An Analysis of the World Bank documents on Higher Education in Developing Countries

SAITO Yasuo

Abstract

This paper aims to review and analyze the problems which higher education in developing countries is facing and to discuss the challenges to the international donors in supporting higher education reform in those countries. Here, in particular, we study the World Bank documents on higher education due to its strong influence in developing countries. In fact, the Bank’s policy recommendation and lending strategy in the field of education have a major impact on development of education in the developing world. Since the World Conference on Education for All held in 1990, both many national governments and also the World Bank have assigned higher education a relatively low priority. In a higher education report published in 1994, the World Bank declared that higher education in developing countries was in crisis because of widespread fiscal constraints. It insisted that quality improvement and enrollment expansion in higher education could be achieved with little or no increase in public expenditures. They suggested strategies for reform, such as encouraging greater differentiation of institutions, including the development of private institutions and diversifying sources of funding for public institutions.

In a new higher education report published in 2002, however, the World Bank clearly changed their perception and attitude toward higher education in developing countries. In the 2002 report, the World Bank emphasizes the role of higher education in building up a country’s capacity for participation in an increasingly knowledge-based world economy, and investigates policy options for higher education. It also discusses the justification for continuing public support of higher education and the appropriate role of the state in support of knowledge-driven economic growth. The final report (2000) of the Task Force on Higher Education in Developing Countries that was convened by the World Bank and UNESCO contributed to the re-examination of the Bank’s policies in higher education.