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Creating a New University Campus:

The University of
Botswana, Lesotho
and Swaziland

The campus of the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland at Gaborone, capital of the Republic of Botswana in Southern Africa, was founded in mid-1971 with virtually no physical facilities, minimum staff, almost no equipment, almost no library, but with pledges for capital funds, land, recurrent support for running expenses and international assistance to provide lecturers.

While the University campus in Botswana is one of the newest in Commonwealth Africa, it stems from the Catholic Pius XII University College in Roma, Lesotho. Founded in 1945 in what was then Basutoland, the College grew to become a non-sectarian university supported by and serving the three independent countries whose names the university now bears. On the one hand, this has been the result of recognized need on the part of the three governments. On the other hand, this has been because of professional planning and the mobilization of financial assistance internationally. Throughout, the aim has been the creation of an institution of higher learning, and all that that implies, where none had been before.

In Botswana there have been two major factors in the creation of an operating university presence. While founded as a new campus, this was as a part of a functioning university already established but in another country five hundred miles away and with the Republic of South Africa in between. At the same time the new campus was envisaged for Botswana, not as a symbol of national prestige, but rather in terms of being a producer of educated men and women to help meet the urgent, pressing and serious manpower demands of a pioneering nation, to sustain its existence and to help imple-

ment its development in the multiple terms of community growth.

a common pattern

The meagre beginnings of universities founded in post-World War II in Commonwealth Africa had much in common in most instances: hopeful signboards with the word "university" on them; modest and temporary, often borrowed accommodation; negotiation with governments for the financial and operational support; the organization from external sources of the necessary capital funds; international academic advice and assistance; the recruitment of largely expatriate teaching and senior administrative staff, to begin with; the admission of students leaving often newly established secondary schools. Repeatedly, in West, East and Central Africa, in Southern Africa, much the same pattern obtained, concurrent with a growing realization of the obvious need for higher education locally within the usually imbalanced national education structure, and what a university's potential for teaching, research and advisory services implied. This was the base from which what are now major institutions grew. It is in this continent-wide context of similar circumstances that the University came into being in Botswana.

In 1969-70, Sir Norman Alexander, himself a former Vice-Chancellor and founder of a new university in Commonwealth Africa, together with an Academic Planning Mission which included the Canadian university administrator and advisor, Dr. T. H. McLeod, put forward major recommendations for the growth of the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland through structural devolution which led to the University's campus in Botswana (and also in Swaziland). Despite earlier studies and advice, there remained serious doubts in Botswana as to the viability of such a plan, with obvious financial implications, as compared with an extended scholarship and training program abroad. However, largely on the basis of the Academic Planning Mission's detailed report, the three Governments and the University agreed in late 1970 to proceed as recommended. This was to include the establishment of degree teaching up to the completion of the first two years of the four year undergraduate program with campuses for this purpose in both Botswana and Swaziland. In concert with another, almost simultaneous set of educational recommendations, the Academic Planning Mission also advised de-

velopment of polytechnical training to be linked with each campus, as well as the expansion of adult education and extra-mural activities. Thus the stage was set for what had to be done to found the University in Botswana.

botswana

The Republic of Botswana, new and under-developed, is the size of France, with a population, while likely to double in the next twenty years, of only 600,000. There is cattle-raising, as well as farming mainly for local subsistence; there are also mineral, coal and gem deposits. The tourist industry is centred on game reserves and a casino at the capital. In the north, there are the Okavonga swamps; in the centre and south, the Kalahari Desert. The majority of the population is in a crescent of farm land along the eastern border by Rhodesia and South Africa, with a railway through it. Much more exploration and research into the further potential of natural resources remains to be done. Manpower surveys provide details of what is readily apparent, an extreme shortage of local people with either professional training and/or higher education, or even secondary education, and a lack of primary school facilities. This is combined with low cash incomes generally. Botswana graduates from universities and training institutions abroad, and from the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland are usually allocated positions long in advance of course completion. Meanwhile, secondary schools and teacher training colleges are overwhelmingly staffed by, for the most part, inexperienced, expatriate volunteers, recent graduates lacking formal teaching qualifications, and usually on short assignments. It is in this setting that the University in Botswana has become a factor of national significance.

The University in Botswana opened its doors to the first intake of full time undergraduate students in July, 1971 for 58 students. There had been limited choice, with approximately only 80 school leavers that year having obtained minimum entrance requirements. In July, 1972 a further intake brought the undergraduate numbers up to 136. But by this time the impetus for further development was well on the way, with part time and evening students, short course projects, and affiliation with Botswana's three teacher training colleges being arranged. By 1973 there were over 200 undergraduate students and, in community programs of various kinds, perhaps triple that number.

creating the university campus

The actual creation of the University campus at Gaborone was an exercise in improvisation. Although land was allocated by Government in general terms, the legal processes still continued. The only University buildings to begin with consisted of three bungalows, one for offices, one for a women's dormitory, and another, donated by a bank, as the refectory. There was virtually no equipment of any kind, no library and no books, no full-time teaching staff nor administrative personnel other than one maintenance man, a typist and a messenger. Our first purchase, from funds we did not have, was a bicycle. Yet the demands for classes to begin, for the admission of secondary school leavers, were too great to permit postponement. With the arrival in late February, 1971 of a Canadian Pro-Vice-Chancellor, to create the campus as a functioning institution in operational relationship with the University's central administrative and academic headquarters at Roma, Lesotho, and in accord with Botswana Government advice, four and a half months remained before the beginning of the 1971-72 academic year.

In a new town, such as Gaborone, with shortages of all kinds, with insufficient buildings of any sort, the obtaining of suitable staff, expatriate and local, was shared with the necessity to provide living accommodation for them and for students while building plans were being drawn, contracts negotiated and awaiting construction to begin. Financially, Canadian, British and American assistance was assured for capital works, although in each case within a different frame of aid regulations which had to be met before the architectural drawings could be translated into a building program in action. Meanwhile, supplies and equipment were ordered and began to arrive. Borrowed housing only just kept pace with staff arrivals, followed by frequent changes of quarters. A Canadian capital donation provided a house for a newly arrived campus registrar; international capital, later, for accommodation for a Canadian campus bursar. A Dutch Reformed Church was loaned to house the library, and among library acquisitions the Canadian Overseas Institute's contribution was significant. Laboratory use was made available by an already overcrowded local secondary school, and an adjacent government run para-professional training centre provided dormitory and instructional accommodation. The local trades union centre provided a temporary home for the extra-mural services division of the University in Botswana, while evening lectures

were held at the National Library and at the Art Gallery and Museum. A small development fund was used hastily to build staff offices. More Canadian assistance helped secure basic office equipment. In July, 1971 the University's new financial year began with specific recurrent financial provision for the Botswana campus, met by Government subvention. During this time, the frequent meetings of the Botswana Local Executive Committee of the University's Council, composed of Government and University representatives, continued the task of advising on ways and means to implement the opening and running of the campus. Meanwhile, student selection had been made by the University to include mainly Botswana students nominated through the Government's Central Bursaries Committee. There were additional students from Lesotho in place of those Botswana students going in for law studies who went directly to the Lesotho campus, and a handful of students from Rhodesia and South Africa who were supported from United Nations and various private agency funds.

Academically, the University in Botswana began as part of already established systems and programs at the parent campus in Lesotho, and set out to duplicate the Year I and Year II courses already offered, but taking part through Faculty and Department Boards in subsequent modifications and changes referred to the University's Senate, on which all campuses were represented (as in the case of the University Council). For example, the initiation of a common first two years in science, for programs not only leading to science degrees on their own but also with education or with agriculture, was arranged after consultation and agreement with each campus, Botswana included. Science and Education degrees, Humanities and Education degrees could be taken in combination. The B.Sc. in Agriculture was newly established — completely in Swaziland but with the first two years in Botswana provided by the common science program.

Departmental offerings first made at the Botswana campus included courses in Administration and Government, African Languages and Literature, African Studies, Biology, Chemistry, Economics, English, Geography, History and Physics; in most cases only one or two man staffing, and with inability to obtain graduate assistants. In 1972-73, Accounting and Business, Education, Law (Commercial and Contract), Sociology, and Statistics were offered as well, and in both years a General Studies program of guest lecturers dealing in particular

developmental aspects as applicable in Botswana. It had not been possible to hire a full complement of suitable full-time lecturing staff and, anyway, there were constant difficulties in housing them. Therefore, Government assistance was sought. A prohibition against civil servants accepting additional employment was lifted as far as the University was concerned, and qualified experts were employed on a part-time basis. Once again, this was an example of dependence on and cooperation from Government. Such dependence was exemplified in the Faculty of Economic and Social Studies, where out of a staff of fifteen, thirteen were part-time and eleven of these, in Government service.

It should also be noted with reference to staff at the new campus, their internationality, British, Canadian, American, South African, Rhodesian, Batswana, Basuto, Dutch and Australian. In this, this mixture of academic and national backgrounds, I believe that our otherwise somewhat parochially and tribally oriented students have from the outset been fortunate. At the same time, the staff contact hours as recommended by the Academic Planning Mission have been low, with in most cases the desired corollary of additional time available not only for preparation and research, for participation in national advisory services, but also for much informal and individual association with students. Simultaneously, the actual classes, tutorials, laboratory groups have been small; while this compounds the popular charge that in too many African universities the staff/student ratio is "uneconomic," there have been the benefits of often nearly individual instruction and discussion, of great importance where the secondary schooling has been, to say the least, very variable and where acquaintance with any world outside Botswana, has been, in most cases, minimal.

With reference to the students, those who are Botswana citizens, the great majority, are dependent on Government support, for their bursaries and for their future employment, and eventual postgraduate studies where this applies. They are also pioneers. The establishment of a Students' Representative Council was helped initially by more experienced student representatives from the Lesotho campus, but the Botswana SRC's developing understanding of its potential role and responsibilities has been largely worked out by its own members, and with the nucleus of academic, social and athletic organizations already formed. The pattern has been somewhat different from what has obtained at the other campuses. This

reflects a wider issue. How different can an individual, national campus be from the other, national campuses, while still being a part of a regional university? This is not only a question of student organization and attitude, but also of admissions policy, academic patterning to suit a local situation, staff organization, administrative procedures, and financial responsibility. Investigation and experimentation in campus devolution, while maintaining an overall joint university government and similarity of academic standards, are continuing.

In a campus quite literally on the move, unfinished yet in academic operation, the physical problems tend in the short run to diminish as the initial construction nears completion. Inevitably, there are difficulties, particularly so in a new country, but by October, 1972 the residential accommodation began to be occupiable; the completion of laboratories, classrooms, library and catering facilities is scheduled for some time this year, so is administrative, maintenance, storage and staff accommodation. The first administration meeting on the campus and the first academic lecture were held in the partially completed new buildings this February. Milestones, it was felt, for the University.

In staffing, a policy of "localization" has been instituted, including further training for people already employed, both academic as well as administrative. This is essential, with so much dependence at present on expatriate recruitment, albeit on short-term contracts. Already, members of staff from the Botswana campus, sorely missed, have gone to Canada, the U.S. and Britain for additional study, with more scheduled to follow.

Another matter of priority during the short period of the existence of the University in Botswana has been the extent to which the greatest number of people in the community can be served. The principle, so long familiar elsewhere, of part-time students, is being put forward. Day release has not yet worked out; the first lesson learned is that time-tabling has to be adjusted to meet the schedules of employed people. Here, staff at the University accustomed to "normal working hours" find it strange in many cases to contemplate evening teaching, other than in the Division of Extra-Mural Services. Another development has been the introduction of a "Mature Age Program" for university entrance, admitting persons for full-time degree studies who do not possess the conventional entry requirements (through lack, in the past, of secondary school facilities), but who have demonstrated their competence and

suitability. This program has caught the imagination of prospective students and government departments, and has received government financial support, with the 1972 intake of students including head teachers of primary schools and agricultural assistants with professional training but no secondary school diplomas. Their participation in academic studies and student government has been a marked success.

In addition to this, the Central Bursaries Committee (of the Botswana Ministry of Education), now includes representation from the University to assist in selection of students and their counselling as to what study programs might best suit them while remaining in line with the national requirements to meet high priority and specialized manpower needs. The placement of, in particular, science students whose special programs can be met at none of the University's campuses, e.g. in engineering and in medicine, and who therefore must gain admission at institutions elsewhere, is another function now undertaken jointly by the University and the Government in Botswana.

Meanwhile, the University's Division of Extra Mural Services, with its work established in Botswana before the founding of the campus, has developed considerably, with, for example, short courses and workshops for radio broadcasters, community development workers, and for agricultural demonstrators. Advisory services for dissemination of information on rural development and on the five year governmental planning in Botswana have been provided, as well as a regular series of radio programs on a wide range of development-related activities. A branch of the Division has been opened to the north of Gaborone, in Francistown (with a Canadian adult education expert in charge) and in the nearby and growing new mining communities. Evening classes have been organized to provide tutorial assistance for persons preparing to take examinations of many kinds as external candidates, e.g. in Francistown alone, 60 candidates for the Pitman course in book-keeping, also courses for small traders with sessions on management and marketing, as well as literacy courses combined with instruction in health and nutrition.

In other words, the role of the University in Botswana is not seen to be exclusively at the degree level, but rather to provide as many training opportunities as possible. This is in itself the local creation of what had been an unfamiliar concept, virtually a community college approach, far removed in

a sense, from those traditional ivory towers about which we used to hear so much.

after two years, a review

In Botswana, the first schools, founded nearly a century ago in a few informal cases, were those of church missions, followed by tribal authority schools during the British Protectorate period together with a few Government institutions up to national independence in 1966. But illiteracy throughout the country is still greater than literacy, in any language. Secondary schools are for the most part new, as already noted, and still expanding but with space available out of balance with the numbers of pupils leaving primary schools. In the University, a vehicle has been created not only to produce what must inevitably be the future leadership of the country, but also to provide teachers and teacher trainers, and through the adult programs to expand greatly its effect on a growing number of people already established in many walks of life.

Concepts of what education is about, in what ways education should take place, and for what purposes, are in the process of discussion and development. In Botswana, there is the background of traditionally established values, behaviors and goals of a pastoral and rural society, intensely family conscious where numbers of people are small, and in a country where the presence or absence of never dependable rainfall at the edge of a great desert is the arbiter of existence. There is the inevitable influence from Botswana's highly developed and wealthy neighbor, the Republic of South Africa, from where consumer goods and most reading material come. There is the influence of Botswana citizens at present in front-line positions of importance who have been educated in South Africa, and that other influence of a steady migratory movement to and from South Africa of Botswana people serving as mining and agricultural labourers, in their tens of thousands.

There is also the new, post-independence influence of internationalism in Botswana. In growing momentum, assistance in economic and educational development is being made available, from international organizations, from other countries, from foundations, North American, European, and African. There is the steady injection of new ideas, different values,

other than what has been traditional, exemplified by the heavy proportion of the young, expatriate, volunteer staff at the secondary schools and teacher training colleges, with their own approaches to life, their questioning, their non-deference to authority in many cases, their outspokenness, their inclination to academic experimentation and innovation. This has been making its mark on the present youth of the country which attends schools, goes on to University and from which much future political and professional power will come.

Meanwhile, at the University the introduction of what is standard in many institutions elsewhere sometimes tends to be regarded as very new, locally: that students be both residential and non-residential; full-time and part-time; take short term courses in the day and in the evening; that they are both adult and adolescent; they may be either "qualified" secondary school leavers or mature-age entry student who are "unqualified" yet take courses for degrees; and that age and entrance to the University do not necessarily go together. It is a new thought that the location of the campus is better right in the town, rather than literally far afield. It is also new to consider that student enrolment numbers need not be controlled exclusively by the existence or otherwise of University dormitory accommodation; that students should have a wide measure of choice in the use of their own time; that they should be responsible for their financial allowance expenditure; that they should participate in the University's committee structure together with staff; that conventional decorum of dress and deportment are not factors of major importance; that their private lives are their own. That students could suitably take employment during vacation periods has been immediately accepted, by all concerned.

Initiated through the establishment of the University campus in Botswana, at present on a small scale numerically, these concepts serve as seeds sown which may have results in this country both profound and far reaching. As this article has tried to indicate, creativity in education has come from the founding of a University campus in a country where none had ever been before and where few people had ever seen a university anywhere else. Now the University is becoming a familiar and accepted part of the local scene in Botswana, academic, social, and economic, and its creation should perpetuate further creativity in the realms of research, advice, debate, and the spread of ideas.