

AN EFFORT OF HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT AT THE UNDERGRADUATE LEVEL : THE CASE OF WUS SRI LANKA - WUS CANADA STIPEND PROJECT¹

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1. Introduction

It has been realized that the human resources development is one of the most important means for national development. This is more relevant to a developing country like Sri Lanka, where scarcity of skilled and knowledgeable human resources is a great barrier in the development process. The development of potentials of undergraduates who were 38192 persons (excluding Open University students in 1998) is one of the most important means imperative to meet graduate level human resources requirements in Sri Lanka. Education, training and development of undergraduates in accordance with advanced knowledge and technology in different specialties requires huge financial commitments. According to the Central Bank Annual Report for the year 1998 the government expenditure on education was RS. 26,694 ml. The Mahapola Scholarship Foundation along with government bursary grants and some other minor scholarship schemes financially support majority of student population. In spite of all these support activities the majority of undergraduates face many financial difficulties in their studies. This situation is further evidenced by the fact that 95.9% of undergraduates in 1993 represented middle and working class population in Sri Lanka while only 4.1% of students represented the upper class (Kotthachchi, 1977:15).

The Presidential Task Force has also suggested counseling and finance among other things to be provided for the benefit of university students (Central Bank Annual Report for 1998:70)

In this context where the Government alone cannot meet the student needs fully the NGOs and other organizations should come forward in supporting university undergraduates to make them meaningful human resources. WUS Sri Lanka – Canada Undergraduate Stipend Project which was officially terminated in 1997 serves a successful model or an example in university undergraduate level human resources development. The experiences of this project may help in successful planning and implementation of similar micro-level development project in Sri Lanka especially in the university system. Consequently, the major objective of

this article is to study the WUS Sri Lanka – Canada Stipend Project which would help to draw attention of concerned parties to establish university undergraduate supportive schemes to develop their human resource potentials.

02. The Origin of the Project.

A joint project between the World University Service of Sri Lanka (WUS-SL) and of Canada (WUSC) for the selection and monitoring of stipend recipients among university undergraduates from the Districts of Ampara, Badulla, Baticaloa, Hambantota, Matara, Moneragala and Trincomalee emerged in 1993 as a result of successful co-operation between the above two organization. While the WUSC provided financial resource and office equipment under the WUSC Project for Rehabilitation through Education and Training (PRET) in Sri Lanka, WUS-SL took the responsibility for the administration². The Project completed its activities formally in February, 1997.

03. Aims and Objectives of the Project.

World University Service (WUS), an international non-governmental organization, aims at achieving the objectives of :

- a. Resisting all forms of interference in freedom of study, teaching or research and projecting WUS's vision of the social responsibility of the university in the context of a holistic vision of education.
- b. Harnessing the resources of the academic community in strengthening civil society through educational programmes that simulate popular participation and self-reliance, promote human rights, combat gender discrimination and enhance human resources development. (WUS, 1993:1-2).

Following these objectives as guidelines, WUS-SL initiated the action for the Stipend Project aiming at helping financially needy students from families of economically disadvantaged and affected by ethnic and other forms of violence. It was clearly understood that Sri Lanka only about 2% of students enter to the universities representing the most important future human resources of the country.

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Unfortunately many, even among this small number of students face various difficulties in their studies mainly due to sever financial limitations, although many of them receive little over Rs. 1000.00 as Mahapola/Bursary scholarships. In this context, the effort by WUS Project to assist university undergraduates in human resources development has been greatly appreciated by the students as well as the other interested parties.

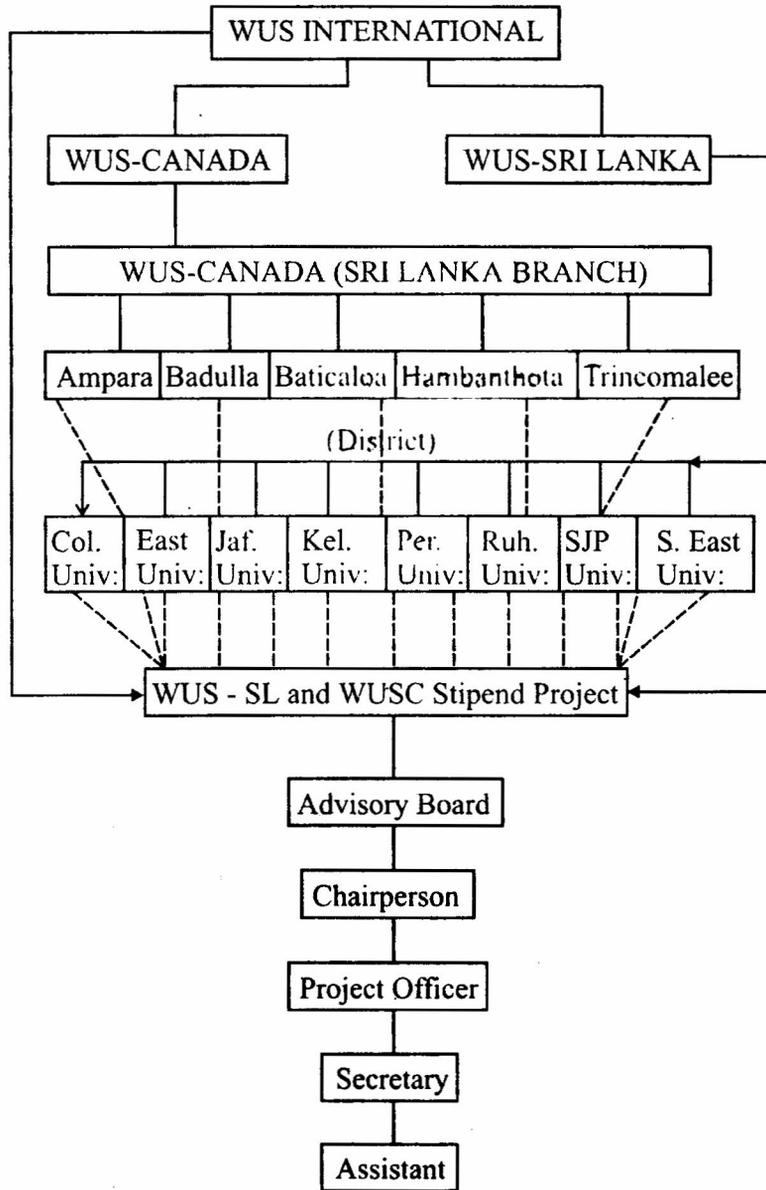
04. Planning and Organization of the Project.

The planning of the Project activities had been done jointly by WUS-SL and WUSC in accordance with WUS principles and policies especially in relation to equity and adequacy of education. After signing of the Agreement, it was planned to form an Advisory Committee consisting of representatives from both WUS-SL and WUSC; to recruit a project officer, a secretary and an assistant to operate the Project through the project office based at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura; to open a separate bank account at the People's Bank; to select stipend recipients and grant Rs. 500.00 per month per each recipient.

Although the Project was very small in scale, it interconnected all the universities in Sri Lanka and followed legal, social and modern human resources management standards in its activities.

05. **Organizational Structure.**

The organizational structure could be depicted as follows :



06. Recruitment and Selection.

The post of project officer was advertised in national newspapers calling for applications from suitable, qualified persons. The applications received were screened by both WUS-SL and WUSC, shortlist of applicants were invited for semi-structures interviews. At the end of the interviews conducted in free and open atmosphere, a suitable lady-graduate was selected as she met conditions of relevant job description and job specification almost fully. After receiving two positive reference letters, the selected applicant was appointed to the post of Project Officer. A detailed contract letter has been signed by both parties.

The same procedure was followed in selecting a new Project Officer in 1995 after the former resigned and went abroad for higher studies. In the selection of a secretary and an assistant, both were girls completed 13 years schooling, the Project Officer played a decisive role as she was the immediate line manager/supervisor.

The secretary, capable of running a modern office effectively, was conversant with the Tamil language, in addition to Sinhala and English languages. This was important as the Project had to deal with some students knowing only the Tamil language.

In the process of the above interview and appointments, the terms and conditions such as duties, responsibilities, salaries had been discussed with the job holders and agreed upon, so that they were very clear of their job functions and remuneration.

07. Training.

At the initial stage of the Project, the Project Officer was given 03 months training at the WUSC Head Office of Colombo, and later necessary training and guidance were given by WUS-SL and WUSC when it was required. The Project Office provided required training and guidance to the secretary and the assistant/s at the Project Officer. Apart from that, they were facilitated to upgrade their computer application skills by attending special classes.

08. Activities of the Project.

08.1 Interviews of Stipend Applicants.

One of the major activities of the Project was to hold interviews in order to select undergraduate stipend recipients. This process was cumbersome as the applicants were the students of all the universities in Sri Lanka. Normally, at the end of each year advertisements in Sinhala, Tamil and English languages were sent to the Vice-Chancellors, Registrars, Student Counselors and Student Councils of all Universities to be displayed in their Universities; upon request, application forms etc. in relevant languages were sent.

Applications were codified upon receiving them, screened and interviews were arranged on different days at different Universities. Semi-structures interviews had been held according to schedules with support of WUS representatives of respective Universities and of WUSC. Initially, The Project Officer and the Staff traveled to the Universities except the University of Jaffna to conduct interviews; and later Universities out of Greater Colombo held interviews themselves with the assistance of the Project Officer. Interviews had been held throughout the year and during 1993-1997 period totally 2740 applicants had been interviewed.

08.2 Selection of Stipend Recipients.

The selection of stipend recipients was done through a strict procedure. The Project Officer prepared a very clear marking scheme on the guidance given by the Advisory Board. Marks were allocated to every applicants for all relevant items on the marking scheme. The marking scheme required a number of documents to be produced by the applicants to certify their family income, university studentship, health problem, terrorist or violence problems, living in refugee/rehabilitation camps, residence of appropriate districts, number and age of households members, number of school going-children, death of family members etc. If these documents were available earlier, then the Project Officer allocated marks, which the interview boards checked during interviews.

Suitable applicants were invited for one or two interviews. In case they failed to face due interview, they were given more chance/s to appear for another one. A sufficient time period was given even after the interview to

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submit required documents, as many applicants had to face difficulties of travelling, terrorist activities etc. In the interviews marks were allocated and totalled to each and every interviewee, and normally indicated their suitability (stage) for stipend taking their overall socio-economic background into consideration:

Stage 1 - the most suitable.

Stage 2 - the next suitable.

Stage 3 - the least suitable.

The Advisory Board, which usually met once or twice a month, made the final selection of stipend recipients according to the stage, marks and supporting documents. Furthermore, each and every University had been allocated a quota of stipends on the basis of available number of stipends and the applicants from the particular University. The attention was also paid to keep the balance of gender ratio of stipend recipients, although it was difficult as the overwhelming number of applicants were males. In 1996, for example, out of 757 eligible applicants, the male and female numbers were 490 and 267 respectively. Out of 43 applicants from the University of Moratuwa there was only one female student. The number of stipends given to the University of Moratuwa in that year was 21 including the female one. Totally, out of 750-stipend recipients males were 478 while the females - 272. (Marking Scheme : see Annex No. 1)

08.3 Stipend Awards.

Every year a ceremony of stipend awards was held in which a number of selected students from various universities had been granted their initial installments. The distinguished people such as WUSC Field Director, Vice-Chancellors, Deans, Registrars and WUS-SL member awarded stipends to the recipients. The ceremony was held in 1995 at the University of Colombo while in 1994 and 1996 – at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura.

However, the granting of stipend continued through out the period of four years. The recipients from the University of Colombo and around received their stipend in cash at the Project Office. The others from the Universities of Eastern, Jaffna, Peradeniya, Ruhuna and South-Eastern received in chques through their University authorities. The Project Officer has taken

a great courage to : disburse stipend timely and correctly; get payment vouchers duly signed; balance the account accurately and so on .

09. The Outcomes of the Project.

There are many reasons to state that the Project greatly helped many underprivileged students in pursuance of their studies satisfactorily. It was not a secret that many students met their expenses only through Mahapola/Bursary scholarships, which was Rs. 1000.00 in 1993 and now Rs. 1250.00. It was revealed at the interviews that some students not only lived on the above university grants but part of the grant was sent home to assist younger ones or elder parents. Many students were living and studying sharing their textbooks, cloths, and meals, rooms. The students in the Faculties of Medicine and Engineering had to spend a great deal of money on textbooks and instruments. In this context, the WUS stipend of about Rs. 500.00 per month was a great relief for many of these students.

During 1993-97, the Project had granted Rs. 11,850,800.00 among 1253 students (male 769, female 484) from all universities. (See Table No. 1)

The Evaluation Report on the Project indicates that the income of 65% of recipients (the sample was 240 students) was only the Mahapola/Bursary and WUS Stipend totally amounted to Rs. 1750.00 or less. Only about 15% students received up to Rs. 2500.00 as a result of financial support from their homes, and even among these students 50% received only Rs. 250.00 from home per month (Evaluation Report, 1996: 10-11).

The Report further reveals that all the respondents except one stated that WUS stipend had positively helped in many ways for their studies. 73% of students had the opinion that their studies would have collapsed if they had not received this stipend (ibid.:5). 82% of students mentioned that the stipend had helped them to improve future job skill as the stipend financially assisted to follow job-oriented courses of study in professional organizations other than in the universities (ibid.:4-5). Some students had saved part of this stipend for their future development. One of recipients has said that he had deposited a part of stipend money in a credit account and was ready to start a self-employment project using Rs. 50000.00 loan received from that credit account (ibid.: 5).

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92.5% of recipients were of the opinion that only eligible students had received this stipend (ibid.,9). Although some of students tried to submit documents concealing real income of the family, the cross-checking prevented incorrect selections.

There are number of letters received from stipend recipients mostly expressing their gratitude for granting the stipend and asking for further extension of the Project so that mere needy students would be benefited. One may even shed tears reading some of these letters revealing very pathetic life situation of many university students. For example, a Ruhuna University female student from a remote area has said that her family was able to fulfil the almsgiving for her deceased mother only as she had received a number of stipend installments together.
(Letters are available at the Project Office).

The parents of university students and the university community highly appreciate the benefits from the Project. The WUSC has also expressed their satisfaction with Project activities. WUSC Field Director stated that “the advanced university stipend programme administered by WUS-SL and WUSC has been very successful. This programme has proven to be very effective as a means to reach the most needy students in university programmes...”(Awarding Ceremony, 1995:12-13).

The Audit Report for the Project for 1993-95 has mentioned that “...I affirm that the accounts pertaining to this project has been maintained systematically and the financial statements as at 30th September, 1995 show a true and fair plight of the financial situation and receiving and paying of funds”(Audit Report, 1995:2).

The Project Officer has managed the activities within the limitation of Administration Budget and at the end of the Project by 28th Feb. 1997 Rs. 34, 427.96 had been saved from the Administration Budget (Project Report, 1997:2).

However, there were some difficulties in carrying out action plans mainly due to intermittent closure of some universities in different times. These plans were met somewhat later. Apart from that, taken as a whole, the Project has been as effective venture that achieved its goals and objectives.

10 The Contributory Factors for the Success of the Project.

10.1 Commitment.

The significance of the fundamental objective of the Project itself in contributing to university human resources development through financial assistance to the undergraduates promoted interest and commitment of WUSC and Sri Lanka university community. In 1993 when the Chairperson, WUS Sri Jayawardenepura University forwarded the project proposal to the WUSC which has experiences with similar project Worldover, readily accepted and agreed to provide financial support, otherwise the project would not have been realized.

The WUSC staff at the Head Office and Regional Offices in Ampara, Badulla, Baticaloa, Hambantota, Matara, Trincomalee; many members of WUS and academic and administrative staff of all the universities and university institutes voluntarily rendered invaluable service to the Project activities such as interviews, stipend awarding ceremonies etc. symbolizing meaningful social mobilization.

Inspired by the content and the context of the jobs, the Project staff fully committed to the work. They all concentrated their knowledge, experience, energy and time on the Project activities not merely regarding it as a job, but as a means of self-fulfillment. In spite of the fact that Project functioned in a public sector environment, the staff maintained participative and rather informal way of behaviour which was very productive. Thus the staff was self-motivated to fulfil Project requirements. It is possible to say that they derived work satisfaction because they had identified themselves with the aims and objectives of the Project³.

10.2 Empowerment and Job Enrichment.

The Project's main objective has been the empowerment of students through facilitating their education. The WUSC and WUS-SL in their capacity as employer delegated authority and responsibility to the Project Officer and others to carry out project activities efficiently and effectively. The Project Officer was also responsible for the multi-million Rupees project account, disbursement of large amount of cash to stipend recipients; and a valuable office equipment.

The Project has successfully completed its task. This has been achieved without close supervision by the employer, who was satisfied with quarterly and annual reports submitted by the Project Officer. The delegation of decision-making power allowed the staff to experience job enrichment, and that made their task more productive.

10.3 Team Work.

The nature of work style of the Project staff could be identified clearly as teamwork. Having high morale, the staff had been very sensitive to fulfillment of their duties and responsibilities, at the same time helping each others and even doing other's work in their absence from the office.

The Project Officer could delegate fully the responsibility of the office to the Secretary in the former's absence. Every member of the staff was ready to comply with and to help each other maintaining collective responsibility for task performance. Especially, team spirit was clearly seen in difficult circumstances such as travelling to far-away universities (eg. Eastern), closures of universities, hard work involved in holding interviews of a large number of interviewees and so on.

10.4 Communication and Inter-Personal Relations.

The communication was free and open among WUSC, WUS and the Project. The Project also followed the same style of interpersonal communication, the (formal communication had been limited to official matters,) generally working through informal and friendly manner. The management hierarchy was insignificant, and the salient features of management style were democracy with all relevant institutions without hierachical barriers.

WUSC, being an international organization promoting equal opportunity in society, maintained free and open communication. For example, the WUSC Field Director encouraged others to address him by first name and to discuss any matter freely. The Project Officer has also kept friendly relationship with students addressing them by the word's 'brother' and 'sister'; not allowing especially stipend recipients to feel inferior by revealing their pathetic life situation and receiving stipend. In relationships with students the Project staff maintained a 'counseling approach' trying

to help them in any possible way to overcome their problems in the university and also at home.

10.5 Integrative Approach.

The success of any organization depends on the well-functioning of its parts, their mutual support and co-ordination. This is analogous to the healthy human body, especially to the human brain⁴. The WUS Sri Lanka WUS Canada Stipend Project maintained well-balance and proper integration with WUS Sri Lanka including its all sister organizations in individual universities, with WUS Canada including its regional Offices and also with some other interested parties like Social Services Department. The activities of the Project were carried out integratively so that it lead to a successful ends.

Conclusion.

WUS-SL and WUSC Undergraduate Stipend Project during 1993-97 has disbursed Rs. 11,850,800.00 among 1253 students from all the universities (except the Open University) in Sri Lanka. There is no doubt that the Project has rendered a great service for the development of skilled, professional human resources although in a small scale in the national context. The Project could also be identified as a welfare programme aimed at the upgrading of living standard of the undergraduate student community.

It is important to mention that the Evaluation Study reveals that some students would have given up their studies if they had not received this stipend. It is also common knowledge that only eligible students received the stipend.

The factors that contributed to the success of the Project were the significance of the goals and objectives, democratic style of management and leadership, commitment, empowerment and job enrichment, high morale, open and free communication, task-oriented and co-operative interpersonal relationships and concern for the quality of the work. Thus, positive, appropriate and integrative human resources management approaches have paved the way for achieving the project goals and objectives.

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The author firmly believes that the experiences and outcomes of the WUS Sri Lanka- WUS Canada Undergraduate Stipend Project would help to arouse interest of concerned people to launch similar schemes to provide financial and other welfare supports for university students in their education and training activities.

Notes.

1. The first version of this article was presented in 1997 to the HRM Programme, Postgraduate Institute of Management, University of Sri Jaywardenepura.
2. WUS – Canada, University of Sri Jaywardenepura and WUS Sri Lanka provided the Project with necessary office rooms, furniture, filing cabinets, computer, type writers, telephone, stationery and so on. The common facilities of the University, such as canteen were freely available for the Project. When some of Project activities were carried out in the other Universities, the relevant Universities and the WUSC Regional Officers provided the necessary facilities.
3. The Project Office did not maintain an attendance register. The flexy-time procedure was practiced to a great extent. The staff came to work usually between 8.00-9.00 A. M. and left the office between 4.30-6.00 P. M. daily. There was not a fixed time for lunch or tea. When work permitted, the staff took time for lunch and tea. The “over-time” was also not practiced. When there was extra or urgent work, the staff worked after hours and even Saturdays and Sundays; and some office work has also been done at home. For this work an additional payment had not been claimed or paid.
An additional assistant had been recruited on casual basis only for a few months when workload was unmanageable for the staff.

It was not also practiced taking leave filling leave forms. When an urgent need for leave arose, he/she consulted with others, took absence from the work, but others performed necessary activities. As there were not labourer, messengers or a driver for the office, all the work was performed by the Project Officer and the others willingly. The travelling fees claimed very rarely, although Project Officer’s private car was heavily used for office purposes.

4. During the last four decades, Roger Sperry and other psychologists have been explaining the different functions of left and right hemisphere of the human brain. It has been revealed that the human left-brain is responsible for verbal, analytical, and logical abilities while the human right-brain is responsible for thinking, inspiration, value, drive and special abilities (Andrew B. Crider et.al, 1983:64-69).

The left brain is compared to the technical sub-system of an organization operationalizing systematic relations between hardware, software, liveware and organizational goals. On the other hand, the right-brain is compared to the human sub-system of an organization energizing the organization through ideas, commitment, hard work and harmonious teamwork.

The well-functioning of the technical sub-system and human sub-system comparable to left and right human brain produce benefits over costs (technical rationality) and synergistic relations (holism) respectively promoting total organizational development through appropriate integration of both systems. This is how an organizational efficiency and effectiveness is achieved (Nanayakkara, 1994:9-13).

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Table No.1
University / District breakdown of Stipend Recipients

District Univers./ Inst.	Ampara	Badulla	Bataloa	Hambanthota	Matara	Moner.	Trinc.	Total
Colombo	34	12	3	20	17	5	16	107
Eastern	39	0	181	0	0	0	43	263
Inst. Aest.	2	2	0	5	7	0	0	16
IIM Rajagiriya	3	0	2	7	10	0	0	22
IIM Yakkala	0	0	0	3	0	1	0	4
Jaffna	1	0	9	0	0	0	5	15
Kelaniya	7	16	0	11	10	12	3	59
Moratuwa	13	1	4	7	7	1	3	36
Peradeniya	38	17	22	10	11	8	16	122
Ruhuna	6	22	0	137	134	28	1	328
S. Eastern	47	0	15	0	0	0	5	67
SJP	19	65	2	45	43	34	6	214
Total	209	135	238	245	239	89	98	1253

Source : Annual Reports (1993/ 1997)

Annex No. 1

MARKING SCHEME

Selected		Ref. No
01. (a). Monthly income Rs. 2,000.00 or less Receiving Mahapole / Bursary		
<u>Annual Income Rs.</u>	<u>Marks</u>	
0 - 12,000	55	
12,000 - 24,000	45	
24,000 - 36,000	40	
36,000 - 48,000	35	
48,000 - 60,000	30	
(b). Monthly income divide by temple members Rs. 400,00 or less	55	
02. Disabled / Serious illness		
Applicant	25	
Parents	15	
Brother / Sister	10	
03. Application living in a refugee camp	50	
04. Affected by troubles Applicant	30	
Parents	15	
Brothers / Sisters	10	
Properties	10	
05. Detained at rehabilitation - Camps/ Police during the last 7 years (more than six month)		
Applicant	50	
Parents	25	
Brothers / Sisters	20	
06. Not receiving Mahapola / Bursary		
<u>Annual Income Rs.</u>	<u>Marks</u>	
48,000 - 60,000	40	
60,000 - 72,000	35	
07. Year of study 1 st Year	10	
2 nd Year	15	
08. Under 18 "Privena" going members (Per person)	05	
09. (a). Living in a University Hostel/ Temp	05	
(b). Living outside (not in temple)	25	
09. If brother/ sister studying in a University		
Receiving Mahapola / Bursary	10	
Not receiving Mahapola/ Bursary	20	
Total		