

## Discussion Note

For the Launching Ceremony for a Study on

### **“Towards a Competitive Higher Education System in a Global Economy”**

World Bank, Bangkok Office

January 22, 2010

Vicharn Panich

Mr. Mr. Luis Benveniste, Lead Education Specialist at the World Bank, Ladies and gentlemen

It is my great pleasure and honor to be invited to join this important meeting and have the privilege to serve as discussant to the study entitled Towards a Competitive Higher Education System in a Global Economy. On behalf of the Higher Education Commission of Thailand I would like to thank the World Bank, especially to Mr. Luis Benveniste for doing this study. It helps Thai education authorities understanding our Higher Education System in more depth and details. It also helps us finding new ways of HES governance and management by learning and sharing with international organization such as the World Bank and with other countries.

However, I make this comment based on my personal view, not on the capacity of the chairman of the Higher Education Commission.

I completely agree that Thailand's higher education system needs further transformation to have a closer and more effective link with R&D, innovation and the real sectors. Thai HES should be more effective in serving as a tool for social and economic transformation. But it should also serve maintaining our cultural (wisdom) heritage.

### **Higher Education Differentiation**

In order to serve the duties effectively, Thai HES needs its own transformation. Actually, during the past 15 years it has increased markedly in size or quantity. But quality needs to be much improved. The Second 15-Year Long Range Plan for Higher Education indicates very clearly that we need to define quality separately for our 4 groups of HE institutions. We must develop and use four criteria or four sets of indicators of excellence, not one.

## Higher Education Governance

The issue of HE governance is presented in Chapter 5 of the report. I agree that HE institutions should be given more autonomy with university council of each HEI taking care of the institution governance.

Higher education in the new era must emphasize creativity and flexibility to deliver high quality output and impact to the society. In order to function in that way HEIs should be given management autonomy. But autonomy must come with strong governance.

HE governance must be a coordinated effort of two forms of governance; HE institution governance in the form of university council, and HE system governance.

We are facing the 1997-like dilemma in HES deregulation. Before 1997 Thailand deregulated her financial system without careful oversight mechanism in place. It gave us very painful economic crash of 1997. Now we are deregulating our HEIs without effective system governance. Even though we have HEIs with high standard, many are of questionable quality and social responsibility. Our poor or ineffective *HE system oversight capability* allow them to give HE services irresponsibly.

### Higher Education Institution Governance

To reach autonomy with responsibility of HEIs we need strong university councils. The Knowledge Networking Institute of Thailand (KNIT) under the Foundation of the Ministry of University Affairs takes mission to strengthen the function of university councils. It has initiated governance and management training courses for university council members and university administration. There will be other activities to strengthen university governance such as University Council Award.

### Higher Education System Governance

HEI management autonomy must come with strong *institution governance* and strong *system governance*.

Our challenge is to develop an effective system governance mechanism that can transform the whole HES. The general perception that HEI system governance is under HEC / OHEC is a partial truth. Actually Thai HEI system governance is a very complex system comprises at least of HEC / OHEC, ONESQA, the Budget Bureau,

OPDC, and Student Loan Fund. I agree with the report that we need a coherence and a continuity of this complex system governance mechanism. It should be a knowledge-based governance-making disciplined by competition, not by cronyism.

HEC / OHEC should not take a solitary role of HES governance. But should take a coordination role to make the whole system of complex HES governance work interactively in harmony. To do a coordination role of knowledge-based governance-making disciplined by competition the OHEC needs a new paradigm and a new set of skills, not the existing set of bureaucratic command and control activities.

But OHEC staffs are government servants with long tradition of strong bureaucracy. Is there any success story in other countries where bureaucratic people give non-bureaucratic governance to HES or other systems? How and why they can do it? In Thailand we have many examples of failure. How can people of paradigm A give governance in paradigm B? I have a feeling that we are facing a wrong paradigm of the organization of HES governance, or actually we are facing a nation-wide wrong paradigm of organizing system governance mechanism in a deregulation or decentralization policy.

### **Self-sufficiency of Thai Higher Education System**

One very important issue of Thai HES which is not touched by this report is the *self-sufficiency* or self-reliance of HES. We have to improve our self-reliance in term of developing our own academic staffs, our own high quality PhDs. During the last 12 years we have improved this aspect of HES a lot, mainly through the RGJ (Royal Golden Jubilee PhD Program) operated by the TRF. We should further improve our capacity in this aspect. RGJ not only strengthen our high quality PhD producing capability, but also strengthen our research and academic networking capability with foreign countries and HEIs with high standard. It also strengthen HE – industry link.

### **Higher Education and Entrepreneurship**

I do agree with the report (p. 90) that in order for HE to serve knowledge-based economy, more emphasis should be made on entrepreneurship over research. Thai HEIs should learn to build entrepreneurship spirit and skills in all sectors of our society, including HES itself. This is a big challenge.

### **Higher Education System Does Not Stand Alone**

HES is a part of the whole. It is a part of the national and global system. It must communicate and collaborate with other parts of the whole. It must generate data, information, and signal for the purpose of communication and collaboration. The best means of communication and collaboration is action or working together.

HE's core function is scholarly activities. The activities must be relevant to social need for longterm and sustainable societal and global prosperity.

HES is not a mechanical part of the whole. It is a living and dynamic part. And since the world is becoming more and more knowledge-based, the role of HES on generating and translating knowledge is very crucial in proving the real value of its existence.

This issue takes us back to the HES management and governance. The concept is to facilitate and promote synergistic interaction with the other systems of the society. HES must not do its function in isolation but do it in collaboration with other sectors, especially the real sectors. Financial support to the HES should aim at supporting collaboration, especially cross sectoral collaboration, resulting in multiplying (not additional) effect.

We need a new paradigm of HES management and governance to achieve this goal. A paradigm and skills of managing and governing a Complex Adaptive System.

### **Sense of Urgency**

Thailand need a strong sense of urgency not only to transform her HES but also the whole national innovation system or innovation in all sectors.

.....