regard to cross-institutional co-operation in course development is that institutions agreeing to be involved would be prepared to contribute resources – human, financial and physical – towards the project. The human resources thus contributed would fall into two main categories viz. those forming the team/s that would be actually involved in the development of the course materials as writers, editors, instructional designers etc.; and those whose responsibility would be the administration and co-ordination of the co-operative venture and who, directly or indirectly, interact with the course developers.

While it is acknowledged that social, technical and administrative aspects of course development are essential for the attainment of goals, this study is **mainly** concerned with the administrative and social aspects of the system – the course development team, the institutional administration and the coordinating body (where there is one). The focal point is what motivates the members, what are their modes of operation, the interactions within and between them, as well as their administration. Are there any policies governing such operations? The author shares the same view as Pritchard and Jones (1985:140) that co-operation among institutions "probably requires, and hopefully implies", co-operation among individuals.

It is the researcher's conviction that the operational and administrative facets of any such venture will influence significantly the attainment of its goals, among which one would expect to observe improved efficiency in the utilisation of resources, as well as academic benefits for the personnel involved, the institution and the students.

This study endeavours to highlight the motivational, academic, operational, administrative and contextual implications of cross-institutional co-operation in course development, as well as the impact of operational and administrative aspects upon the attainment of the academic goals. The

literature suggests that an examination of the following factors will be critical in the formulation of a model for inter-institutional co-operation in course development:

1. course teams must comprise members of each co-operating institution;
2. an efficient, sensitive and properly managed communication system is imperative;
3. success will be in direct proportion to the quality of the team members and their ability and willingness to work as a team;
4. administrative effectiveness within the team and/or between the team and the co-ordinating body of the venture is essential;
5. the team must be sufficiently motivated to engage in and execute the venture to completion;
6. the human, fiscal and physical resources must be in sufficient quantities to facilitate the success of the venture.

#### **FURTHER MATTERS TO BE CONSIDERED**

Course development is one of the activities in which institutions could co-operate with a view to rationalising the scarce resources in pursuit of a solution to a felt need.

Cross-institutional co-operation in course development might not entail some of the problems inherent in other forms of co-operation such as regional institutions.

There is a paucity of literature pertaining to cross-institutional co-operation in course development, both in Africa and in Australia; and there are very few extant examples of successful ventures of this nature.

## DELIMITATIONS TO THE STUDY

The actual development of a course to be delivered by distance education, is but one step in a chain of processes that normally begin with the identification of a need for the course and culminates in a pilot scheme for trial and evaluation. It is most likely that there would be further developmental steps as trial or evaluation of the pilot scheme would, in most cases, point to a need for modification, renewal or maintenance of the course.

This study *focuses on the process of course development* by more than one **higher education** institution. It *does not address* the following: (1) identification of course need and the methods involved, (2) the logistics of course development and production, (3) storage and distribution; or (4) the technical aspects of course development. (5) Despite the researcher's personal concerns about her home country's (The Kingdom of Lesotho) need, and that of other SADC member countries, for provision of distance education in the areas of technical and vocational subjects, this study does not specifically address or focus upon these.

## POTENTIAL USES OF THE STUDY

This study should prove useful to institutions, organisations or governments which are contemplating co-operation in the development of courses delivered by distance education through the following channels:

1. An examination of factors affecting cross-institutional co-operation in course development will help those contemplating such a venture to
  - predict the likelihood of success or failure of the proposed venture;
  - diagnose the cause/s of problems should they occur;
  - forestall or guard against the occurrence of problems;
2. The results of the study should give some indication of whether cross-institutional co-operation in course development does actually yield positive results or whether there is some element of myth attached to it;
3. If the study does not yield positive results, it will at least identify the problem areas by examining; such issues as:
  - the individual (personal characteristics);
  - administrative factors and the levels at which they occur



- operational factors – model
    - size of team or project
    - composition of the course development team
    - management of the course development process
  - contextual factors – spatial separation
    - compatibility in terms of resource availability, course-levels, cultures
4. The study should also be able to highlight areas in current cross-institutional co-operation ventures which are in need of improvement.
  5. If the findings prove positive, or at least encouraging, they could act as a stimulus or catalyst for more ventures into cross-institutional co-operation in course development; and particularly initiate more extensive research in this area of higher education.

This study is contained within the Australian context. However, it is anticipated that either the results or the principles derived from the results, will not only serve as a guide or bench mark for Australian higher education institutions, but will have specific applicability to and relevance for the researcher's home situation – that is to the Kingdom of Lesotho, as well as to other countries in the southern half of the African continent. Perhaps too, other countries whose educational systems and programmes are similar to the Australian system could benefit from this study.

Hence the perspectives of the research problem must reach beyond the Australian situation to the Southern African one at the very least. The researcher is fully aware that Australia and the Southern African region differ markedly in social, political, economic and educational aspects and systems. Consequently, the results of a study done on Australian institutions cannot be used *in toto*, as a recipe in Southern Africa with even the smallest guarantee of success. However, some valuable insights, lessons and, perhaps, operating principles can surely be anticipated to flow from the study, not the least of which should be the necessity of giving *context* a prime place in any contemplation or planning of co-operative ventures in course development.

Certainly, developing countries can learn from the developed world. Villaroel (1992:51) suggests that it is relevant for educators from developing countries to

be informed about experiences in the developed world and other parts of the developing world, as such information can help them solve their own *in situ* problems, if only by providing an entirely different perspective.

Each of the members of SADC could benefit from co-operation, where feasible, between a number of distance education providers within the country or in co-operation with one or more members of SADC; or even intercontinentally. Institutions generally, irrespective of geographical situation, might benefit in many ways from co-operation with one another in developing need-initiated courses.

## **DEFINITIONS OF TERMS**

The following terms will be used throughout the text and are defined according to the contexts in which they will be used:

### **Distance Education**

Due to the complexity of the concept of Distance Education, a full discussion of the various ways the term is used in the literature will be provided in Chapter Three.

### **Course**

The Concise Oxford Dictionary (p 265) defines course as "a series of lectures, lessons, etc., in a particular subject." The term could also refer to a whole programme or curriculum (Hargreaves, 1975:1, Mcleod, 1987: 223). It will, for the purposes of the study, be used in the broader sense to refer to the units or modules of work which, together, comprise an award programme such as a degree or a diploma (i.e the curriculum for such an award).

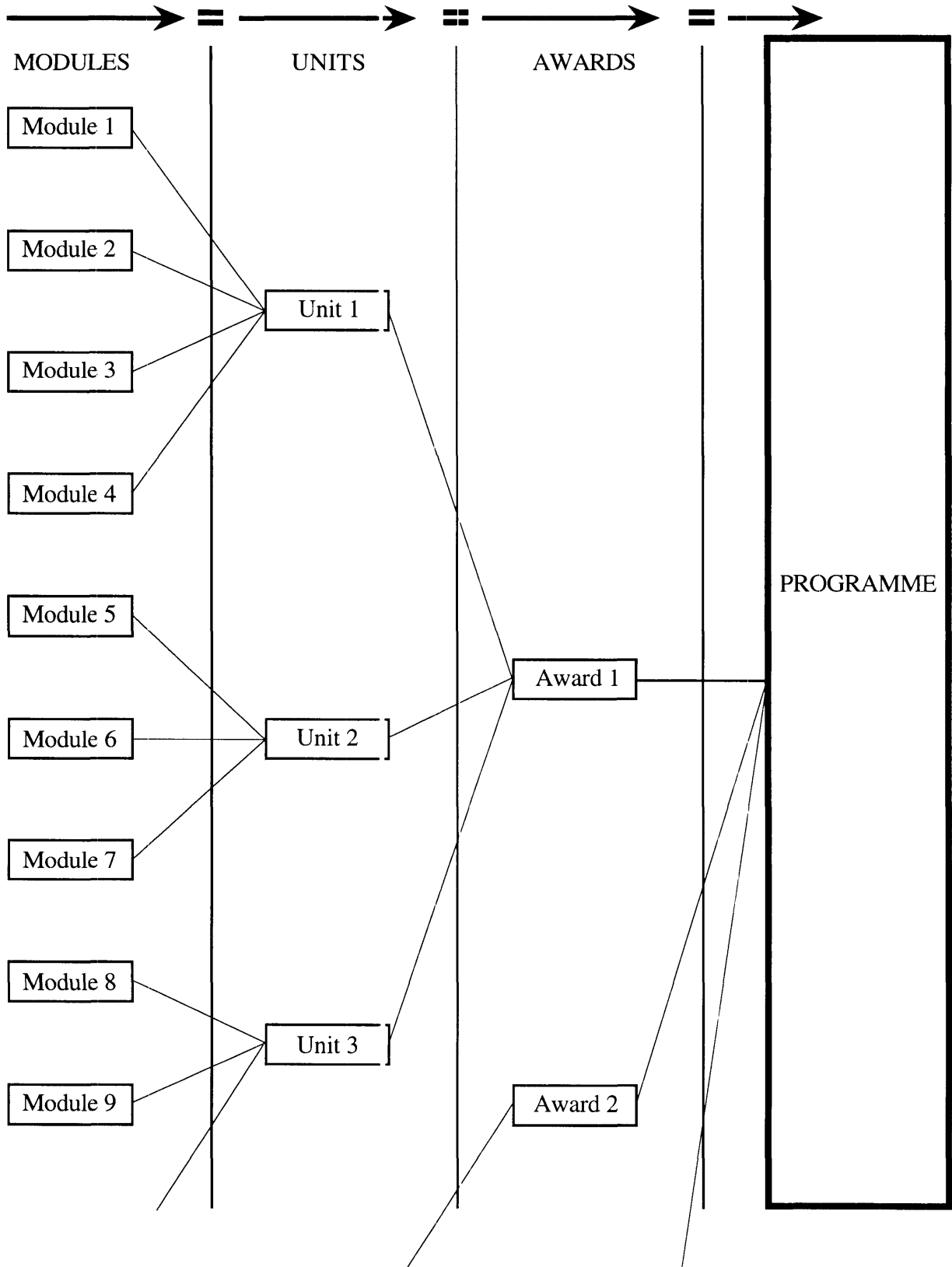


Figure 3: Course

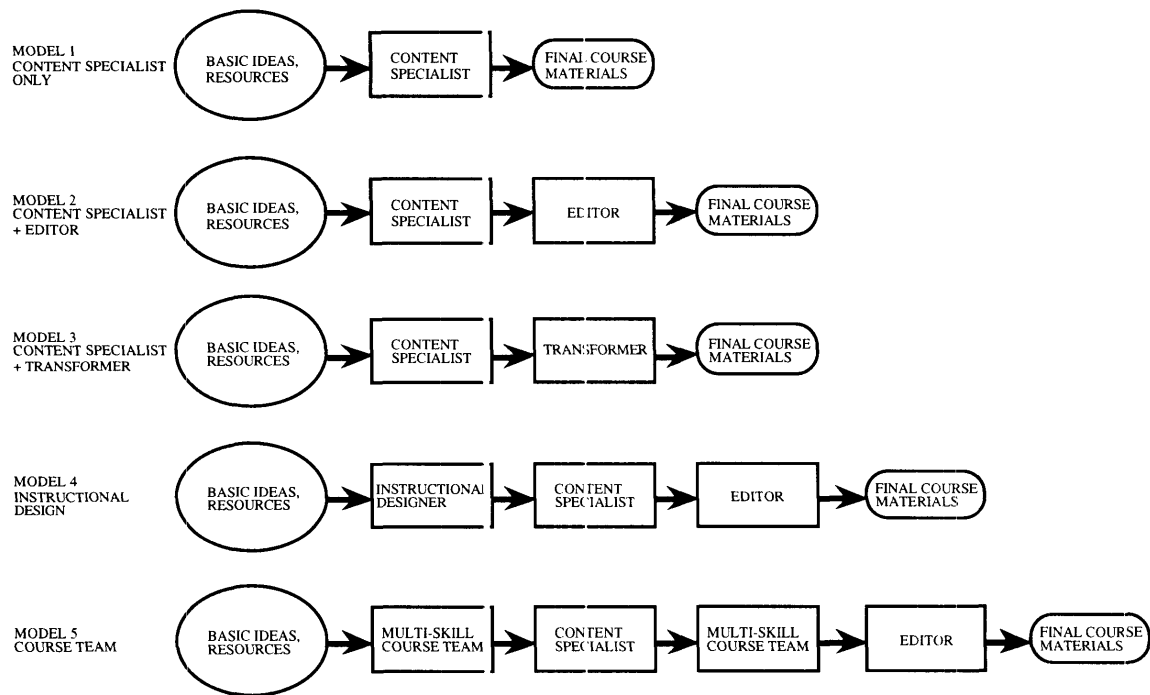
## **Course Development**

The term is used here to refer to the planning of the course structure and content, the design and actual presentation of the instructional units in whatever instructional media are considered appropriate (print, radio, audio cassettes, television or computer) to the point where they are ready for duplication and distribution.

### **Course Development Team**

A course development team can be described as a group of people who are charged with the responsibility of preparing a package of instructional materials for a given course, those responsible for teaching the course and the course maintenance staff. Riley (1976:57) defines the United Kingdom Open University course teams as being responsible for a given course through all its life. Tight (1985:48) adds that a course team operates on a basis of semi-democratic discussion and agreement. Where course teams constitute a formal part of the system, they basically consist of an academic writer/s, an educational designer or technologist, photographers, editors, technical assistants, programme producers and course assistants.

Variables to the basic course development team model exist, two notable ones being on the basis of the number of academics involved and the degree of formality of the course development team structure or arrangement. Course teams will usually have more than one academic (subject specialist) if the courses are interdisciplinary or if the size of the operation justifies their use. Informal or loose course development team arrangements involve academic writers having access to the other role players mentioned above, on a consultancy basis (that is with whom they would meet as and when need arises), preferably in the early stages of development and whenever necessary.



**Figure 4: Course Development Models**

Source: Mason and Goodenough, 1981.

For the purposes of this study, "course development team" will be used to refer only to those people who are involved in the design of the course (setting goals and objectives and deciding on the structure and content) and development of instructional materials and the presentation or design of the instruction, irrespective of the formality or informality of the working arrangement.

*Co-operation* (definition from the Oxford English Dictionary) is a noun derived from the verb "co-operate" which means "to work together, act in conjunction (with another person or thing, to an end or purpose, or in a work), to concur in producing an effect". The second definition, which is economic in essence is "to practise economic co-operation" though this is more an example of a kind of co-operation than a definition *per se*.

In most of the literature on co-operation in distance education, the terms "co-operation" and "collaboration" are used interchangeably. The Concise Oxford Dictionary (p 221) defines collaborate, the verb from which collaboration is derived, as "work jointly, especially in a literary or artistic production" or "cooperate traitorously with an enemy". The first of these definitions is restrictive. The second has a rather unpleasant connotation. Hence the decision to use "co-operation" in this study.

Where an attempt is made to distinguish between the two terms, the distinction is still not clear. Following are examples of attempts to make the distinction:

- Elton (1992:55)
- collaboration means working together on a joint enterprise
  - cooperation means working together in mutual support
- Salter and Hart (1982:60)
- collaboration implies greater reciprocity of activity
  - cooperation implies working together but with a measure of independence that permits individual freedoms

Even from the fore-going examples, the distinction is still somewhat delicate. However, the elements – "mutual support" in the former and "the measure of independence that permits individual freedoms" in the latter, make cooperation seem a more appropriate term than collaboration. Therefore an attempt will be made to use "co-operation" consistently in this work, as the term that the author considers more appropriate.

The terms 'cross-institutional' and 'inter-institutional' are used interchangeably throughout the text.

As indicated in Chapter One, page 22, inter-institutional co-operation in course development has neither been as extensively researched, nor has it been as extensively documented as regional or federated universities. Thus a study of inter-institutional co-operation in course development has to be undertaken before any meaningful comparison can be made between the two modes of co-operation i.e regional institution versus inter-institutional co-operation in course development. Hence inter-institutional co-operation in course development becomes the focus of this study. Findings from this study should enable a well informed comparison of the two modes of co-operation, upon which decision makers can base their choice of method of co-operation.

The following chapter will review the literature on inter-institutional co-operation generally, but with a special focus on cross-institutional co-operation in the development of courses by providers of distance education for the higher education or tertiary sector.