MAKING A SUSTAINABLE MARK ON THE WORLD
Université Laval takes action
Over the last several years, Université Laval has successfully met the challenge of the internationalization of education. Indeed, in little over ten years’ time, the proportion of our graduates who have completed a period of study abroad has risen from less than 1% to more than 13%. Université Laval’s Bureau international has been a driving force behind the strategy aimed at making Laval into a university that is open to the world.

International co-operation at Université Laval has always been stimulated by the dedication of its members throughout its various faculties. Since 2007, the Bureau international expanded its areas of activity to include the field of international co-operation, providing networking, funding search assistance and consulting services. Whether this co-operation concerns scientific activity or development, it contributes to the notoriety of our university and provides a basis for sharing with developing countries the best that we have to offer – namely, our knowledge.

Université Laval wishes to thank its financial supporters, in particular the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), the multilateral development banks and all the other institutional partners for the backing they have provided to our work among partner institutions. We also thank all the private donors who have enabled us to pursue a number of our activities, particularly our training projects in international co-operation. We are thus able to train a new generation of co-operants having all the knowledge necessary to working effectively in emerging countries.

I am pleased to present to you this publication describing the achievements of eleven international co-operation projects in which Université Laval played an active role. While it does not provide an exhaustive profile of the work of Université Laval employees in developing countries, it does offer an accurate overview of activities that I hope will stimulate your curiosity.

Richard Poulin
A scientific circus comes to the Caribbean

Planted in the middle of the island of Grenada is a gleaming white circus tent, atop of which the Université Laval flag can be seen flying. There, however, tightrope walkers and jugglers have been supplanted by a troupe of researchers whose special area of study is food- and water-borne illnesses. Launched only a few months ago with funding from the International Development Research Centre, the Caribbean Eco-Health Program will enjoy a run of four years. Its director, Éric Dewailly, a professor and physician both, speaks effusively of this scientific circus.

“This program concerns the interactions between public health, environmental health, and food- and water-borne diseases. The project comprises three dimensions: training, research and knowledge transfer. Researchers and students from Université Laval, along with students from three Caribbean universities, are involved in the program. In addition, each research project is nested within partnerships with the local government. It’s one way of ensuring that knowledge transfer is integrated into public policymaking.”

Water comes in for close scrutiny

The team of scientists has focused its research on several specific topics, including the phenomenon of food- and water-related gastroenteritides, the use of pesticides having an impact on human health, and the use of untreated rainwater for drinking water. To add them in their research is the Atlantis Mobile Laboratory for environmental health assessment, which is owned by Université Laval and funded by the Canada Foundation for Innovation. Under the tent, the researchers conduct experiments in microbiology, chemistry and toxicology using standardized procedures, thus ensuring the reliability of results. As such, this big top from the North is a beacon of hope for island-dwellers in the South.

“The Caribbean countries are our neighbours somewhat. They are small nations that have no university research and laboratory facilities to speak of and very little in the way of technologies. It’s only logical to want to give these populations an assist by providing them with training (if you’re going to put your money where your mouth is), and it’s also an ideal opportunity to reflect on new ways of doing things,” asserts Éric Dewailly. For example, in keeping with the financial capacity of governments, the researchers try to design simple pieces of equipment and to develop methods which, though based on sophisticated technologies, are easy to use and require a minimum of maintenance.

North-South Benefits

The real originality of the Caribbean Eco-Health Program consists in training cohorts of local researchers who will stay in their country and contribute to its progress. As Professor Dewailly explains it, “We are not attempting to export brainpower – quite to the contrary. We don’t go collecting samples in the South for analysis in our laboratories in the North. Everything we do, we do on location. We don’t go about our business like imperialists. Local communities take ownership of the results.”

He adds, “In four years’ time, the program will have graduated upwards of 20 Quebec master’s or doctoral students who have completed field work in the Caribbean. Most importantly, however, it will have provided training to upwards of 30 students and 20-odd technicians hailing from the Caribbean, in addition to civil servants.”

In short, this program does not just exist on paper but has been translated into practice. The traveling laboratory gives a tangible form to the research being performed. And, after only a few weeks’ time, local researchers are running the program. For Professor Dewailly, North-South co-operation is vital to the success of research. “What value do our technology and our methods have without the knowledge of the local community? By providing us with ongoing monitoring, the locals help us to detect new problems as they arise.”

In a few months’ time, the scientific circus will be packing up and moving on to Dominica, Barbados and Guyana. The stops will last six to eight months. The time required to train public health actors and to generate research hypotheses. And, for the duration of each stay, the Université Laval flag will be seen flying over the mobile laboratory.
I laid the groundwork for my experience during the year preceding my departure. In addition to taking preparatory classes, I read up on malaria, which was widespread in the village I was travelling to. As a result, I was sufficiently informed to be able to act more effectively once I was on location. Nevertheless, you’re never completely prepared to experience a cultural shock of that order. Fortunately, we were given quality supervision on location,” Catherine allowed.

This year, 33 nursing students will be participating in an international education program in conjunction with Université Laval’s partners in China, India, Senegal, Mali, Ghana, Cameroon and Burkina Faso. Since training is the focus of these work terms, students are thus provided supervision by health professionals from the host country. Prior to their departure, they acquire knowledge pertaining to all the sociocultural dimensions shaping the kind of care provided to patients. Ultimately, these international work terms are designed to educate culturally competent professionals who are able not only to respond to the needs of an increasingly multicultural clientele but also to work in harmony with colleagues hailing from a range of cultural backgrounds.

Furthermore, the future of the work term program lies in offering interdisciplinary international experiences. In Ms. Lazure’s view, further efforts should be dedicated to promoting these initiatives, which, for example, bring together students in nursing, medicine and dentistry around common objectives.

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For Catherine Breton, a nursing student who made a 10-week stay in Mali, the outstanding lessons of her experience make for a rather long list: adapting, being ready for any eventuality, keeping one’s mind open, accepting difference, and more. The Université Laval undergraduate took part in the Bureau international’s student mobility program known as the International and Intercultural Semester program (stage international et interculturel), designed to allow students to experience the developing world.

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The view from the field

“The International and Intercultural Semester program represents a strategy of prime value,” notes Ginette Lazure, program supervisor. “It constitutes an extended encounter in a particular work context in which the role of health professionals is different. The participants learn to adapt the care offered by taking into account patients’ beliefs, working with the available technology, and using creativity to design health promotion and prevention programs. There’s more to it than just field observation.”

In India, for example, students set up the dispensary of a music school attended by disadvantaged children. There they developed care protocols that factored for traditional approaches, integrating medicinal plants in particular.

How to describe the main benefits of these training programs? Ms. Lazure is firmly convinced that students come home thoroughly transformed: “Our program participants are confronted with very different health situations, thus prompting them to reflect on their role and commitment as nurses. Once back home, they become more fully engaged in their community.”

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For her part, Catherine came back from Mali – only to depart again, to Nepal this time. She notes that beyond satisfying her thirst for adventure, she has come away from her overseas experiences a richer, fuller person. “When you provide care, you have to show empathy for the other person, know how to put yourself in their position in order to better understand their situation and adapt care accordingly. Travelling enables you to get to know yourself and your own culture. By the same token, you understand your own people better. So many things I was unaware of before I did my work term in Mali!”

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• International and Intercultural Semester program: The program enables more than 30 students to do work terms in developing countries.

• Countries of activity: China, Senegal, India, Mali, Ghana, Cameroon and Burkina Faso.

• Goal: Contribute to the education of nurses aware of major social challenges through their participation in work terms in health settings different from those of Quebec. These work terms are also designed to incorporate a new sociocultural dimension into the care given to patients.
A combat on several fronts

Dr. Alary’s main work in Africa unfolded in three phases. In the early 1990s, the researcher worked in Benin, the Central African Republic, Guinea and the Congo. Other countries were subsequently added to the list. Doctor Alary focused his activities not only on the monitoring and evaluation of STIs but also on patient management strategies. Numbering among his accomplishments was the construction of a clinic for female sex workers in Cotonou (Benin).

In 2006, funding for many anti-AIDS activities had become harder to come by. Nevertheless, Professor Alary carried forward with his activities, namely: assessing the impact of HIV/AIDS projects, training African students, building a specialized laboratory for STIs, implementing (elsewhere than in West Africa) services for female sex workers, and so on.

At the same time, he joined forces with colleagues who were carrying out a HIV/AIDS prevention project in the State of Karnataka, India. It was in this context that the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation awarded him a grant of US $7.68 million to evaluate the effectiveness of an AIDS prevention program in India.

“I work on projects that can make a difference, that amount to more than shuffling papers. Something happens in the field. The operations yield results having a major impact,” explains Professor Alary. “On a global scale, the Indian project is, at this time, considered to be one of the most promising on account of its scope. It covers the four States where HIV is most present – i.e., in States numbering some 300 million inhabitants and that are home to hundreds of thousands of female sex workers who are seen almost every week. This exceedingly high coverage rate is a key factor in the success of this venture.”

Photo: Isaac Minani.

In his capacity as researcher, Michel Alary is confronted with an array of challenges. Such as continually locating funding with which to keep his research teams working, or training the next generation of public health specialists, given that pursuing a university career in this field has become too risky. Professor Alary also dreams of a research chair dedicated to his field. It is his hope that the countries hit hardest by AIDS become more autonomous, at least in intellectual terms. “Even if they don’t have all the money required, if at least they have the (human) resources… There has got to be a stop to the brain drain from the emerging countries to the developed countries,” he concludes.

Dr. Alary’s sentiments go hand in hand with the message of a poster hanging on the wall behind him: Open Your Eyes; Don’t Turn Your Back on AIDS.

Where to from here?

While Michel Alary admits to being almost always on the run, he is as resolute as ever to continue his fight against AIDS. He wishes to this disease one day cease being the world’s number one health problem – particularly in Africa, where HIV continues to constitute one of the most serious public health threats. “AIDS has a huge impact on development. It causes a considerable decrease in productivity as it takes a toll on the working population. It attacks the health and education systems. How will these countries be able to sustain their future development? How will they be able to emerge from their current situation?”

In the early 1980s, Michel Alary, at the time a general practitioner, was placed in charge of monitoring infectious diseases by the Beauceville (Quebec’s) community health department. That was when he noticed that sexually transmitted infections (STIs) were the most frequent type of notifiable diseases. The discovery prompted him to go back to school and complete both a master’s and a doctorate in epidemiology. A short time afterwards, he headed for West Africa, whose emerging nations were now becoming engulfed in the AIDS epidemic.

A ton of documents rises toward the ceiling. A desk lies buried beneath heaps of paper. Such is the shambles that first greets the visitor upon entering the office of Michel Alary, Professor at the Université Laval Faculty of Medicine. On the walls of his basement lair are posters from awareness campaigns and photos of a lively, animated Africa that awaken the urge to travel. Welcome to the world of a researcher determined to vanquish AIDS.

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Upon departing, they are curious, eager for new experiences, keen to discover that “elsewhere” that is so different from home. Upon returning, they have been literally transformed for having pushed so far past their initial limitations. For Faculty of Medicine students who do a work term abroad, they can expect no less from their experience in a developing country. Ahead of their respective departures, both became involved in the Fonds étudiant de la Faculté de médecine pour la santé internationale, or FEMSI (Faculty of medicine student fund for international health).

Marie-Hélène Dubour is a student in medicine, Amélie Descent a student in physiotherapy. The former had gone on a 10-week work term in Mali, while the other was getting ready for her experience in a developing country. Ahead of their respective departures, both became involved in the Fonds étudiant de la Faculté de médecine pour la santé internationale, or FEMSI (Faculty of medicine student fund for international health).

FEMSI

Created in 2005 by four female medical students, including Marie-Hélène, FEMSI was a groundbreaking initiative. The fund is managed mostly by medical students, with the addition, beginning last year, of physiotherapy and occupational therapy students. Its goals are to support the funding for international work terms of health science students and to promote sustainable development by contributing to health-related projects in partner countries.

How does FEMSI work? Each year, a funding target is established on the basis of the number of students wishing to take part in a work term. The success of the campaign rests on the search for partners and sponsors as well as on the staging of several fundraising activities. For each dollar gathered, the Faculty makes a matching dollar contribution to FEMSI, up to a total of $60,000. Each participant in the student mobility program known as the International and Intercultural Semester (stage international et interculturel) is also awarded a $2,000 scholarship from the Bureau international. This year, the funding target is in the neighbourhood of $170,000.

Until now, FEMSI has awarded scholarships to close to 200 students taking part in the International and Intercultural Semester program. As Amélie, the co-ordinator of the current campaign, points out, “Not all of the students who share in managing the fund necessarily do an internship. They simply believe in the cause – nothing more, nothing less!” It is worth mentioning that 5% of the moneys thus gathered are invested in sustainable development.

Once the funds have been raised, the students leave it up to the Faculty to award scholarships. It’s a way of avoiding conflicts of interest. According to both students, FEMSI is driven by a number of noble values. Says Marie-Hélène: “It’s all a matter of mutual aid, sharing and solidarity – solidarity between students, to begin with, then between programs, and finally between peoples. On top of that, it’s a matter of open-mindedness, a quality that is required in one’s practice, considering the diversity of the clientele seeking professional assistance.”

In Amélie’s view, the students who work together managing FEMSI came away with solid experience in management and communications, Alison Threatt, international and intercultural studies advisor at the Faculty of Medicine, believes that FEMSI not only prompts several students to commit strongly to international health but also helps to attract new students to the Faculty.

What are intercultural internships like, exactly? In medicine, the emphasis is on observation. Students may also take part in awareness campaigns. In physiotherapy and occupational therapy, however, internships are primarily centred on practical training. Whatever the case, the experience constitutes a turning point in the lives of participants, as Marie-Hélène can attest to: “In Mali, I worked in the emergency ward of a hospital located in a region at a considerable distance from the capital. I experienced something of a shock just making a first tour of the premises. There were open areas where meals were prepared right next to the patients. The standards of hygiene contrasted strongly with our own. There, even the notion of emergency takes on a different meaning. If you show up at the hospital bleeding but without a penny to your name, you will not be provided with any care. Supplies and medicines are paid by the patients. That was when I realized how lucky we are here. Above all, I tried to understand the Malian situation in its own terms. I have come away from this experience with a number of values, such as taking the time to listen to people. It’s a good way of dispelling prejudices.”

Ms. Threatt confirms that internships not only forge critical thinking but also help to educate health professionals who are more deeply involved in their community. “In medicine, a new work term was recently launched in Quebec among refugee and marginalized populations. Close to a third of the students who enrolled in the program had previously done an international internship. All of which goes to show the degree of commitment shown by these students following this experience.”

For her part, Amélie will soon be departing. She claims she is ready to throw into question her values and her cozy lifestyle. She demonstrates the desire to grow and mature through this internship experience. You can be sure there’s a metamorphosis in her future.
In a university classroom in Burundi, students patiently wait for class to begin. When class finally takes in, however, the professor is still thousands of kilometres away – at Université Laval, home to a distance bachelor of science program in computer science, the first of its kind in Quebec. This project, an initiative of the Department of computer science and software engineering, was initially targeted at French-speaking Africa. Today it offers a range of opportunities, as can be attested to by Guy Mineau, department director during the roll-out of the project to establish a virtual university in Africa.

The wonders of going synchronous

In Quebec City, a professor establishes a connection to a distance teaching platform. Students at learning centres located in Africa hear his voice and see his screen. In fact, they are attending a PowerPoint presentation delivered in real time. They thus have the opportunity to raise questions as though they were in an actual classroom. The synchronous mode fosters interactions between the various participants and facilitates feedback from the professor. Assignments and exams are corrected in Quebec City. Upon completing the program, Université Laval awards these African students a diploma – an international diploma, moreover, that can open many doors for them.

For Université Laval, the benefits of this project have been sizeable too. “To begin with, we developed the materials, expertise and technical know-how required for distance teaching. That is what now allows us to make this fund of knowledge and experience available here in Quebec and abroad. Internationally, for example, we are aiming to sign off on the same type of partnerships with institutions of higher learning and thus export our diplomas. We are also hoping to host the graduates from these programs at some point,” explained Guy Mineau.

The African project has spawned a number of successors, with a new cohort having just been formed in Côte d’Ivoire and negotiations currently underway with the government of Gabon. For countries experiencing a rapid increase in population and that have non-recurrent training needs, the service provided by Université Laval is ideal, according to Mr. Mineau. “It is considerably cheaper to invest in scholarships than to build infrastructures, hire staffs, etc. The fixed costs can be very high. With our approach, access to postsecondary education is a lot less expensive.”

Other countries, including France and Tunisia, have shown interest in Université Laval’s distance education offering. In Quebec itself, there is a desire to build greater awareness of the existence of this program. At this time, efforts are underway to establish a master’s program based on the distance approach.

“With webcasting, it’s a bit like being blessed with the gift of ubiquity!” notes Guy Mineau.

“But we have the expertise, we’re looking for other partners with a view to exploring other formulas. There’s a multitude of options to work from. To facilitate access to knowledge and degree, one has to demonstrate flexibility and develop a broad range of potential key openings.”

By the time the project in Africa comes to an end in 2009, more than 220 students – from nine centres across eight different countries – will have obtained either the bachelor’s degree or a certificate in computer science from Université Laval.
During the first phase of this project, Gabonese students enrolled at Université Laval took courses in their home country. The courses were given by Quebec instructors. However, following the departure of the college’s director, the project was suspended for an entire year. It was, as they say in Gabon, a “blank” year. In the end, Professor Jacques Desautels took over where things had been left off, infusing new life into the project. Ultimately, a total of 35 Gabonese master’s level students received their degree following a three-month stay in Québec City. It was a classic form of co-operation, with the North exporting its expertise to the South. Eleven of the Libreville graduates also received scholarships from the Canadian International Development Agency and are currently enrolled in the doctoral program at Université Laval.

A major shift in direction

A successful track record of this kind holds great promise for the future. Then, a second phase of co-operation was launched with an entirely different aim – namely, institutional development. The overarching objective is to make the École normale supérieure de Libreville the first centre of excellence for the training of education professionals in central Africa.

For now, the École provides a bachelor’s-level program of instruction to preservice secondary teachers, school inspectors and educational advisors. Thus the goal of the second phase will be to create a master’s in education program in Libreville. It is a daunting challenge, as Professor Desautels emphasizes, “This project is much more difficult to bring to completion, since it has to be carried out in accordance with Gabonese tradition. In no way is it a question of exporting a ready-made master’s program originating here. That is why the courses figuring in the new program are being prepared and given jointly by professors from the École and Laval. Once this process has been completed, the École normale supérieure de Libreville will have appropriated both the program and the accompanying teaching instruments.”

In addition to developing the master’s program, several other operations are on the drawing board: continuing professional development for teachers, succession training, and the creation of research programs, not to mention the computerization of the École’s administrative and academic affairs.

It is clearly an understatement to say that the players in this second phase of co-operation have their work cut out for them. According to Jacques Desautels, everything might not be wrapped up by 2010, the project end year. Regardless of the pace of progress, however, the benefits are already measurable. “We have proven that projects can be fully implemented in Africa. Another strong point is co-participation. We do not export our expertise. We are working jointly on creating a new form of expertise. There is clearly a determination to come up with new avenues of co-operation so as ensure the sustainability of the results of project actions.”

It is also worth noting that co-operation is not a one-way street. In keeping with an approach that is a source of professional and cultural enrichment, “each one teaches one” – and vice versa! Furthermore, the on-campus presence of foreign students clearly brands Université Laval as an institution of international scope. Jacques Desautels also points out that 40% of the current enrolment in the didactics program consists of Gabonese students. He firmly believes, moreover, that their presence contributes to maintaining the quality of post-graduate programs at the university’s education faculty. And what does the future hold? In Professor Desautels’ view, Gabon constitutes an ideal gateway to all of central Africa, and for this reason alone, justifies maintaining tight-knit relations with this country.
For data concerning Europe, please see next page.
They are researchers in developing countries around the world united with a common purpose: Fighting poverty in their community. To support them in their efforts, they have turned to the Poverty and Economic Policy (PEP) research network. John Cockburn, Professor at the Université Laval Economics Department, speaks enthusiastically about this network that he was instrumental in creating.

The PEP Network

POVERTY

ZERO

It takes money – and guidance

In the 1990s, a research project was being conducted in the Philippines, at the time in the throes of major economic adjustment: budget cuts, tax hikes, currency fluctuations, liberalization of markets, and so on. The objective was to find out how such changes impacted communities. Did the poor really benefit from these structural transformations or, on the contrary, were they penalized by them? This ambitious project then expanded to include India, Pakistan, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and West Africa.

Throughout this time, a team from Université Laval’s Economics Department provided the researchers with scientific support. But there was a desire to do more. In 2002, the PEP network was established as part of an initiative undertaken jointly by the Philippines-based Angoro King Institute and Université Laval.

Today the PEP network numbers more than 5000 members throughout the world. How does it work, exactly? To begin with, researchers from emerging countries submit research projects for analysis by a grant selection committee. It is a rigorous process: in response to nearly 2000 proposals received until now, the PEP network has provided support to 102 projects involving over 300 researchers. The role of the network is not limited to financial support alone but also includes substantial scientific support. For example, members are provided with a research environment as close as possible to those of their colleagues in developed countries. This assistance can take numerous forms: access to e-journals, four-week study visits in a foreign institution of their choice, the opportunity to participate in international conferences so as to share information and views with other researchers or with decision-makers, training workshops, detailed comments, etc.

Follow-up is important, too notes Professor Cockburn: “From the outset, local researchers are prompted to consult policymakers. As their work progresses, they are also encouraged to stay in contact. At the end of their project, they are provided with the funding necessary for staging a policy conference in their country at which they make their findings public. We lay considerable stress on dialogue with policy-makers.” For the network’s instigators, the dissemination of results is always vital to efforts to shape policies in a manner benefitting the most disadvantaged members of society.

What subjects are of particular interest to researchers from emerging countries? Among the projects sponsored by the PEP network, several concern the multiple dimensions of poverty, the differential impact on women and men of macroeconomic policies, trade liberalization, and the effects of public spending on poverty. Take the case of multidimensional poverty. Put simply, poverty cannot be considered only in terms of income levels. For example, some disadvantaged groups do not have access to adequate health and education services. PEP researchers are tackling the challenging issues this raises: How does one measure poverty simultaneously in several dimensions? What indicators can be used and how should they be measured? Professor Cockburn acknowledges that the challenge is a daunting one indeed.

The PEP network has grown continually since the time of its founding, yet John Cockburn feels that there is still a good deal more to be accomplished. There is a need to diversify resources and, above all, to empower the South. “Here at Université Laval, we have a group of professors and graduate students who are committed to building capacity in emerging countries and who believe in working in partnerships with Southern researchers. It is our vision that more local researchers will contribute in policy and academic debates on poverty issues not only in their country but also on a global scale. But there is always a question of ensuring funding and scientific support.”

John Cockburn is firmly convinced of the importance of mobilizing local researchers in the fight against poverty. He believes that conducting research directly in developing countries makes it possible to implement more realistic policies. “Malnutrition, child development delays, infant mortality – the needs are all staring us in the face. If a way can be found to share our resources and expertise, local researchers will certainly be able to contribute to improving the fate of their community and reducing poverty in their respective countries. That is the hope I cherish,” he concludes.

Main financial partners:

• Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID).

• Title of project: Poverty and Economic Policy (PEP) research network.

• Countries of activity: 5000 researchers throughout the developing and developed worlds.

• Main financial partners: Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID).

• Budget: 2002-11: $13 million.

• Goals: To promote research on issues related to economic policies and poverty, particularly in developing countries, and to foster the use of results in policies having an impact on poverty.

Heading south

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In the 1990s, a research project was being conducted in the Philippines, at the time in the throes of major economic adjust-ment: budget cuts, tax hikes, currency fluctuations, liberalization of markets, and so on. The objective was to find out how such changes impacted communities. Did the poor really benefit from these structural transformations or, on the contrary, were they penalized by them? This ambitious project then expanded to include India, Pakistan, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and West Africa.

Throughout this time, a team from Université Laval’s Economics Department provided the researchers with scientific support. But there was a desire to do more. In 2002, the PEP network was established as part of an initiative undertaken jointly by the Philippines-based Angoro King Institute and Université Laval.

Today the PEP network numbers more than 5000 members throughout the world. How does it work, exactly? To begin with, researchers from emerging countries submit research projects for analysis by a grant selection committee. It is a rigorous process: in response to nearly 2000 proposals received until now, the PEP network has provided support to 102 projects involving over 300 researchers. The role of the network is not limited to financial support alone but also includes substantial scientific support. For example, members are provided with a research environment as close as possible to those of their colleagues in developed countries. This assistance can take numerous forms: access to e-journals, four-week study visits in a foreign institution of their choice, the opportunity to participate in international conferences so as to share information and views with other researchers or with decision-makers, training workshops, detailed comments, etc.

Follow-up is important, too notes Professor Cockburn: “From the outset, local researchers are prompted to consult policymakers. As their work progresses, they are also encouraged to stay in contact. At the end of their project, they are provided with the funding necessary for staging a policy conference in their country at which they make their findings public. We lay considerable stress on dialogue with policy-makers.” For the network’s instigators, the dissemination of results is always vital to efforts to shape policies in a manner benefitting the most disadvantaged members of society.

What subjects are of particular interest to researchers from emerging countries? Among the projects sponsored by the PEP network, several concern the multiple dimensions of poverty, the differential impact on women and men of macroeconomic policies, trade liberalization, and the effects of public spending on poverty. Take the case of multidimensional poverty. Put simply, poverty cannot be considered only in terms of income levels. For example, some disadvantaged groups do not have access to adequate health and education services. PEP researchers are tackling the challenging issues this raises: How does one measure poverty simultaneously in several dimensions? What indicators can be used and how should they be measured? Professor Cockburn acknowledges that the challenge is a daunting one indeed.

The PEP network has grown continually since the time of its founding, yet John Cockburn feels that there is still a good deal more to be accomplished. There is a need to diversify resources and, above all, to empower the South. “Here at Université Laval, we have a group of professors and graduate students who are committed to building capacity in emerging countries and who believe in working in partnerships with Southern researchers. It is our vision that more local researchers will contribute in policy and academic debates on poverty issues not only in their country but also on a global scale. But there is always a question of ensuring funding and scientific support.”

John Cockburn is firmly convinced of the importance of mobilizing local researchers in the fight against poverty. He believes that conducting research directly in developing countries makes it possible to implement more realistic policies. “Malnutrition, child development delays, infant mortality – the needs are all staring us in the face. If a way can be found to share our resources and expertise, local researchers will certainly be able to contribute to improving the fate of their community and reducing poverty in their respective countries. That is the hope I cherish,” he concludes.

Main financial partners:

• Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID).

• Title of project: Poverty and Economic Policy (PEP) research network.

• Countries of activity: 5000 researchers throughout the developing and developed worlds.

• Main financial partners: Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID).

• Budget: 2002-11: $13 million.

• Goals: To promote research on issues related to economic policies and poverty, particularly in developing countries, and to foster the use of results in policies having an impact on poverty.

Heading south

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Managers Without Borders has a wide range of challenges to offer, such as proposing corrective measures to emergency action plans in Niger, aiding the marketing of regional products in Bolivia, or developing export markets in New Delhi, India. To take advantage of these opportunities, the program provides what are called “training-action partnerships” – i.e., well-structured internships lasting an average of five months, during which participants receive solid training from professors having broad field experience.

It is a cutting-edge program, moreover, as Université Laval is the only institution in Canada to propose such a robust training offering. There are internships corresponding to all three levels of university education, thus making for better fit with the varying complexity of NGO needs. Furthermore, by taking advantage of the competencies of future managers, NGOs are able to do more with the aid they receive. “It’s all well and good to be generous and open-handed,” Robert W. Mantha points out, “but it is also vital to master the tools of management.”

To describe these internships as rewarding experiences is to put the matter lightly in the case of some participants, such as Valérie Tremblay, who travelled to Port-au-Prince, Haiti, to provide technical assistance to the authorities in charge of risk management. Valérie returned to Canada with an inkling of NGO experience. This testimonial was offered by Julie Herman-Lemelin, who did an internship under the Managers Without Borders (Managers sans frontières) program offered by the Université Laval Faculty of Business Administration. This student travelled to Ouagadougou, where she aided the city’s oral health centre in tasks relating to personnel management and upgrading organizational values.

Instituted in 2005, Managers Without Borders pursues the mission of training managers in international development and humanitarian action. According to Robert W. Mantha, dean of the Faculty, the program also attracts young people who are ready for an overseas experience but who had not contemplated going into management.

So how does Managers Without Borders work, exactly? Requests originate with partner organizations, such as Uniterra, Action Against Hunger and Oxfam Québec, which produce a match-up between the needs to be filled and the profiles of the different student applicants. Requests also originate with students who have, through their own efforts, identified the organization for whom they would like to work. Managers Without Borders thus offers a complete support service in the search for internships, acting as the referring agent between its network of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the student community. Upon arriving in the host country, internship participants are also provided with a supervision and co-ordination service set up in conjunction with partner organ-

"At first, I was in awe at the beauty of the people and the surroundings. Then I grew frustrated over the disparities I noticed between rich and poor. At one point, I thought I had lost the core motivations that had taken me this far. I felt powerless in the face of all the work that had to be accomplished in Burkina Faso to meet and surpass its potential for development in both economic and human terms. Finally, I came to the realization that while these people lacked material goods, they still had so much to offer."
Each project is the occasion of enriching exchanges. In Uashat, an Aboriginal reserve on Quebec’s North Shore, Professor Casault and colleagues recently co-ordinated an architecture and urban design workshop. The project consisted in expanding the reserve located on the city limits of Sept-Îles. One of the particular features of this workshop was that it involved not only the Innu community, the citizens of Sept-Îles and the Université Laval team but also a Chinese professor with students from the Center of Urban and Landscape Design (CULD) in Shenzhen, in tow as well as some representatives from Malika, Senegal.

In addition to being intrigued by the participatory approach, the Chinese collaborators were amazed by the low density of the project. Here, the project concerned 400 single-family homes for 2000 inhabitants. There, the same land area would have been home to approximately 30,000. The Innu, for their part, were keen to acquire a built environment that fitted more closely with their way of life. The community of Sept-Îles, on the other hand, wanted the project to respect the buffer zone between the reserve and the city.

“In architecture, we do not perform miracles,” notes André Casault. “The key thing is to maintain dialogue, to remain determined to jointly arrive at solutions, not only in social and economic terms but also in environmental terms. Ultimately, we proposed a plan with which the Innu could identify and which, at the same time, complied with agreements with the people of Sept-Îles.” For this supervisor of the intercultural workshops, the challenge, in a nutshell, is to create rapprochement with the other group, without imposing one’s own values on its members. Since the relationship to space varies enormously from one culture to the next, one must adopt a position of relativity in terms of what can be considered beautiful or ugly in architecture.

To date, more than 200 students have taken part in one of the School of Architecture’s intercultural workshops. In addition to being major actors in their own education, they have contributed to the well-being of a community. They have learned to respect cultural differences in their work as architects. They have understood that the first principle of sustainable development is allowing communities to take ownership of their environment.
“Human issues are often the triggers of research projects,” states, from the get-go, Alain Olivier, Professor at the Université Laval Plant Science Department and director of the project known as “Des arbres et des champs contre la pauvreté au Mali” (Trees and fields to combat poverty in Mali). Olivier, a researcher clearly smitten with this West African country, speaks glowingly about this ambitious project focused on teaching and training.

Over the last 10 years, Professor Olivier has conducted agroforestry research in Mali, Burkina Faso and Senegal. His work has focused particularly on non-mechanized production systems that grow trees and crops side by side in fields. The current project is an outgrowth of relations established over the years with researchers and instructors at the Institut polytechnique rural de formation et de recherche appliquée in Mali.

Specifically, its objective is to train professors, researchers, engineers, technicians, extension officers and peasants to combat environmental degradation. An additional goal is to safeguard Mali’s productive capacity with respect to food, firewood and livestock feed. According to Alain Olivier, training such a wide range of actors has the potential to create a major impact. Furthermore, certain training modules will be revised and some new courses will be created. As well, Malian professors will come to Université Laval to do a master’s in agroforestry. Finally, a series of pilot initiatives will be conducted among rural populations.

Trees for life

Mali, a country characterized by a generally arid climate, has been confronted with serious problems in respect of its agriculture. The degradation of soils and soil fertility has made it necessary to revise peasant farming practices. Whence the rationale for the current project involving fields and trees. Trees in particular play an important environmental role and, at the same time, provide a number of products – for example, shea butter, used in various places around the world, or baobab leaves, a local ingredient of meals.

Professor Olivier is a believer in the virtues of mixed crops. “It is a known fact that including trees in production systems is beneficial. Aside from producing fruit and edible leaves, trees also grow deeper-running roots. They thus draw nutrients from soil layers that are usually not used by field crops. In addition, as soon as leaves fall to the ground, they enrich the arable soil layer, improving its organic material level and fertility. Now there’s something that contributes to sustainable production. Trees sequester carbon. They also produce wood, obviously. It’s important to recall that for millions of people on the planet, wood represents their main source of energy.”

A pluridisciplinary project

While the Malian project concerns agronomists and forest engineers first and foremost, it also involves anthropologists, sociologists and experts in rural economy. Professor Olivier points out that work in peasant communities necessarily brings into play economic, social, cultural and political issues that have an impact on the adoption of techniques. He notes that Université Laval is able to supply specialists in all these fields — a fact fully in keeping with the spirit of the project. By cultivating long-term relations with Mali, Université Laval has laid the groundwork enabling its students to do internships in the field.

Alain Olivier hopes, moreover, that the African partners will take ownership of the project. If all goes according to plan, in six years’ time, Mali will have an institute that is better equipped to provide quality training in agroforestry. Rural communities are also expected to reap benefits from this knowledge both economically and socially as well as in terms of food security.

For Olivier, the Malian project has a global scope. “Our fates are linked. The environmental problems of the South have an impact on the North. We often forget that peasants are the origin of our wealth. Without good food, we don’t amount to anything. Unfortunately, those who satisfy our essential needs are often those who suffer the most. It’s not a question of charity but of justice. We have a duty to demonstrate solidarity toward them.” Proof again that human issues are the raison d’être of this researcher’s work.
The projects led by Damase Khasa take place at points all over the globe, involving for example, the training of forestry engineers in the Congo basin, designing a conservation program for Mexican conifers, studying the impact of intensive clonal forestry in Brazil, or aiding the people of Madagascar to develop a sustainable tourism sector. And yet, wherever these initiatives are conducted, they all have some points in common. For one, they contribute to a sustainable management and use of natural resources. Furthermore, they imply the sharing of knowledge between researchers from Quebec and abroad.

Damase Khasa, Professor of Agroforestry and International Forestry at Université Laval, becomes effusive when the subject turns to his research projects, particularly the one involving central Africa. His enthusiasm is entirely understandable, considering that he was trained in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). He trained there, and he in turn is serving as a “champion” of this project, which is targeted at creating centers of excellence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cameroon, Gabon, Brazil, Mexico and Madagascar.

At this point, it’s worth briefly examining the situation in his native land. The Congo is home to one of the world’s largest forest resources, second only to the Amazon basin. Nevertheless, this precious resource is currently imperilled. There has been a shortage of human resources to manage this huge forest cover in the many years since the conflict affecting the Democratic Republic of the Congo first broke out. At this time, there are only 40 forestry engineers to provide stewardship, and they will all be retiring in the next five years. Therein lies the core of Professor Khasa’s project: re-launching the training of new forestry engineers (upwards of 30 per year from year 3 of the project) who will successfully meet the challenge of ensuring the sustainable management of the country’s natural resources, and supporting the training of forestry instructors with the assistance of Canadian partners.

Université Laval is acting in the capacity of “champion” of this project, which is targeted at creating centers of excellence in three specific countries: the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cameroon and Gabon. The resources concerned are all renewable, such as the forest, water, wildlife, air and soil. “These resources are the foundation of a sustainable development plan for the countries of central Africa,” notes Mr. Khasa. “More than 70% of Africa’s population lives in forest environments and engage in farming. Thus the forest is both a major source of income for these countries as well as the basis of their subsistence.”

With support from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), this large-scale project was designed in accordance with the needs voiced by the local people. Ultimately, however, it concerns all stakeholders. The Congo basin is, after all, home to one of the most diverse ecosystems, in addition to being the earth’s second lung.

• **Main countries of activity:** the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cameroon, Gabon, Brazil, Mexico and Madagascar.

• **Financial partners:** Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Agence universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF).

• **New project:** a large-scale, five-year project, accompanied by a budget of over $6 million and supported by CIDA, is aimed at re-launching (DRC) and strengthening (Cameroon and Gabon) training in forestry and natural resource management.

There are still other projects driving Damase Khasa forward. For example, this professor has been recently studying the ecological risks associated with the intensive cultivation of poplar in Quebec and eucalyptus in Brazil. Then, the twinning of a Quebec student and a Malagasy student is aimed at effectively re-vegetating degraded ecosystems in Madagascar. For three years now, with the support of the Agence universitaire de la Francophonie, Damase Khasa has also been offering a course in ecotourism and community development in Madagascar, the world’s fourth largest island. His work is aimed at developing sustainable tourism in this environment where natural resources are subjected to strong pressures. “Each year, 11,000 square kilometres of forest cover disappear. We must at all costs promote the sustainable management of this vital resource and appropriately train and educate the island’s stakeholders,” asserts the Université Laval researcher.

Damase Khasa brings the same enthusiasm to his dual mission of training and research in Africa and South America. So doing, he has the conviction that he is aiding his peers while also becoming personally richer scientifically and culturally. His fondest desire is to pursue this tradition of sharing with communities on other continents. Clearly, the planet could use natural resource stewards of this stripe!
THE BUREAU

INTERNATIONAL

Founded in 1999, the Bureau international pursues the mission of developing and providing services related to international co-operation and the internationalization of education. Specifically, the Bureau international undertakes actions pertaining to student mobility, international development and international relations through institutional agreements. It supports the Bureau du recrutement (Recruitment office) on the international aspects of promoting Université Laval.

The Bureau international: some figures at a glance

- In 2007, more than 13% of graduates had taken advantage of the outstanding opportunities afforded by Université Laval’s international programs, thus making the university a Canadian leader in student mobility;
- En 2007-08, more than 852 students received direct support from the Bureau international for an overseas education experience;
- The Bureau international coordinates upwards of one hundred visits by partners each year;
- The Bureau international manages 573 agreements with partners in more than 65 countries;
- The Bureau international has supported the development of international projects that have garnered Université Laval more than $7 million in new funding since 2007;
- More than $2.9 million in scholarships are awarded to our students for international study or internships.

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