

WORLD CONFERENCE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century

Vision and Action

UNESCO, Paris, 5 – 9 October 1998

VOLUME V – PLENARY

The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)

Note1: To meet UNESCO publishing standards, some editing of papers has been required.

Note2: Authors are responsible for the choice and the presentation of the facts contained in signed articles and for the opinions expressed therein, which are not necessarily those of UNESCO and do not commit the Organization.

Speech of Mr Sarwar Hobohm

Office of the Special Assistant to the Director-General on Major Policy Issues, UNIDO

Mr President,
Honourable Ministers and Heads of Delegations,
Your Excellency, Mr Federico Mayor, Director-General of UNESCO,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the privilege to speak on behalf of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization - UNIDO - a sister organization of UNESCO based in Vienna, Austria, which has the mandate to support the industrial development efforts of developing countries and countries with economies in transition.

Allow me, first of all, on behalf of my organization and its Director-General, Mr Carlos Alfredo Magariños, to congratulate UNESCO on the initiative to hold this very important conference. It is indeed a great achievement to bring together so many eminent and high-ranking representatives of governments, inter-governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, and institutions of higher education and research. As we were informed in the opening session last Monday, a considerable amount of effort has been invested in organizing this World Conference on Higher Education, and I share the confidence expressed by many previous speakers that this effort will be well-rewarded.

Mr President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I mentioned at the outset, UNIDO is the specialized agency of the United Nations established to promote industrial development. In response to the changing requirements of our times and the evolving demands placed upon it, our organization is currently undergoing a fundamental transformation under the dynamic leadership of our Director-General. Since assuming office in December last year, he has initiated a comprehensive programmatic reform of the organization's technical cooperation activities in the field of industrial development. This programmatic reform process is now nearing completion and has resulted in a focusing of our activities on what we call the three 'E's - a competitive Economy, productive Employment and a sound Environment. This concentration on selected core activities will strengthen the ability of our organization to serve our clients more efficiently and effectively in their efforts to achieve sustainable industrial development.

An important feature of the programmatic reform process being undertaken by UNIDO is an enhanced recognition of the critical need to develop partnerships between all stakeholders in the industrial development process - including national governments, private corporations, business and industrial organizations, national and international development and funding agencies, private foundations and representative organizations of civil society at large.

Particularly high priority is being placed in this context on the establishment of partnerships and networks with universities and other institutions of higher education and research. This reflects a recognition of the extensive and intrinsic linkages between higher education and industrial development. Higher education thus forms the basis for the establishment of an appropriate policy framework for industrial development; it makes a critical contribution to the development of the necessary human resources and institutional infrastructure; and it plays an important complementary role in creating domestic capacities for such fundamental building blocks of industrial development as sound enterprise management, technology acquisition and adaptation, and environmental sustainability.

UNIDO therefore seeks to establish broad institutional links with universities and institutes of higher education and research, both in developed countries and in developing countries and countries with economies in transition. Already, memoranda of understanding have been drafted with several universities setting out a general framework and terms of reference for possible cooperation, which are sufficiently flexible to accommodate the specific interests of the individual universities involved in these partnerships. Within the broad guidelines stipulated by these memoranda of understanding, specific development projects are formulated linking UNIDO and its partner universities with government bodies, industrial corporations and associations, bilateral and multilateral funding agencies, private foundations and other relevant organizations.

As an example, we are currently in the process of finalizing a project to enable some 30 small and medium-sized engineering companies in a South Asian country to supply automotive components to a large European motor vehicle manufacturer. Apart from the principals, this partnership also involves industrial associations and engineering institutions in the developing country concerned, as well as management schools and specialized colleges of technology in several European countries and the USA.

Another important initiative that UNIDO is proposing to launch in order to enhance its links with the higher education community is the establishment of specific research chairs within our organization. This would enable academic researchers to join us on a temporary basis on sabbaticals from their respective institutions. We feel that we have both a lot to offer such researchers, and a lot to gain from having them in our midst. What we can offer is our own particular expertise in a wide range of fields related to industrial development, as well as a wealth of project data which we ourselves do not have the resources to analyze as comprehensively as we would like. What we have to gain, by the same token, is the knowledge and fresh approach of the external researchers, as well as a fuller analysis of the data yielded by our technical cooperation projects.

By way of example, preliminary discussions have recently been initiated with a European university in this connection. These are aimed at securing the secondment of a researcher to UNIDO to analyze the data derived from our highly successful activities, within the framework of the Montreal Protocol, to phase out ozone-depleting substances in industrial plants in developing countries.

Against this background, it has been very rewarding for me to attend this conference. I have met many representatives of universities and other institutes of higher education, and am confident that these meetings will lead to the development of firmer partnerships in due course. Of course, I have not been able to meet all of the distinguished delegates gathered here to discuss these issues personally with them. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to stress that UNIDO would welcome any enquiry from representatives of universities who may wish to enter into partnerships with us of the kind that I have just described.

In his opening speech last Monday, his excellency, the Director-General of UNESCO, Mr Federico Mayor, expressed the hope that this conference would lead to the development of new partnerships between the various organizations gathered here. I am pleased to be able to confirm that it has given my organization a unique opportunity to lay the groundwork for the establishment of many such partnerships. I would like to close my statement by thanking him once again for making this possible, and wishing this conference the success it so richly deserves.

Thank you for your attention.