

several reasons. One is the absence of a tradition of private higher education. Second is the comparatively large private higher education share of total enrollments. Third is the relatively vigorous privatization of public education financing. Both the second and third developments stimulate striking private-public mixes, dynamics, and competition. ■

## Mexico's Brain Drain

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The Mexican press constantly expresses its concerns about brain drain, but, perhaps because its impact has been officially underrated, the matter has so far not appeared on the education research or policy agendas. While brain drain is calculated to involve only 5 percent of the students granted postgraduate studies abroad, that estimate is low—for the following reasons: (1) because it is based on findings from a sample used to evaluate the National Council of Science and Technology (CONACYT) scholarship program over the past 30 years; (2) because it does not incorporate the *free movers* who have used alternative mobility channels to study abroad; (3) because the mobility of highly qualified personnel includes, other than the academic market, additional fields of endeavor such as, for instance, the productive sector; and (4) because the intention expressed by young Mexican PhD holders to remain in the United States after obtaining their degrees has increased (notoriously) in recent years—almost matching the preference of Argentines and Chileans with US doctorates to remain abroad. Given these factors, the brain drain estimation would vastly surpass 5 percent. However, to reach a reliable approximation of the phenomenon would require mobilizing financial and human resources and organizing joint cooperative programs—to develop linkages between highly skilled Mexican institutions and institutions located in their countries of origin—as well as recognizing the existence of a vexing problem that the public authorities have opted to ignore.

### FROM CONVENTIONAL POLICIES TO NO POLICIES?

Paradoxically, while academic circles and antigovernment groups are expressing renewed alarm about the “exodus of talented minds,” the policies established 10 years ago to combat the trend are coming to an end. In the early 1990s, the PACIME Program (“in support of Mexican science”), cofinanced by the World Bank and the Mexican government, was set up in an attempt to repatriate doctoral graduates from abroad and invite interested foreign scientists into the country.

PACIME was a conventional program, aimed at repatriation or medium-term stays, but it also focused on the multipolar flow of highly qualified human resources which was partially substituting the bipolar South-to-North dynamic. Under favorable international circumstances (the collapse of the Soviet bloc, the extended crisis in Cuba, and the difficult return to peace in Central America), the program's success was striking. Not only did it attract a significant number of Mexican and foreign doctoral degree holders, but it also encouraged national state universities desiring to enhance their research capacities to enlist the services of these repatriates and visitors.

The apparent results were not sufficient, and once the PACIME program was terminated, the repatriation and invitation efforts went into decline. Mexico received 299 foreign academics in 1994 and only 49 in 2002. Jaime Parada, director of CONACYT, recently attributed this decline to the lack of a specific budget. His statement probably indicated the end of a policy that, despite its traditionalism, showed immediate and positive results. Will another kind of program take its place? There is nothing to point in that direction, but the situation calls for answers to several questions.

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Does a country with substantial inflows of money from its citizens abroad not also need the academic assistance of its most educated expatriates? Can it be that Mexico lacks the means for utilizing the experience accumulated abroad (inside and outside Latin America) through brain bank or the organization of scientific and productive diasporas? Is it that Mexico can only perceive the brain drain—a term that forms part of the national rhetoric in lieu of a more neutral expression, such as brain circulation—as a form of treason against the motherland, an absolute loss of capacities, or an inevitable consequence of neocolonialism and thus fail to understand the double meaning of both risk and opportunity?

### STRATEGIC CHALLENGE

A country such as Mexico experiences many challenges especially under the present circumstances. Some are well known—the result of asymmetric professional working conditions between Mexico and its main trade partners, the difficulties faced by the national academic market in absorbing young doctoral degree holders, as well as all the country's bureaucratic, credit, and fiscal requirements, which discourage the creation of business enterprises.

However, the significance of some other issues is underestimated, despite their relevance in the context of nonterritorial recruitment dynamics and “circulating elites.” Developed

countries are applying aggressive policies to recruit PhD holders, while developing countries have not yet substantially improved the working conditions offered. Mexico has adopted quality assurance policies, and, recently, pilot initiatives for the convergence of higher education systems, international harmonization of domestic degrees, regional equivalency in professional training—in the framework of bilateral or multilateral agreements, such as NAFTA. Consequently, the recruitment of Mexican postgraduates regardless of where their degrees were obtained, has become less risky for international employers. Those factors point to a scenario in which white collar migration will rapidly increase.

The situation described above calls for strategic decisions. One decision would have to involve national postgraduate scholarships. Mexico is providing funding for doctoral students in fields with a greater probability of obtaining employment abroad than of returning home. Another factor is the reestablishment of strategic linkages with scientific and productive communities abroad, based on the results achieved in Argentina, Colombia, El Salvador, and Venezuela, as well as in South Africa, China, and India. Still another area involves a science policy more focused on national priorities and on the expansion and reproduction of scientific communities and entrepreneurial groups. The goal is that the relations with Mexicans living abroad will help to consolidate an official program for the reform of a national science system. ■

## Transformation, Reform, and Renewal in Afghanistan

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**A**fghan higher education is undergoing enormous changes after a generation fraught with conflict, university closure, and severe damage to the infrastructure of Afghanistan's universities. Postsecondary institutions have suffered from several significant problems over the past quarter century. Many of the most talented faculty fled the country—first during the Soviet invasion, then during the years of fighting by the Mujahidin, and most recently during the era of the Taliban. Faculty who stayed in the country suffered from professional isolation not only with peers outside Afghanistan but also with colleagues at other institutions within Afghanistan. Many faculty were killed or exiled; others were driven underground. Higher education became highly politicized, ideologized, and sectarianized. Postsecondary campuses became war zones.

The result was that the infrastructure was damaged, looted, or destroyed.

### THE INFRASTRUCTURE OF THE SYSTEM

Afghanistan's higher education system remains one of the most centralized in the world, although a weakened or nonexistent infrastructure limits the capacity to manage the system. Such centralization permits standardized policies and procedures, but it also weakens the authority and innovativeness of the chancellors and faculty on the 19 campuses. Universities do not have budgets, and all requests involving income, hiring, and new departments must be requested through the Ministry of Education. Students are accepted not by the respective universities but by the ministry. The ministry also determines the size and placement of an incoming class.

The ministry controls the budgets for all postsecondary institutions with a total annual operating budget of slightly more than US\$9 million. About 65 percent of the budget covers the costs of housing and feeding students in dormitories. Tuition is not charged at any university. The result is that postsecondary institutions are dependent upon the largesse of non-governmental organizations for structural improvements.

The number of institutions—currently 19 four-year institutions and 18 two-year institutions (which are equivalent to teacher training institutes)—has continued to expand, resulting in considerable discussion about the inefficiencies within the system. Some institutions are quite small, with fewer than 500 students, and their capacity to increase is limited due to their geographic isolation. At the same time, Afghanistan currently has less than 0.15 percent of its population in higher education, a statistic among the lowest in the world. There are currently 36,000 undergraduate students, 17 percent of whom are women. The estimate is that within five years over 100,000 students will desire a postsecondary education. The system is not well positioned to deal with such a rapid expansion. In addition to the physical devastation suffered by many campuses, during the Taliban regime hundreds of thousands of books were destroyed. No university presently has what might be considered a minimally acceptable number of books for a postsecondary library. Buildings remain in serious need of repair. No institution has more than 100 computers.

### THE DIVERSITY OF THE POPULATION

The challenged infrastructure must respond to the needs of a culturally and ethnically diverse population. There are four major ethnic groups in the country and two major languages. The diversity of cultures is a social fact that is to be honored; at the same time, given the recent history of the country, language and culture are also significant topics of contestation. Which language is to be used as the medium of instruction, for example, is an unsettled question with many different answers. Although English is the most widely spoken foreign language in Afghanistan, the extent of Afghans' fluency varies widely.