ABSTRACT

This paper examines how international partnerships in higher education in the State of Qatar have evolved in the context of the education reform that the State has launched as a strategy of fostering social change and economic development. Building national human capital through higher education has been considered key in coping with the evolution to a post-oil economy in the Arabian Gulf region. Modernizing education is critical in this connection, and this modernization has driven the region to actively engage in developing partnerships with internationally recognized educational institutions abroad. The partnerships take different forms, contingent on the local context. The case of Qatar is unique, bold, and ambitious. The purposes place international partnerships as a critical vehicle of higher education reform. The State of Qatar has taken an unprecedented approach in building these partnerships, using the State’s two key higher education institutions, i.e. Qatar University and Qatar Foundation. The approach is unique both in their scope and the level of commitment made through the State’s leadership, and strategic and specific in selection of partner institutions.

Both Qatar University, and the foreign university branch campuses partnered with Qatar Foundation, serve as a vehicle to educate Qataris to be able to fill in a shortage of national talents in the fields that require immediate attentions, e.g. medical and nursing, engineering, foreign policy and diplomacy, communication and business management, journalism, arts and design, to achieve the long term strategy of national capacity building for the post-oil era economy, with the ambition of achieving national labour market policy called “Qatarisation”, as well as human capital investment to position Qatar for the knowledge-based global economy in the long-term.

The partnerships are growing and expanding in many ways. Yet what is more important is that the growth and expansion should not be focused on their size and number. The depth of learning and teaching-and implications should be carefully reviewed in their peculiar social context, i.e. Qatari population, migration and foreign labour, demographic change, women’s participation in labour market. In the long term, what will determine whether Qatar’s partnerships, and even education reform are a success or not, extends even beyond the achievement of Qatarisation, to the global sustainability of Qatar’s society and economy. Policies, programs, and specific initiatives need to be supported by a viable national consensus of both the leadership and a multiplicity of stakeholders, a consensus capable of overcoming challenges from within and without Qatar.