



Societal Responsibility



Academic Partnerships: The Driving Force behind Social and Pedagogical Development (Case of Mohammed V University at Souissi)*

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Abstract

Many universities are looking into new ways of increasing their income in order to cover part of their expenditures. As a result, some universities have entered into academic partnership and cooperation agreements with various bodies involved in education and training.

This paper considers the case of the University Mohammed V Souissi in Morocco, a newly established University that has entered into partnerships and cooperation arrangements with numerous universities, organizations and sectors, both at home and abroad. Such partnerships and arrangements have helped the University to achieve many goals related to the development of pedagogic modalities and methods. They have also helped to open the university to the community, through links with various sectors of society, ensuring that its graduates have an appropriate profile, in return for financial aid to finance their education. This has enabled, the University to run new professional, industrial, social, educational and cultural specialization programs in its various faculties and institutes. Additionally, the paper provides some insights into what partnership and cooperation agreements could contribute to opening new advanced horizons for higher education in Arab countries.

I. Introduction

Higher education undoubtedly faces radical changes in knowledge, economy and technology. It also faces many challenges that traditional methods are unable to meet. These challenges are even bigger in Arab countries where higher education is under a lot of pressure, both qualitatively and quantitatively. It is necessary for higher education, therefore, to look for new ways to generate well structured programs, new curricula techniques and experiences in order to help higher education attain comprehensive quality and become actively involved in the knowledge economy.

Higher education is the cornerstone of societal development; it is one of the main indicators of the progress and prosperity of people. The traditional role of higher education institutions was to generate intellectual wealth and transfer it to the labour market. However, its role has changed

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and it is now expected to support growth and development in its socioeconomic context, as well as industrial progress, living up to people expectations and helping them to realize their aspirations (ISESCO, 2008).

Consequently, higher education institutions have become inextricably linked up with research centres, laboratories and training workshops that form the educational process. In addition, they are now closely interconnected with the economy as a whole. "Each nation's upswing is the fruit of knowledge. University is the breeding ground of brains which produce knowledge, excel in it and reshape life with scientific know-how, vocational experience and practical experiments drawn from academic attainment" (ALTouajeri, 2008).

It is the concepts of sustainable development, technological and scientific progress as well as the enhancement of living standards that now go hand in hand with higher education. This in turn gives rise to ideas, theories and theses that are applied on the ground through innovations and inventions which promote progress and growth. Higher education institutions are, therefore, like laboratories and factories which produce the best products and innovations of the human mind in diverse scientific and technological fields. As such, they put an end to backwardness.

In order to upgrade higher education so that it becomes the lever of socioeconomic development and progress, it has to broaden its horizons, become receptive to international experiences to improve its quality and services and look for new financial sources to cover its increasing expenses. Thus, officials and decision-makers in charge of higher education must, on the one hand, devise new approaches to relieve the high expense burden on governments and, on the other hand, devise new ways of developing cooperative partnerships between active stakeholders in the economic, academic, national and international sectors.

II. The Importance of Academic Partnerships and Cooperation in Higher Education

Nowadays, the concept of a partnership is widely found in the plans and programs of many international organizations concerned with education and development affairs. It requires high degrees of cooperation, coexistence, fraternity and tolerance from the various stakeholders, but it can achieve tangible results with regard to progress and development. Partnerships change the roles between academic institutions and the other institutions in society, and it has become one of education's main modern characteristics (Ouzi, 2007, p. 23).

Partnership itself is not the end, but one of the means used to achieve common goals. It represents a challenge for authorities that are used to intervening and applying bureaucratic rules in administration. Societies today are looking for new mechanisms and strategies of governance in all sectors, including the education and training field that is recognized as the driving force behind socioeconomic development and progress (Ouzi, 2007). Officials in charge of education have acknowledged the importance of partnerships and the role they play in boosting development at all levels. Furthermore, organizations started to call for international conferences and meetings that encourage partnerships and cooperation amongst a range of stakeholders.

The Dakar (Senegal) conference held in 2000, called for achieving education for all and highlighted in its resolutions the importance of partnerships, laying its foundations, setting its regulations and establishing diverse mechanisms to be adopted at national and international levels. Moreover, the declaration of the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien (Thailand) in 1990 pointed out, in article VII, the importance of encouraging partnerships at all levels, adopting a new expanded vision and making a renewed commitment in education through the participation



of all governmental and civil institutions. Partnerships play a crucial role; they are an expedient of development, invention and innovation and a means to encourage learning and improvement. The World Bank report on education and training in the Kingdom of Morocco in the 21st century stated that “all reforms in the education and training sector will not succeed unless they are accepted by all the categories of the society and the relevant stakeholders. It is therefore necessary to establish strategies in order to fulfil this comprehensive commitment.” (Jahidi, 2006, p. 69) In other words, education should be of great importance to everyone in society, from individuals to groups (including political parties, syndicates, organizations and civil society). In an attempt to implement the principles of the National Charter of Education and Training (which points out the necessity of partnerships and the importance of decentralization), the Ministry of Higher Education and Training in the Kingdom of Morocco issued special decrees (MOE, Morocco, 1995). They urged stakeholders to conclude agreements with academic institutions and establish communication links through networks and infrastructure that enable the institutions to realize their education and training goals and be in harmony with their environment.

III. Concept of Academic Partnerships and its Features

It is difficult to define partnership since it belongs to many knowledge fields. However, one can say that academic partnership is “a relation of excellence based on a common project between two people, groups or institutions and even more. It takes concrete form in the exchange of expertise, experiences, information, human and financial resources. This is in order to serve and realize specific academic projects that bring added value to both contracting parties based on mutual agreement and sharing of responsibilities” (Ouzi, 2007).

A partnership has many positive features, as it offers great possibilities to overcome the many problems facing the different facilitators. Solutions are found when these people unite, support each other and share their experiences. This is because they are convinced about the importance of the project and they are committed to deploying efforts to make it succeed (Marjolaine, 2001, p. 11).

In addition, a partnership is a collective effort that benefits all aspects of development in general and education in particular. This is because it is a fundamental pillar that supports and improves academic services, develops academic institutions and increases their efficiency through effective and fruitful agreements with the sectors of civil society. Such agreements help to design and implement new structures for the education field so that it meets the new needs of today's students. In addition, academic institutions become the lever of development at all levels, societal, economic and cultural. These institutions can, therefore, lay the foundations of cooperation and solidarity between academic institutions, students, professors and all sectors of civil society, so that all contribute to academic development in the era of modernity and knowledge.

The task of developing education in the information society is incumbent on responsible people in society. It requires the participation of all sectors in order to achieve the aspirations of the people, to get them actively and effectively involved in the information society and to ensure that they are not mere passive spectators.

The universities in Morocco, as with many other universities in Arab countries, are making great efforts to meet the challenges facing them. They are trying to enhance education so it meets the needs of the national labour market. They are trying to ensure that their future graduates will be able to move in a globalized world and be competitive in the international arena. In fact, «the regional characteristics of higher education have been regressing amidst the hegemony of the

features, products and tools of globalization. As a result, people in charge of higher education affairs must strengthen structures, develop curricula, programs and incorporate them into the whole society to benefit from its experience and become beneficial” (AbdelSamih, 2005, p. 1). Consequently, universities have been taking active steps to improve curricula, modernize pedagogical methods and develop research projects. This process requires additional costs that the universities cannot afford. They have had to look for new sources of financing and cooperation. “An increase is expected in the coming years in the registration applications submitted to universities in developing countries, which will have an impact on all aspects, namely financing, globalization and quality. In fact, registrations in the universities of the MENA region increased by 250% between 1999 and 2004 compared to an average of 114% in developing countries. Based on the expected augmentation, the number of registrations in developing countries universities is estimated at 120 million during the next ten years” (Allnaqui, 2008).

As a result, many universities in Morocco and other Arab countries took several measures to guarantee new sustainable sources to finance educational requirements and support the academic infrastructures and equipment. These include:

- a. Academic and pedagogical partnership and cooperation agreements with many national and international parties.
- b. Openness to the national labour market through the creation of new scientific and vocational majors that meet market requirements. New vocational degrees and new scientific majors were added to fulfil the needs of different sectors.

These measures enabled higher education institutions to cover part of their expenses and improve their programs and regulations in-line with the aspirations of society. Moreover, they created new dynamics and helped develop a new pedagogical approach in academic institutions. It is important, therefore, to look closely at this situation in order to analyze it and draw conclusions on the new approaches regarding academic partnerships and the positive openness of higher education institutions to their social environment. This is the subject of this study which is based on the actual experience of Mohammed V University at Souissi, located in Rabat (Morocco), which was established ten years ago.

IV. Academic Partnership and Cooperation in Moroccan Universities and their Effects on Societal Development and Pedagogical Methods Enhancement in Higher Education (Case of Mohammed V University)

1. Overview of Mohammed V University

It is located in Rabat and consists of 26 higher education, training and research institutions, in addition to medical establishments affiliated to Ibn Sina Hospital. The university was founded in 1992 and has more than 15,923 students and 707 administrators, educators and technicians. In addition, there are 1,012 professors and researchers and it encompasses 14 main fields of studies that comprise of 24 majors. It offers 10 vocational bachelor's degrees and 23 master's degrees in law, economics, sociology, medicine, pharmacy, engineering and computer science. In addition, there are 13 doctorates offered and recently a doctoral school was created within the university. The research section consists of 118 units, 103 research groups, 9 laboratories, 5 research centres and one observatory.



2. Partnership and Cooperation Agreements between Mohammed V University and National and International Partners

There are academic partnerships within sectors both inside and outside the country and with local industrial and administrative organizations. Those responsible for these partnerships often realize many objectives, namely:

- a. Promote societal development
- b. Modernize and develop pedagogical curricula and methods
- c. Enhance academic administrative systems
- d. Improve the quality and standards of graduation from the university
- e. Develop and modernize programs and degree courses

As a result, academic partnerships and cooperation play an essential role in today's world. This is especially true in higher education as they can help the institutions to become more open to their socioeconomic environment, broaden their horizons and provide students with skills and knowledge to enhance their capacities in-line with the needs of the local labour market. Furthermore, partnership and cooperation agreements can help develop strategic frameworks that reduce the gap between acquired and required skills. This in turn globalizes education in the sense that it defines a profile for a "Global Graduate" whose skills, competences and innovative spirit go beyond national borders. These academic agreements make higher education one of the fundamental levers of socioeconomic development through the creation of new scientific, industrial, technical and vocational majors within academic institutions in accordance to the needs of the environment and partner institutions. This encourages students to enrol in these majors. As a result, private and public sectors become effective partners in implementing national academic policies, enriching them with their experiences, enhancing their structures and building their capacities.

In this regard, Mohammed V University strengthened cooperation with several national and international parties by signing academic partnership agreements. This has had a positive impact on its pedagogical methods and mission as well as on its status in the international scene.

3. Cooperation and Partnership Fields between Mohammed V University and its Partners

Mohammed V University participated in many international programs and concluded many partnership and cooperation agreements with other foreign universities and facilitators in the fields of research and education. These agreements included the following measures:

- a. Exchanging information about higher education, educational methods and research (Kingdom of Morocco, Mohammed V University, 2008).
- b. Inviting teachers, researchers and executive tutors of partner institutions to participate in diverse academic and research activities.
- c. Inviting research professors of partner institutions to participate in meetings, seminars and training sessions that deal with research subjects.
- d. Elaborating programs of scientific research in common fields of interest between contracting universities.
- e. Receiving students who are preparing their theses and providing co-direction.
- f. Looking for sources of finance for common activities.

Law 10/ 2000, which related to university reform in Morocco, encouraged universities to upgrade their capacities and participate in socioeconomic development. Mohammed V University is aware of the challenges it faces, and has, therefore, included in its strategy effective and permanent



partnerships at the national and international levels. This is in order to exchange knowledge and expertise and provide services in terms of continuous training, research, development, assistance and orientation for the benefit of social and economic organizations and institutions. The partnership agreements concluded by the university following its foundation can be categorized as follows:

- 64 partnership and cooperation agreements with national partners
- 55 partnership and cooperation agreements with European countries
- 18 partnership and cooperation agreements with American countries
- 8 partnership and cooperation agreements with African countries
- 4 partnership and cooperation agreements with Asian countries
- 15 partnership and cooperation agreements with Arab countries
- 10 partnership and cooperation agreements with foreign organizations

The figures 1 - 4 illustrate these agreements.

Figure 1: Partnership and Cooperation Agreements between Mohammed V University and National and International Partners

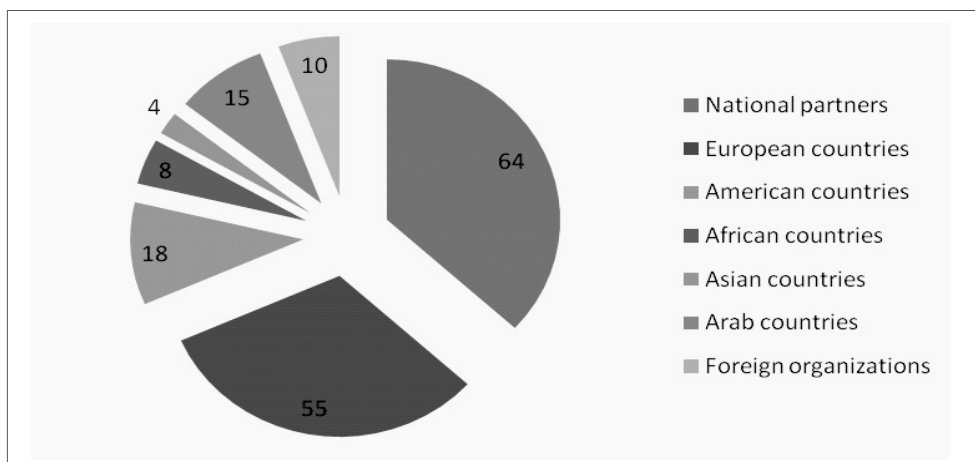


Figure 2: Partnership and Cooperation Agreements between Mohammed V University and European Countries

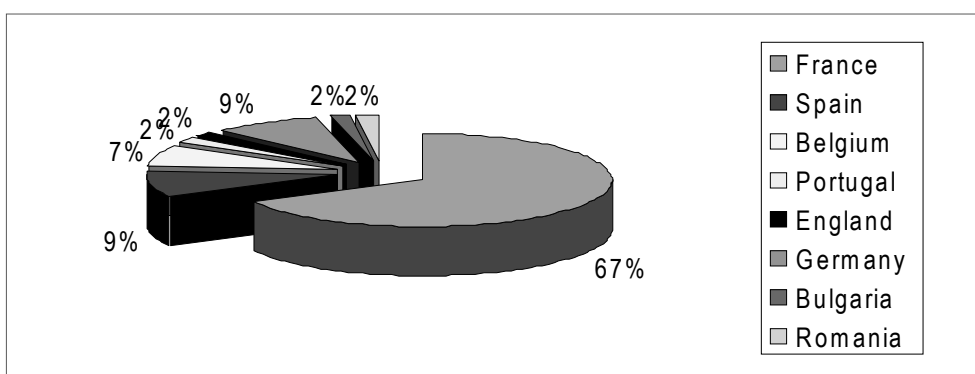


Figure 3: Partnership and Cooperation Agreements between Mohammed V University and American Countries

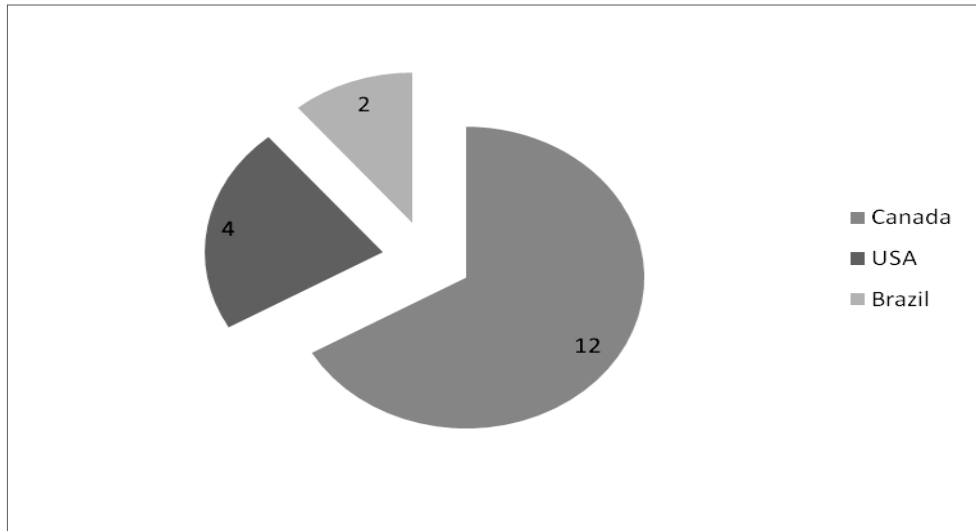
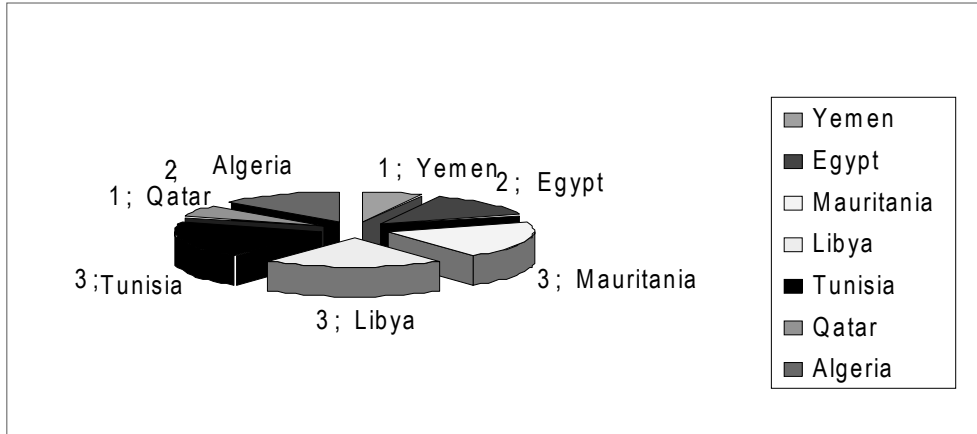


Figure 4: Partnership and Cooperation Agreements between Mohammed V University and Arab Countries



4. Examples of Partnership and Cooperation Agreements concluded by Mohammed V University

a. Moroccan – French Cooperation for Training in Tourism

This cooperation has helped open new higher education majors in tourism and hotel management since July 2004 in the faculty of law, economic and social sciences in Sala. This agreement will be put into force in 2010 in the tourism sector that is expected to receive 10 million tourists.



b. Organizing Regional Sessions in Commercial Tourism with the Cooperation of the World Trade Organization (WTO)

The Mohammed V University and WTO signed a technical training and cooperation agreement to organize regional sessions in commercial tourism in 2004, 2005 and 2006 for the benefit of 27 African countries. These sessions aimed at raising knowledge about the concepts of this organization and about the issues related to commercial tourism. They were conducted by experts from the WTO and specialized African experts from academic and scientific research institutions.

c. Cooperation with the American University of Texas

Within the framework of partnership and cooperation between Mohammed V University and the American University of Texas, a training session was organized for the students of the latter university in June 2008. Arabic classes and courses about Moroccan history, art, culture and the political institutions in Morocco were conducted during this session.

d. Cooperation between Mohammed V University and Tunisia

Within the framework of cooperation between Morocco and the Republic of Tunisia, a joint research program was adopted between Moroccan researchers and their Tunisian peers, through a joint bid for common research projects (Mohammed V University, 2008, p. 5).

5. Cooperation and Partnership Agreements between Mohammed V University and Important Moroccan Economic Facilitators

The reform of universities in Morocco offered new opportunities for them to provide their services to the different economic sectors. As a result, Mohammed V University offers basic training, continuous training and research sessions with a view to develop these sectors. Indeed, the university is trying to become more open to its socioeconomic environment and has created a special office responsible for mobilizing capacities within the university for the private sector. Other sub-offices within university-affiliated institutions were established in order to increase the efficiency of this special office. They follow up on the field partnership agreements with enterprises in terms of basic training, continuous training and scientific research. For example, the university created a "Business Incubator" to orient, guide and help students to integrate into the socioeconomic fabric.

6. The Business Incubator (Pépinière d'entreprises)

In order to increase the openness of the university to its socioeconomic environment, Mohammed V University opened new majors that meet the needs of society and bolster, social, economic and cultural growth and development. For example, new vocational, industrial and cultural majors were opened in the Faculty of Education Sciences, such as a bachelor degree course in social intervention or socio-cultural activation and a master's degree course in juvenile delinquents re-education.

The university has also helped integrate graduates in the socioeconomic fabric through the creation of a "Business Incubator". The "Business Incubator" receives, follows-up and supports future entrepreneurs. It is an instrument for local economic development that provides support for future entrepreneurs from the planning of the project to the establishment of the enterprise and its integration in the economic fabric. A "Business Incubator" offers orientation and guidance services for graduates as well as logistic support in order to maximize their chances of success. The company spends a maximum of two years in an incubation program, enabling entrepreneurs to benefit from the following services:



- a. Legal and legislative coverage
- b. Assistance to fully understand the project
- c. Follow-up
- d. Expenses coverage for 2 years
 - 1) Acceptance Criteria: In order to encourage entrepreneurship and innovation, Mohammed V University chooses innovative entrepreneurial projects each year that are submitted by graduates desiring to benefit from assistance and the follow-up services provided by the “Business Incubator” or partner organizations during the implementation of the project. Applicants must:
 - a. Hold a diploma of higher training
 - b. Be exclusively occupied with the implementation of the project
 - 2) Continuous Training: The National Charter for Education and Training and the various legislative texts related to higher education regulation, namely law 102000/, offered many opportunities for universities to develop continuous training. In this regard, Mohammed V University follows up graduates with university degrees who are working in different organizations and offers continuous training sessions within the various faculties and in different majors. This training is carried out in accordance with a regulation issued by the University Board on the 16th December 2005, which defines the beneficiaries of continuous training. These are people working in private institutions, or public administrations individually or collectively within the framework of a partnership; people working in the faculties of the university, such as medicine and dentistry; and students enrolled in basic training courses in other majors in the university.
 - 3) Coordination Office between the University and Enterprises: The Chief Education Office of the university established a specialized office for mediation between the university and enterprises with a view to connect it with the economy and society and to encourage cooperation between the university and its partners. These include public authorities, enterprises, social and cultural facilitators, and involve research, training, development, orientation and guidance, as well as the bolstering of local, national and international development. It also promotes orientation activities and the support provided to universities, educators, researchers and their external partners. The office includes an Orientation Council composed of many partners that study entrepreneurial contracts related to research and continuous training, and look for suitable training for students in their institutions, and for financial support to help establish entrepreneurship.
 - 4) Encouraging Contractual Research Activities: Mohammed V University does this for science and technology through several ways (disseminating information, organizing events and forums, academic days dedicated to research, lab visits, and intervention amongst main partners). The coordination office informs research groups in the university about available research opportunities and sources of finance, organizes training sessions for research professors on different aspect of contractual research and provides logistic support to develop their activities.
 - 5) Promoting Continuous Training:

Developing permanent training is a socioeconomic challenge for both universities and organizations as it:

 - Strengthens the university’s openness to its socioeconomic environment

- Has a positive impact on the basic training of students as it satisfies the needs of the institutions, undertakes case studies and provides assistance in the modernization of labour regulations.
- Enhances the university's resources
- Represents a valuable asset for the university and its professors

6) Starting training of projects holders: On October 21st 2008, the "Business Incubator" of Mohammed V University organized in its main campus a meeting for graduates with entrepreneurial projects. Several representatives from prestigious financial and economic institutions, such as the National Bank for Enterprises and the National Agency for the Promotion of Employment and Labour Skills, and many research professors in charge of supervision and training attended this meeting. Discussions took place between the graduates and the coordinators in charge of supervising them and several projects were adopted, as shown in table 1.

Table1: Graduates whose projects were adopted by Mohammed V University

Applicant Name	Academic Level	Services or production (project)
Youssef Acamy	Holder of law degree from Mohammed V University	-Advertisement posters design - Cars and motorbikes design - Advertisement posters design equipment - Advertisement posters printing
Ahmad Issam	Holder of a diploma in the reform of special technical textile materials	- Lighting and electricity - Power line and computer networking - Satellite - Video surveillance - Automatic doors
Ibrahim Al-Souissi	Holder of a PhD in pharmacy from Mohammed V University	- Training of pharmacists and people working in the pharmacy field - Pharmacy counselling
Amin Rahim Said Alebo Imad Mahu	Holders of a vocational degree in cultural mediation from Mohammed V University	- Cultural project management - Counselling with a view to improve the institution profile
Sanaa Bulbul	Holder of bachelor degree in economics (business management)	- Centre that provides advisory, counselling, check-up, and follow-up services before childbirth

7) Examples of Partnership and Cooperation Agreements with Local Partners: The openness of the university to its social environment has allowed it to conclude many partnership and cooperation agreements with a variety of social, cultural and economic partners. The university created many new vocational majors to provide graduates with training in-line with the needs of a society that has been developing dramatically at all levels during the last decades. These agreements include:

- A cooperation agreement with the urban community of Rabat.
- A cooperation agreement between the Faculty of Social Sciences and the Directorate of jail management and re-education.
- A cooperation agreement between Mohammed V University and the Regional Council of Rabat.
- A cooperation agreement between the Faculty of Education Sciences and the centre for combating illiteracy and informal education.
- A cooperation agreement between the Faculty of Education Sciences and the Secretary of State's Office for Social Protection, Family and Child Affairs.

V. Conclusion

Partnership agreements are very fruitful and can have an effect on a wide range of sectors, as they can be concluded with educational, social, economic, artistic and sports partners. Partnership can be seen as a means to help develop society in a globalized economy. This concept was integrated in the education and training sector in order to enhance it and to meet the new societal and international needs. However, one must keep in mind that academic partnership is not a ready-made method that can be easily applied. Rather, it is a framework that is tailored to the needs of both parties. Consequently, partnerships can vary in substance and in form with regard to their nature, their environment and the expected objectives in terms of education, training and research.

Entering into a partnership, whether national or international, does not mean losing the identity or autonomy of the contracting parties, as all the parties share responsibilities and have equal rights and obligations. Consequently, partnerships can represent a major change for academic institutions with strict administrative hierarchies. This is because in order to promote power sharing and cooperation amongst the various facilitators and organizations in society, they have to create new dynamics based on cooperation. Partnerships can also bring to reality the desire of education and training institutions to be relevant to the economic sector, which has been a source of concern for a long time, in order to develop and modernize structures and systems.

Academic partnership management, as with any other human resources management dealing with human skills, capacities and ambitions, will not bear fruit if it only focuses on the already developed logistics. It has to be driven by a strong will, determination and a readiness to understand the real meaning of partnership and accept changes in tasks and responsibilities. It also has to stem from a common interest in the field of work and a sense of cooperation (Ouzi, 2007, p. 65).

The main features of partnership are collective efforts and human cooperation and for institutions they represent an arduous task. However, academic partnership and cooperation are one of the best ways to improve academic programs, modernize pedagogical approaches, enhance administrative systems and upgrade degree courses. "The higher education institutions can no longer ignore the importance of academic partnerships and cooperation, in order to improve their curricula and upgrade degree courses." (AlAwit, 2008)

"Financing higher education in the Arab region is incumbent in the first place upon the state. However, this financing is not enough to meet the growing needs of the society in terms of higher education and an assured good quality given the various pressures on public sources of finance. It is therefore necessary to diversify these sources through partnerships with economic, social and international facilitators and launch a restructuration process for universities. This is in order that they become self-sufficient productive institutions, capable of promoting their academic



production and providing tailored services in terms of expertise, counselling and research with sufficient resources to be invested in quality improvement. In this regard, the globalization of educational services represents an opportunity for Arab universities to export their programs and diversify their sources of financing.” (AlDougui, 2008)

In order to help higher education institutions to achieve these goals, it is necessary to promote cooperation and enhance partnerships through symposia and workshops. Such measures will raise awareness about the importance and necessity of partnership and cooperation along with helping to accelerate new initiatives.

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