

“WHAT CAN I OFFER AMERICA?” A POSTCOLONIAL ANALYSIS OF FACULTY MOTIVATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS IN NORTH- SOUTH UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS

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Abstract

International university partnerships are a prevalent internationalization strategy for both North American and African higher education institutions, yet the predominance of discourses that reflect the inequities of the global knowledge economy among participants perpetuate the very challenges that they are designed to address. Using a postcolonial framework, this study provides a critical analysis of qualitative interviews conducted with faculty members from one West African and one U.S. university participating in an international higher education partnership. The paper examines the motivations and perceived benefits of the partnership among participants at both institutions. It argues that the history of inequitable relationships perpetuated by globalization continues to shape understandings and pose challenges to achieving mutuality in North-South university partnerships. Findings show, for both institutions, motivations for partnership participation are based on the expectations and anticipated benefits to their institution as well as an alignment with the individual's personal goals and objectives. Furthermore, perceptions of power imbalances between participants at the two institutions are evident. Despite the partnership's intent for mutuality and reciprocity, the narratives of both West African and U.S. participants reinforce inequitable hierarchies. However, they also highlight opportunities for working toward greater mutuality and intercultural learning through North-South partnerships. Recommendations for cultivating reciprocity in North-South university partnerships are provided.

Keywords: Higher Education Internationalization, North-South Partnerships, Postcolonial Approaches

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In response to globalization, university partnerships are a prominent internationalization strategy utilized by African and North American higher education institutions. Globalization, which involves multiple social, economic and political forces increasingly pushes institutions towards greater global engagement. However, these engagement activities often reflect global inequalities that exist within a capitalist system particularly between countries in the North and South (Altbach & Knight, 2006; Tedrow & Mabokela, 2007)². These global hierarchies, produced by European colonialism, create a global hierarchy based on race/ethnicity, international division of labor and the dominance of Western knowledges (Grosfoguel, 2002). In contemporary times, given the concentration of wealth and economic and ideological power in Northern countries, globalization and the neoliberal policies that drive it continue to favor institutions in the North over those in the South (Altbach & Knight, 2006). Thus, historical forms of colonial domination continue even after the formal end of colonial administrations (Grosfoguel, 2002).

Internationalization strategies enacted by higher education institutions provide an avenue for universities in the South to mitigate the inequalities of globalization through engaging in activities geared towards enhancing their resources or global presence (Sanderson, 2008). Institutional partnerships, “mutual collaborations between two higher education institutions that should be beneficial to both partners in the North and South” are one such strategy (Ishengoma, 2016a, p. 2). Theoretically, partnerships imply a shared commitment to participate in jointly determined activities where the costs and benefits are also shared equally. Collaboration refers to the ways in which these partnerships are enacted (Carnwell & Carson, 2008). In higher education, partnerships may involve a mutually beneficial engagement in collaborative activities around research, exchanges of staff, students and knowledge, and the professional development of staff from both institutions (Kot, 2016). Partnerships define the parameters through which collaboration takes place (Carnwell & Carson, 2008).

Although partnerships are predicated on ideas of mutuality and reciprocity (Tedrow & Mabokela, 2007), the history of North-South partnerships is fraught with power asymmetries between institutions in the North and South (Grant, 2014). Rooted in assumptions and practices of foreign aid, the concept of North-South partnerships “signal[s] an association in which the southern partner [is] viewed as the ‘receiver’ and the northern partner as the ‘giver’” (Binka, 2005, p. 207). Historically, funding for North-South partnerships has often been provided and controlled by the Northern partners, leaving developing countries somewhat beholden to their Northern partners (Samoff & Carrol, 2004). In contemporary partnerships, this contributes to underlying assumptions from both partners that Northern institutions have resources and expertise to offer in support of Southern institutional priorities (Etling & McGirr, 2006). Assie-Lumumba (2006) states that these donor-receiver relationships that perpetuate colonial dynamics persist today as countries in the South are treated as funding ‘beggars’ who have nothing to offer beyond receiving donor funds. The notion of Northern countries as experts has historical colonial and post-colonial antecedents that are often mentioned but seldom used to frame studies to

² The use of terms such as north-south or developed and less developed in no way condones the historical colonial histories that created these designations. These terms are only used in this paper to highlight geo-economic differences as used in international partnership literature.

understand the motivations and perceptions of those participating in North-South partnerships.

For African countries in particular, partnerships present a tension, given the history of North-South partnerships and critiques that they yield minimal benefits for African higher education (Ishengoma, 2016a; Larkin, 2013). For example, in a study examining partnerships' contributions to strengthening the capacity of public Universities in Tanzania, Ishengoma (2016a) found that the substantial infusion of donor funding through international higher education partnerships contributed to both internal and external brain drain. Research outputs were lowered as senior academics were lured into consultancy work for the donor and inequalities between in-country institutions were exacerbated as already well-resourced institutions were deemed by Northern partners as being more desirable to repeatedly engage. Furthermore, partnerships reinforced the dependency of public universities on donor funding by increasing the reliance on external funding to supplement staff salaries in the wake of less government funding.

In some cases where the Northern partner initiated the partnership, differences in motivations and desired outcomes between partners resulted in the donor's agenda taking precedence "with little, if any regard for the actual needs and desires of the individual universities and their surrounding communities" (Grant, 2014, p. 53). For example, in 2017, the South African Minister of Science and Technology Naledi Pandor noted how partnerships between African higher education institutions and Western universities did not work towards developing the continent's research capacity as desired, amounting instead to "little more than visits" during which Africans tended to be subjects and not co-participants in research endeavors that are not central to the national agenda (Times Higher Education, 2017). Similarly, in Tanzania few partnerships focused on infrastructure development as an objective despite it being a key national priority for higher education (Ishengoma, 2016b).

In Ghana, a study examining internationalization strategies of three public universities revealed how faculty perceived partnerships with the North to be unequal. Because the partner in the North had more financial resources, they controlled the nature of the collaboration with one faculty member lamenting how they collaborated on a research project but were ultimately not named as collaborators in the final publication (Gyamera, 2015)

In response to historically inequitable dynamics, countries in the North and South have jointly called for reciprocal and mutually beneficial North-South partnerships (Downes, 2013; OECD, 1996). For example, the Paris Declaration in 2005 and the Accra Agenda for Action in 2008 both involved countries from both the North and South pledging to curtail the inequalities of North-South partnerships through encouraging mutual accountability and mutuality (Jamison, 2017; Teferra, 2016). In some cases, African scholars have gone beyond reciprocity in calling for African countries and institutions to lead partnerships with the North, "rooting African education in African traditions amidst the perpetuation of a colonial situation" (Assie-Lumumba, 2006, p. 150). Increasingly, donors are funding North-South partnerships that are led by Southern partners and encouraging the establishment of multinational and multi-institutional South-South-North partnerships (Teferra, 2016). However, despite the aim of partnerships to provide mutual benefits for all parties involved, partnerships led by Southern institutions remain at risk of perpetuating "a one-way flow of 'development knowledge' which reflects the dominance of Western models of development" (Downes, 2013, p. 2).

If North-South partnerships are to move towards more ethical forms of engagements where African institutions truly direct their own development, ensuring North-South

partnerships do not perpetuate colonial and neo-colonial hierarchies is imperative (Alasuutari, 2015). Making explicit the perceptions of those involved in North-South partnerships is an important first step in working towards reciprocity and mutuality in global university partnerships. We argue that maintaining a historical perspective in exploring these perceptions is essential (Samoff and Carrol, 2004). While the importance of history in understanding Africa-U.S. partnerships is widely acknowledged, there remains a dearth of systemic and critical analyses of these relationships within the current context of internationalization.

To inform new approaches to North-South partnerships, we use postcolonial theory to critically analyze and compare faculty motivations and perceptions of a partnership between one West African and one U.S. based university to address the following questions:

- (1) How do faculty participating in a North-South higher education partnership describe the motivations and benefits of participation?
- (2) What do the faculty members' overall perceptions of the partnership illuminate about notions of reciprocity and mutuality?

In the review of literature that follows, we situate U.S.-African university partnerships in the broader context of African higher education and describe the motivations for engaging in collaborative activities. We then introduce postcolonial theory as a framework for this study, describe the partnership examined and research methods employed, and present key findings. We conclude with a discussion of the various discourses present in the faculty narratives and their implications for mutuality and reciprocity in North-South partnerships.

U.S. – African Institutional Partnerships

International higher education partnerships exist in various forms including student and faculty exchanges, establishing branch campuses for institutional expansion, and engaging in research collaborations. According to the International Higher Education Linkages Project (IHELP), the most comprehensive database tracking international higher education partnerships to-date; between 2000-2001 approximately 101 African³ institutions were in partnerships with 69 U.S. institutions. Top African partnership countries included South Africa (19%), Kenya (13%) and Ghana (10%) (Samoff & Carrol, 2004). Recent data highlights how linkages between universities in the U.S. and Africa continue to expand (Alliance for African Partnerships, 2017). Though comprehensive data are scarce, U.S. government funding documents provide evidence of growing interest in U.S.-Africa partnerships. For example, through the Africa-U.S. Higher Education Initiative launched in 2007, the U.S. government has allocated funding to increase U.S.-African higher education partnerships. In 2009 the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID, 2009) and the Higher Education for Development awarded 40 paired institutions with planning grants to establish Africa-U.S. partnerships. In 2010, the U.S. Congress allocated \$USD15 million to fund 11 U.S. institutions to actually establish partnerships with African institutions (APLU, n.d.).

³Reference to Africa is not meant to provide a generalization of the African continent. However, this is how the U.S. defines their relationship with the continent as a whole. While the focus of this study is on one region/country in sub-Saharan Africa. The relationships the U.S. has are not limited to sub-Saharan Africa only.

In addition to government funding, partnerships between U.S. and African institutions are funded by private foundations such as the Mellon Foundation, Carnegie and Kresgie Foundations amongst others. Smaller scale partnerships are frequently established through academic institutions, departments and individual faculty who leverage their networks to establish study abroad programs or other joint research initiatives. Partnerships between higher education institutions in Africa and North America remain a prominent feature in the current global landscape and serve the goals of national governments, philanthropic foundations and higher education institutions. Therefore, critical scholarship that furthers our understanding of how partnerships are currently operating is important to inform equitable practices that critically engage rather than reinforce historical colonial relations between Northern and Southern partners.

History of African Higher Education and International University Partnerships

Created to provide sufficient education to Africans to ensure the continuity and security of the colonies (Assie-Lumumba, 2006), “African institutions were never intended to be the equals of their metropolitan counterparts” (Samoff & Carrol, 2004, p. 77). Instead, the introduction of Western education in sub-Saharan Africa in particular was both a practical and ideological strategy to usurp African people and their social institutions into the colonial system (Abrokwa, 2017). Western education systematically diminished the role and value of indigenous knowledge within the emerging capitalist system. The training provided was not meant to enlighten or develop Africans but was aimed at “detaching them from their historical past and [driving them] to accept colonial institutions” (Woldegiorgis & Doevenspeckp, 2013, p. 37).

In post-colonial times, marked by the dismantling of formal colonial administrations and the wave of liberation and independence movements in the 20th century, Africa’s relationships around the globe have continued to expand. New actors such as the Soviet Union, China, Sweden and the U.S. provide financial and technical support to African higher education through building universities, providing scholarships for African students and strengthening faculty development (Samoff & Carrol, 2004). International agencies and funding bodies such as the World Bank that initially reduced the resources of higher education institutions through structural adjustment programs in the 1980s have grown increasingly interested in its contributions to economic growth and involved in determining the direction of higher education through the provision of funding (Samoff & Carrol, 2004; Bloom, Canning & Chan, 2006). In this process, local knowledge gained recognition as being essential for solving local challenges and a discourse of strengthening local capacity became part of the language of the current U.S. partnership model for Africa (Jamison, 2017).

Reciprocity and Mutuality in North-South Partnerships

Despite aspirations towards reciprocity and mutuality, skepticism remains about the ability to truly achieve this as perceptions that partnerships remain inequitable and controlled by Northern countries persist (Altbach & Knight, 2006; Ward, Burchard, Bybee, Noyes & Du Bois, 2017). Resource dependency is one of the frameworks used in research that informs these skeptical views (Grant, 2014; Ishengoma, 2016a, 2016b).

Resource dependency theory views the desire to access resources on the part of resource-strapped institutions in the South as a key driver to collaborate with institutions in the North. It posits that institutions in the South are motivated to enter into partnerships with those in the North to access resources perceived as necessary to achieve a Northern, and arguably now globally defined level of accomplishment based on metrics such as scholarly

research output, standings in international university rankings and the number of patents produced. By focusing primarily on material resources, it reflects the previously discussed operating assumption on the part of both partners that Northern institutions have more resources and expertise to contribute and that Southern institutions are merely beneficiaries with less or nothing to offer (Etling & McGirr, 2006). For skeptics, North-South partnerships are inherently unequal (Bradley, 2016). Furthermore, given their association with notions of aid which “usually imply unequal relationships” (p. 113), skeptics caution against non-critical acceptance of ‘mutual’ and ‘equitable’ partnership rhetoric when elements of a hierarchical and inequitable paradigm remain in actual practice (Jamison, 2017).

In contrast, optimists argue that the benefits accrued and the roles played by each actor in North-South partnerships need not be identical for the partnership to be considered mutually beneficial and reciprocal (Samoff & Carrol, 2004). Instead, as long as partnerships involve shared learning, they are viewed as having the potential to empower both partners. Moreover, when both partners are involved in specifying goals, charting directions and creating appropriate governance strategies, they move away from a unidirectional, aid-based narrative (Samoff & Carrol, 2004).

Although skeptics and optimists approach North-South partnerships with different lenses and thus provide valuable insights about partnerships, both are limited in their attention to history. Furthermore, given the current realities of globalization encouraging increased interactions between the North and South, critical perspectives are necessary in discussions of North-South partnerships as they shed light on inequitable practices while allowing for new ways of thinking and engaging to emerge that move the needle towards more equitable, mutual and reciprocal relationships. Postcolonial theory provides an avenue to both contest existing frameworks and provide alternative ways of knowing and enacting partnerships.

Postcolonial Theory as a Framework for Studying and Enacting Partnerships

Postcolonial theory provides a lens for examining how the legacy of colonialism remains present in the context of globalization and specifically within and through international North-South partnerships. Postcolonial theory analyzes and critiques Western domination of knowledge systems “... [and] seeks to recover alternative ways of knowing and understanding ... in order to present alternatives to dominant western constructs” (Sharp, 2009, p. 5).

Originating from the South with the purpose of revealing and challenging hegemonic Northern discourses (Martin & Griffiths, 2012), postcolonial theory as a critical framework makes known how the West (and the rest of the world) actively “Others” those from the South through determining and universalizing Western standards and using them to understand and judge the South. For example, against Western standards of technological advancement and research outputs, sub-Saharan Africa is portrayed as lacking and thus as needing Western solutions and assistance to catch up (Martin, 2011). In a globalized world, these metrics have become universal such that Southern countries aspire to achieve similar indicators and assess their own development through them. In combating Western-created hierarchies that categorize the South as deficit, postcolonial theory highlights the erasure of the history of the West’s role in colonization and the creation and maintenance of existing global inequalities in contemporary times (Martin, 2011; Spivak, 1988).

While challenging the dominance of Western based knowledge systems (Khanal, 2012); postcolonial theory remains aware of the challenges of achieving mutuality in a world order defined by “unequal relations between dominant and subaltern powers” (Seth, 2013, p.

161). However, postcolonial theory also allows us to move beyond historical imbalances and cultural inequalities. Through centering the voices of the subaltern, it facilitates the necessary conditions for including non-Western voices in creating new theories and models of practice for North-South educational partnerships (Andreotti, 2011). It is the dual capabilities of postcolonial theory as both deconstructive and constructive that informed our selection of this theory. By attending to the presence of colonial dynamics within one particular international partnership, this framework aims to move beyond merely naming these problematic patterns toward identifying new possibilities for engaging in North-South partnerships that are more mutually beneficial and reciprocal (Martin, 2013). In the following section, we provide an overview of the case considered in this study.

Partnership Overview

This study draws on the experiences of two universities to examine faculty motivations for and perceptions of participation in a North-South university partnership. Throughout the paper, these institutions are referred to by the pseudonyms of the STEM University of West Africa (STEM-U) and Sunshine State University (SSU) in the U.S.

STEM-U and SSU are each well-regarded public institutions in their regions known for offering a wide variety of high quality academic programs. SSU is a research-intensive institution, whereas STEM-U faculty members have intensive teaching loads in addition to their research and service responsibilities. Both are considered large public institutions in their respective contexts. In addition to their large student populations and highly ranked schools of engineering and business, both institutions share a commitment to expanding higher education access to qualified individuals regardless of their economic circumstances. To advance this commitment, both offer scholarships that support students who demonstrate exceptional academic and leadership potential yet face significant barriers to continuing their education.

As participants in a network of universities with a shared interest in advancing access to high quality, impactful higher education opportunities, administrators from STEM-U and SSU convene on an annual basis. Separate from these interactions, faculty members from both institutions have engaged in a variety of collaborative activities in recent years including SSU hosting visiting scholars from STEM-U and STEM-U hosting short-term study abroad students from SSU. Building on the relationship formed through these interactions, SSU leadership approached colleagues at STEM-U to see if they would be interested in collaborating on a proposal that would provide students from STEM-U with an opportunity to complete accelerated Master's degree at SSU. Additionally, participants from both institutions incorporated a pathway for students completing accelerated Master's degrees at SSU to return to STEM-U and complete a year of national service giving back to their undergraduate institution as research and teaching assistants.

Through subsequent discussions, SSU and STEM-U agreed that including an opportunity for faculty involvement and collaboration would strengthen the proposal by providing participating students with mentors on the African continent to support their transitions to the U.S. and back upon completion of their studies. Participation of faculty members in an annual professional development seminar and an annual symposium in West Africa would also allow for reciprocal knowledge sharing and capacity building at both institutions. It was decided that each year, a cohort of faculty members from STEM-U would be selected to attend a seminar at SSU, after which this cohort would co-facilitate a symposium at STEM-U with a group of SSU faculty participants. From the beginning, the program was designed to reflect a focus on mutual learning and reciprocity and challenge the

notion of unidirectional benefits flowing from participants and locations in the North to those in the South. The focus of faculty exchange and development activities was left open-ended to allow for topics of mutual interest to emerge.

To promote the goal of mutual learning, the seminar hosted at STEM-U included opportunities for STEM-U faculty members to educate SSU faculty members by giving presentations about their institution, context and research activities. Additionally, an intentional effort was made to ensure that professional development activities in West Africa were co-facilitated by faculty from both institutions rather than only by U.S. faculty. Further opportunities for SSU faculty to learn about STEM-U and the West African context were also incorporated. Beyond learning activities, arrangements were made for leadership at both institutions to participate in monthly program management meetings to maintain effective communication and engage in collaborative decision-making processes.

After funding was awarded, annual interviews were conducted with STEM-U and SSU faculty participants to deepen understanding of participant motivations, priorities and experiences and to inform ongoing collaboration efforts. This article analyzes qualitative interviews conducted with current and future STEM-U and SSU faculty participants during the first year of program implementation.

Methods

We used qualitative interview methods and thematic analysis to critically examine the motivations and perceptions of faculty from these two institutions. Using purposive sampling, participating faculty from both the first and second years of the faculty development program were invited, via email, to participate in an interview with the first author. Interested participants were asked to provide a time, date and mode of communication (Skype, phone or in-person) for the interview. Interviews were then conducted over two months with participating faculty from both institutions. These interviews were between 30 – 60 minutes and addressed topics including their motivations, experiences and perceived benefits of participation. A review of documents and interviews with partnership implementers and coordinators helped to situate the case within the broader initiative and provided institutional context and an understanding of each country's higher education landscape. While some background information is used to further explain the findings, this study focuses on faculty interviews only.

Of the 18 program faculty participants, 14 were available to participate. This included 8 faculty from West Africa and 6 faculty from the U.S. The gender breakdown included 5 women and 9 men. Additionally, three academic fields were represented with 7 participants from business, 6 from engineering and one from the social sciences. The majority of participants from both institutions had previously participated in international collaborations and partnership activities in addition to the STEM-U - SSU partnership. There was some variation in seniority between the two groups. While the SSU participant group was made up primarily of tenured faculty, the STEM-U participants included some lecturers without terminal degrees in addition to more senior participants. Table 1 provides a summary of participant demographics.

Interviews were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). First, we identified themes related to faculty motivations and benefits for participating in the partnership. Second, we compared the themes present in the narratives of participants from the U.S. and West African countries, identifying similarities and differences. Finally, we employed a postcolonial lens to analyze data related to each of the themes by identifying and critically reflecting on instances of historical and contemporary power and hierarchy

reflected in participant narratives. In the findings section, we summarize the themes that emerged through the analysis and provide relevant quotes to substantiate these themes. We then discuss the various discourses present and their implications for mutuality and reciprocity in North-South partnerships.

Table 1. *Participant demographics.*

<u>Participant</u>	<u>Program Represented</u>	<u>Partner Country</u>
Participant 1	Business	West Africa
Participant 2	Business	U.S.
Participant 3	Business	U.S.
Participant 4	Engineering	West Africa
Participant 5	Engineering	West Africa
Participant 6	Engineering	West Africa
Participant 7	Business	U.S.
Participant 8	Business	West Africa
Participant 9	Engineering	West Africa
Participant 10	Social Sciences	U.S.
Participant 11	Engineering	U.S.
Participant 12	Business	West Africa
Participant 13	Business	West Africa
Participant 14	Engineering	U.S.

Researchers' Positionality and Reflexivity

As researchers operating from within a postcolonial framework, we maintained a commitment to practicing reflexivity throughout the research process. This was accomplished through engaging in ongoing discussions about the influence of our critical and pragmatic perspectives as well as our roles in implementing international partnership activities on our data analysis, interpretation and presentation of the findings.

The first author is of African descent and engages with critical, indigenous and postcolonial frameworks to understand the experiences and development of faculty in African higher education institutions. Having received both undergraduate and Master's degrees from an African institution before obtaining a terminal degree in the U.S., her formal experiences of higher education on the continent inform her perspective of challenging the problematic deficit narratives of African higher education that exist in Western contexts. Furthermore, her emphasis on valuing indigenous knowledges is coupled with a worldview that recognizes the multiplicity of truths and knowledges beyond dominant Western knowledge. However, she also believes in the value of North-South partnerships that are rooted in reciprocity and mutuality and that such partnerships can contribute to the advancement of both partners, albeit in different ways. Her desire to elevate African voices in creating new narratives about African higher education informed her approach to the interviews as well as data analysis.

The second author is from the U.S. and has lived and worked in a variety of African countries as an international higher education scholar and practitioner. She engages with critical and spatial theories to understand how historical and transnational dynamics shape the lived experiences and outcomes of international development initiatives. She is responsible for implementing multiple international higher education initiatives, including one university partnership, and views these initiatives as having the potential to make positive contributions. At the same time, she acknowledges that they reflect and risk

reinforcing historical inequities. Her commitment to engaging in critical reflection and navigating complex tensions inherent to North-South university partnerships informed the impetus for this study, approach to data analysis and reflection on how findings might inform the ways in which partnerships are designed and implemented.

Limitations

Our study is limited by its focus on the perceptions of a small number of faculty participants from one West African and one U.S. institution. While this does not diminish the significance of themes present in the faculty narratives, interviews with additional faculty members and program administrators engaged in partnership activities may illuminate additional insights and themes.

In both contexts, senior administrators were involved in the process of planning and implementing the partnerships and would offer another perspective on its ethos and intent. However, given the growing emphasis on establishing reciprocal and mutually beneficial partnerships, understanding how the faculty members who initiate and implement these partnerships may provide insights (Hitch, 2015). Moreover, this study provides a snapshot of faculty perceptions at a particular point in time when interviews were conducted. Additional interviews and more in-depth reflection on inequities within the global knowledge economy would generate further insight into faculty perspectives and learning through the partnership.

Finally, by focusing at the faculty level, our study expands knowledge on North-South partnerships by highlighting alternative postcolonial perspectives on faculty motivations for participating. Future studies might incorporate the perspectives of program stakeholders and faculty members at additional institutions through multiple interviews to allow for further self-reflection, clarification and elaboration on initial interview responses.

Findings

This section presents the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data. Faculty members described two overarching motivations for participating in the STEM-U/SSU partnership: (1) expectations of/benefits to their institutions or department and (2) alignment of partnership activities with their personal goals and priorities. Each of these themes is elaborated on below, followed by a discussion of what the faculty perceptions of the partnership illuminate about notions of reciprocity and mutuality. Gender neutral language is used to maintain participant confidentiality.

Institutional Motivations

Faculty participants in the partnership noted that their participation was motivated by their institution or department and described both anticipated and already experienced institutional benefits. Institutional motivations included (1) fulfilling institutional mandates as good citizens, (2) reputational benefits of global engagement, (3) mutual institutional learning and (4) enhancing learning opportunities for STEM-U students.

Good Citizens Fulfilling Institutional Mandates

Faculty from both STEM-U and SSU described their decision to become involved in the program as based on the recommendation or request of senior officials at their respective institutions. The influence of institutional leaders was particularly salient among STEM-U faculty from project inception through the everyday running of the program. In our study, all STEM-U participants described institutional leaders as playing a key role in

conceptualizing the partnership and inviting faculty to assist with bringing the idea to fruition. As one faculty member explained:

[STEM-U senior leader name] actually called me into his office and discussed this initial idea he had had with [SSU leadership]. It was just an idea they had and when they got to the point where they wanted to start the implementation and start really thinking about how they could make it happen they brought me in to work on it. (Participant 9, West Africa)

Similarly, another STEM-U participant described limited involvement in the decision to participate:

At the time it came up I was contacted and I got involved in the preparations ... when it came to the point where they wanted to match the curriculum they contacted me and so I had to take up that as a [leader in the engineering department]. (Participant 6, West Africa)

In addition to initiating the partnership and hand-picking faculty to be involved at different stages of the partnership, STEM-U faculty noted that senior leadership would continue to determine which faculty would be involved in partnership activities in the future.

Given the influence of senior leadership in formulating this international partnership, the use of language such as “I had to” suggests a perception of limited choice among STEM-U faculty. Among new lecturers and senior professors alike, faculty members used similar language to describe their participation as a response to a top-down directive rather than an exclusively individual decision to participate. Perceptions of a top-down model have been identified as present among U.S. faculty involved in other international partnerships thus this phenomenon is not exclusive to West African higher education (Gieser, 2015). This practice is important to note, as scholars argue that international university partnerships are most successful when initiating actors “possess the requisite degrees of power and capital (economic, social and cultural) to make it so” (Gieser, 2016, p. 63).

In our study institutional leaders were less influential in determining the participation of faculty at the U.S. institution. Instead, SSU faculty described their participation as an exercise of good citizenship in response to the broader institutional mission. As one faculty member explained:

I think people do it because they understand the institutional value of it ... they understand the value of SSU doing these partnerships. I don't think they see an immediate value to their own involvement in it. They're good citizens ... you do it because you're good citizens and you want SSU to have this partnership. You want it to be successful. (Participant 7, U.S.)

Fulfilling institutional mandates as a good citizen also included advancing departmental goals related to internationalization and becoming the top global program in one's academic field, as described by another SSU faculty member:

One perspective is the fact that our [academic program] is a highly ranked program ... so we are a large and well known [program]. ... We have a responsibility to the profession as a leader to do things to help promote the

profession globally ... We want to do things that are more global so when I got pulled in to work on the [partnership] it seemed to tie very nicely with that aspect (Participant 3, U.S.)

Only one U.S. faculty member participated at the request of the College Dean and their involvement was strategically to determine interest in the department among the faculty from West Africa. “Our Dean [of School] pointed me out and said well [Participant 10] is the person because [they have] been working with STEM-U in the past, [they have] been to [West Africa]” (Participant 10, U.S.).

Overall, the institutional motivations described by faculty from STEM-U and SSU related to representing their institution and respective departments/units. As members of the institution and executors of the institutional mission, faculty from both institutions viewed participation in the partnership as an exercise of good citizenship even when leadership directives were sometimes present.

Reputational Benefits of Global Engagement

Faculty members from both institutions also described the partnership as beneficial to their institutions through increasing institutional prestige and global presence. For STEM-U, increased student enrollment as a result of offering international scholarships for Master’s degrees in particular academic programs was described as a specific benefit of the partnership. “In my department I saw that the enrolment level went up” (Participant 4, West Africa), one faculty member explained. Others noted how enrolment numbers had increased in the specific programs that were involved in the student scholarship component of the partnership.

Similarly, SSU faculty described reputational benefits to the institution and impact on core activities of research, teaching and service:

SSU has benefited because its name is getting more and more well-known ... its faculty are becoming more and more recognized and we are also recognized as a university that gets things done. Very good programs are happening here; things are happening at SSU. ... That will probably influence how we do research, how we teach and how we interact and our influence and our reach. (Participant 10, U.S.)

Participants described increasing enrollment and institutional global reach as motivating factors at both institutions for engaging in the international partnership.

Institutions Learning from Each Other

Learning from shared challenges. Participants from both SSU and STEM-U spoke positively about the institutional learning occurring through the partnership. Learning through discussing responses to shared challenges was presented as a particularly good opportunity for mutually beneficial exchange. As one SSU faculty member described:

We had a really good conversation about how do you create collaborations with your external groups within your community—whether it’s alumni, whether it’s with people that will hire your students. How do you do that? That was really, for me, a fascinating exchange because the challenges that STEM-U faces are the same ones we face. How do you relate with your

alumni? How do you get the external community involved with your students? How do you create collaborations? And I thought there was really good sharing on that. I think that's a great opportunity because that's where, I think sometimes when you share the same challenges, you can have really good learning opportunities from each other so I thought that was really insightful. (Participant 7, U.S.)

Reflecting on mutual benefits achieved through the partnership, a STEM-U participant also pointed to the value of exchange visits for institutional learning:

It is also a mutual benefit because SSU came here last year, they will come here again they can also learn from what we do here that they are not doing there--the shared experience between the two universities they are learning from each other (Participant 1, West Africa)

Intercultural learning for students and faculty. Another example of mutual learning through the partnership involved intercultural learning among students and faculty members at both institutions. One SSU faculty member described the benefits of increasing diversity in SSU classrooms:

Just having the students in our classroom is going to enrich the classroom experience for all of our students ... We have quite a few international students but we have very few from most of Africa so I think their perspectives will be very enlightening. (Participant 3, U.S.)

STEM-U faculty similarly emphasized the intercultural benefits of studying internationally for their students:

For me the fact that our students were going to have another experience outside ... to also experience it and see how best, how cultures sometimes differ, how learning styles sometimes differ and what they can get out of it and then probably help them as well. (Participant 12, West Africa)

Both SSU and STEM-U participants saw intercultural learning as valuable not only for students but also for faculty and staff. This was one area in which STEM-U faculty members expressed confidence that through the partnership, they contributed to the learning of U.S. faculty members. As one participant articulated, "I think from a cultural perspective I'm sure [U.S. faculty] learned something from us. We've also shared with them the way we do things here, the challenges that we have and so many things" (Participant 5, West Africa). Likewise, SSU faculty members acknowledged the contributions of the collaboration to intercultural learning among SSU faculty:

SSU faculty, staff and students will learn from this international collaboration. People can impact each other in terms of cultures ... and start to respect each other's cultures and that's really important; that's humanity. These are indirect but they are very, very important. (Participant 11, U.S.)

In addition to intercultural understanding, awareness of global education issues was also described as a key benefit:

I think it's very important for SSU faculty to understand issues in global education. We, I think, often are very egocentric about what our educational system is and what our purpose is and I think that partnership will help us to understand that not every higher education institute is driven by the same goals that we have. ... It's about that exploration, getting our faculty to sort of think about that. (Participant 7, U.S.)

In contrast to the perceptions of mutual learning through discussions of shared challenges, during discussions of pedagogy and research activities SSU was described as being more 'mature' and holding more knowledge compared to STEM-U. One SSU participant stated:

In terms of a maturity curve I think we are further down the road than they are, and so I think the things that we've learned, the experiences that we've had that we can share will be quite beneficial to STEM-U and it seems certainly when they came last year, they were finding that value in the teaching methods that we use, understanding how we use technology so I think they will benefit quite a bit from that. (Participant 3, U.S.)

This language of maturity used to describe institutional differences reflects a linear and hierarchical understanding of institutional development and indicates little recognition of the different forms of knowledge that exist among faculty members in diverse contexts. Instead, it presents SSU faculty as knowledgeable experts and STEM-U faculty as less experienced learners based on particular undefined yet seemingly universal indicators.

Faculty Motivations

As key implementers of the partnership at both institutions, West African and U.S. faculty expressed individual level motivations for participating as well as some benefits they hoped to gain or had already gained. Slight differences were present in the motivations between participants from the two institutions. Among SSU faculty members, alignment between program goals and personal interests as well as a desire to further research agendas were prominent motivations. For STEM-U faculty members, enhancing pedagogical skills and opportunities for STEM-U students were of primary importance.

U.S. Faculty Motivations

As described previously, U.S. faculty had greater autonomy in the decision to engage in partnership activities than their West African counterparts. In general, they elected to participate because the partnership aligned with their prior experience and interests. One SSU faculty member with a history of working on the African continent was approached as a potential participant. They recounted:

Given my history of having travelled to that part of the world and having been involved in other projects they approached me and I was very interested in it. I was interested in ... the opportunity to potentially work with faculty at STEM-U ... so it took me about three seconds to say yes. (Participant 14, U.S.)

Another participant explained, "I volunteered because I was really interested in the project and valued the goals of what the program is about" (Participant 7, U.S.). One of these

motivating goals was contributing to the capacity development of West African faculty members.

One SSU participant who hails from West Africa described their personal motivation to build capacity there: “[S]ince I come from that area, I have a personal motivation which is developing the capacities of these guys” (Participant 2, U.S.). Participants in this study emphasized the value of leveraging SSU expertise to develop capacity at STEM-U, despite indications in research literature that partnerships framed as capacity building projects are especially at risk of fostering perceptions of inequalities and creating knowledge hierarchies between the giving and receiving partners (Helms, 2015). As is further elaborated in the discussion section, the pervasiveness of deficit narratives has become so ingrained that they often go unquestioned and in some cases are uncritically directed towards one’s own people.

The prospect of research collaboration was another motivating factor for U.S. faculty members, reflecting how “partnership is no longer a choice for Northern researchers wanting to work in the developing world; it has become a condition of their doing research in the South” (King, 2008, p. 1). As most SSU faculty had been involved in international collaborative research projects in the past, the partnership with STEM-U presented another opportunity to further their individual research agendas. One SSU faculty member emphasized the value of access to data:

One of my main motivations will be to continue my research in developing countries including West Africa because West Africa is a key player in [my field of study] especially within Sub-Saharan Africa and the folks at STEM-U they will be very, very good partners in this research project ... [I]t will be possible for them to get access to good data that we can use for possible research (Participant 2, U.S.)

Another emphasized jointly identifying and researching interesting problems:

In terms of faculty, they have a lot of things they can offer us as well in terms of finding really interesting problems to look at that we can jointly research together because there are issues that are considerably different there than we have here ... (Participant 3, U.S.)

The same faculty member also shared,

Our faculty is quite research active, we publish papers, we are known worldwide etcetera. And their faculty can benefit from that expertise, but we can benefit from their understanding of problems in the third world or at least in Africa which in our field is kind of an untapped area ... they don’t have the set ways that we have, they have to think outside the box which ultimately leads to really clever solutions. (Participant 3, U.S.)

For SSU faculty members, STEM-U faculty provided access to local data and knowledge of potential research problems. The reliance on local stakeholders in international development work aligns with World Bank (1994) values highlighted previously. Although faculty members at both institutions expressed an interest in research collaboration, both groups described the U.S. partner as the source of expertise from whom West African faculty can learn but for whom equal partnership in terms of research was presently unrealistic. An

American Council of Education report notes that a partner institution with limited infrastructure, policies and resources “to support a fully developed research enterprise” (Helms, 2015) is a key challenge for U.S. faculty working with faculty abroad. This challenge was articulated by an SSU Business faculty member:

The gap between where we are and where they are, it’s almost an unrealistic partnership, if that makes sense. You know, it’s about the hierarchy of research institutions ... in terms of research collaboration. It’s like both institutions have very different cultures around research, very different reward structures and very different motivations about doing research. So that’s why it’s a hard research collaboration. (Participant 7, U.S.)

This faculty member’s description of the stark differences between the two institutions is considered normal if one views it as a product of organizational status homophily where top tier institutions differentiate themselves from those considered lower status institutions (Kim & Celis, 2016). In this way the higher status institution maintains its status. Thus, for Participant 7, because of significant capacity differences, “the probability of an SSU faculty member publishing with them [STEM-U faculty] will be very slim” (Participant 7, U.S.).

West African Faculty Motivations

Among West African faculty members, enhancing pedagogical and other skills and expanding learning opportunities for their students were the chief motivators for and benefits of participating. West African faculty expected that the partnership would allow them to build their skills in terms of pedagogy and other technical skills that could be translated into benefits for their institutions. Those who had participated shared examples of how their teaching had already been enhanced through their experience, especially when it came to the pedagogy. One West African faculty explained how they had begun incorporating some of the newly learned teaching techniques in their classroom at STEM-U with positive outcomes:

I seem to be incorporating some of [the techniques] in my teaching, making it a bit more fun ... I used poster presentation instead of the normal PowerPoint presentation ... and I was surprised with the posters [students] came up with. Some even used a movie to try to understand [organizational] concepts. That is one thing that I did learn. (Participant 12, West Africa)

Participants noted expected benefits that were based on a belief that the U.S. is the seat of knowledge and best practices in terms of pedagogy and programs.

[T]hey (SSU) have a very good distance learning program ... I became interested to know what they are doing there that we are not doing here so when the opportunity came for me to join the team to visit [the U.S.] to help me to know what they are doing to understand and see how we can bring the best practices to improve on what we are doing ... what they are doing we should be able to replicate it here (STEM-U)” (Participant 1, West Africa)

The narrative of replication was also used by another West African participant noting, “we are trying to replicate what we learn [from the U.S. institution visit] here [at STEM-U]” (Participant 8, West Africa). The language of replication speaks to a widespread desire to

emulate the U.S. which is viewed as one global standard for what higher education should be and how it should operate. The experience of an SSU faculty member exploring the potential for research collaborations suggests that this desire to replicate Northern practices reinforces U.S. faculty perceptions of West African faculty as learners in the partnership, looking for the U.S. to drive the collaboration:

[W]hen I went around the room [at STEM-U] and asked people what their research interests were and what they were working on, because no one was able to tell me specifically. It means they don't have active research programs. So, if you don't have an active research program that means you're looking for your [SSU] partner to drive everything. It was like working with an entry level graduate student who has no background in what they want to do or how they would approach it. (Participant 7, U.S.)

Comparing West African faculty to graduate students, reinforces the learner-expert dichotomy and establishes a hierarchy of competence based on Western academy standards of what it means to be a faculty member and research scholar.

Enhancing the learning opportunities and experiences of West African students was another key motivator for all West African faculty participants. As noted previously, there was consensus that while access for students to international higher education opportunities was a motivation, for the students specifically there was a belief that "this program will help them become better students" (Participant 5, West Africa).

In addition to these benefits, STEM-U interviewees also highlighted costs associated with the partnership, including the loss of top performing students to scholarship opportunities abroad. One faculty member explained:

It's good and it's bad. Although it is providing opportunities for our students, it's like our best students [who leave] so you end up with a fourth year class that is so-so because the creme-de-la-creme is gone ... so that is the main challenge which I don't think is a big challenge because every opportunity comes at a cost, this is a small cost that we need to pay for the opportunity. (Participant 13, West Africa)

Despite this cost, faculty members maintained hope that the opportunity afforded to individual students might later translate into benefits for the institution or the country, including the possibility of students returning to serve as faculty members:

I realized that it was an opportunity to get students to go and have an accelerated Master's with the view that they would come back and give back to the university and then their immediate society and so working in this area will help train more faculty ... my major preoccupation was to get them to continue from where we left off as faculty but [I] gave up because again it was a huge opportunity. America is a great country and it has a huge opportunity for the students to advance their future career and I shouldn't be selfish in getting them to do the faculty training and mentorship. (Participant 4, West Africa)

This tendency for Southern partners to prioritize partnership benefits in spite of experienced or anticipated costs is highlighted in North-South partnership literature (Bradley, 2015; Samoff & Carrol, 2004). For STEM-U faculty members, the opportunity the partnership presented for the students as well as the potential benefits it may have for the institution were perceived to outweigh the costs of developing their own faculty pool as initially hoped.

Discussion

In this discussion, we consider what the faculty perceptions of the partnership illuminate about notions of reciprocity and mutuality and consider how postcolonial dynamics are reflected in the faculty narratives. Two main points of discussion are presented in this section: the prevalence of a deficit discourse and the presence of a discourse of mutuality.

The first and predominant discourse reflected in the narratives of faculty members from West Africa and the U.S. described above is a deficit discourse in which the U.S. partner institution is described as the source and provider of knowledge, expertise and innovation while the West African partner institution is described primarily as a learner and recipient of partnership benefits. The use of terms such as “third world” and “an untapped area” to the West African partner resembles colonial language used historically to describe the African continent and the abundance of resources that colonial powers viewed as openly accessible for tapping.

Although it may not have been the intention, such language suggests a motivation to engage in research as an extractive process facilitated in the name of collaboration and mutual benefit. At the same time, in an effort to gain prominence in the global knowledge economy, STEM-U faculty seemingly reinforced these deficit narratives through their emphasis on observing and replicating practices of SSU in the West African context.

The presence of learner and expert language, particularly in regard to research, is indicative not only of historical patterns but also of the current contexts and positionality of each institution within the global knowledge economy. Even as they were viewed as points of access to and experts on their region, West African faculty members internalized their role as learners and struggled to articulate their contributions to the learning and support of their U.S. counterparts. When asked to describe the contributions of West African faculty members within the partnership, one West African participant responded:

I don't know. Like I said we can provide support to our students but I am not sure what I can give to SSU ... a lot of these things like support come to countries that are not privileged you know, so what can I offer America? [...] So apart from maybe learning from us culturally, I don't know what else they (U.S.) can benefit from [us]. (Participant 5, West Africa)

In this partnership the deficit discourse was reinforced both by the U.S. faculty in describing themselves as experts and by the West African faculty who positioned themselves as needing support from and offering little to the partnership. As noted previously, while the material realities of African higher education indicate the need for capacity-building initiatives in a very practical form, this does not imply the absence of knowledge among African faculty. In contrast, they point to the importance of prefacing capacity building efforts with an acknowledgement of the role of U.S. and other Northern countries in the underdevelopment of African higher education even as these same countries engage in activities aimed at facilitating the redevelopment of Southern countries.

Presence of Discourse of Mutuality

Critical scholars note that collaboration between institutions in the North and South seldom occurs on equal terms (Pekol, 2017). While deficit discourse and the perception that the STEM-U faculty had little to offer their collaborators was present in the data, faculty members in both contexts also engaged in a discourse of mutuality. SSU faculty members described experiences of intercultural learning and offered suggestions regarding areas in which greater reciprocity in learning might be possible. In spite of the differences participants in our study identified, both institutions noted contributions that could or were made by their counterparts, albeit from differing positions of power and material conditions. Mutuality was particularly evident through intercultural learning. Both West African and U.S. faculty noted how learning about each other's systems of education was enlightening and beneficial for both faculty and students. While differences in strengths and resources were indeed apparent between the two institutions, this did not prevent mutual learning from occurring.

Several conditions described in the faculty narratives contribute to and enhance the potential for mutual learning. First, U.S. faculty members emphasized the importance of STEM-U's position as the top institution nationally and regionally in the area of STEM education. Second, U.S. faculty expressed a commitment to participating in the collaboration as 'global learners' and 'good citizens' not just to their university but as leaders within their professional fields. While this does not inherently or necessarily imply an awareness of or commitment to dismantling structures of inequality, it indicates an openness to deepening awareness and critically engaging with global issues. Faculty from both SSU and STEM-U acknowledged the opportunity for intercultural learning—not just for students but also for faculty participants—through the collaboration. Furthermore, several acknowledged the benefit of interdisciplinary conversations that occurred throughout their participation in the collaboration, indicating an appreciation for engaging in conversations that are not commonly encountered within the boundaries of their academic field.

Given these two conflicting discourses of deficit on one hand and mutuality on the other, we conclude by offering suggestions for consideration in building North-South partnerships that enhance mutuality and challenge deficit thinking even when significant differences in resources exist.

Toward a Critically Informed Approach to North-South Collaboration

The narratives of faculty members from West Africa and the U.S. presented above reflect the inequities of the global knowledge economy described throughout university partnership literature. At the same time, they highlight the value that collaborators from both contexts place on the opportunity for interdisciplinary and intercultural learning that partnerships afford. We argue that this tension between: (1) discourse that perpetuates inequality through the use of hierarchical language and emphasis on replication of U.S. institutional practices in West African contexts, and (2) discourse that acknowledges the presence and value of mutually beneficial interdisciplinary and intercultural learning offers several considerations for working toward greater reciprocity in North-South university partnerships. We conclude by providing three broad suggestions for how partnership implementers can make strides towards critically informed collaboration activities.

First and foremost, study findings demonstrate the importance of *framing all participants as learners* to counteract deeply ingrained and widely reinforced deficit discourses and expert-learner hierarchies. In postcolonial work, Homi Bhaba argues for the creation of third spaces that are new and separate from the existing structures and ideological and

cultural impositions that limit the individual's ability to imagine an alternative reality. The third space is a metaphorical construct in which "new meaning, ideas and understandings can emerge" (Martin & Wyness, 2013, p. 14). We suggest moving from a metaphorical to a physical space by creating structured opportunities for faculty participants to reflect on their own positionality and critically question the perspectives that dominate international development discourse. Although cultivating practices of critical engagement is time consuming and requires thoughtful facilitation, it provides an opportunity to challenge problematic discourses and lay the groundwork for reciprocity and mutuality in North-South partnerships. In the same way that scholars such as Alasuutari (2011) have advocated for the importance of such critical approaches to global education in schools, we argue for the importance of such approaches to global engagement within higher education and acknowledge that engaging faculty with such approaches is an ongoing process required to challenge inequitable discourses that continue to be present among participants in North-South partnerships.

Second, once critical intercultural learning is established as an overarching objective for partnership activities, *resources to deepen awareness among faculty members* from diverse disciplines regarding structural inequality in the global knowledge economy and the positionality of African institutions and faculty in processes of knowledge production must be identified. These resources could include expert speakers or articles and written pieces that illuminate the historical inequities of North-South partnerships to help readers understand the structural and ideological complexities of partnerships. This practice of challenging faculty to engage with conversations about structural inequalities and their positions and complacency aligns with Spivak's (1998) idea of unlearning privilege. Martin & Wyness (2013) describe unlearning privilege as a multifaceted process involving learning to unlearn, learning to listen, learning to learn and learning to reach out. While U.S. faculty interviewees expressed an appreciation for interdisciplinary and intercultural learning through the partnership, the language used throughout the interviews gave limited indications of engagement with such issues within their specific disciplines of engineering and business. Structuring moments of unlearning privilege into the program will ensure that these necessary critical self- and group reflections occur.

Finally, the findings raise important considerations for designing research partnerships, which partnership literature describes as especially challenging. While mutual learning and exchange was emphasized by participants in other domains of collaboration, descriptions of research collaboration capacity differentials and were fraught with deficit narratives. It is important to acknowledge that due to historical incidents, the domain of global knowledge production remains unequal thus solutions need to remain both cognizant and critical of this fact. One way to foster more equitable partnerships would be through *establishing relationships with peer institutions*. This thinking has led to more calls for South-South partnerships where partners facing similar challenges are able to learn from each other and share resources. However, often there remain limitations around research capacity required to successfully participate in the current global knowledge economy.

If participation in the current global knowledge economy remains the goal for Southern partners, establishing partnerships only with peer institutions will likely result in limited engagement with the North. Instead, we argue that identifying areas in which participants might *engage on a more equal footing* may provide a more practical solution. In our study while research capacity was viewed as largely unequal, conversations around context specific pedagogy and innovation in teaching methods with available resources provided a mutual learning opportunity. Leveraging these conversations and engaging in research around those areas may provide an opportunity to foster capacity building and global awareness for both Northern and Southern

partners. Regardless of partnership type, it is important that these relationships foster critical reflection on the inequitable dynamics that exist within the global knowledge economy by prioritizing the creation of third spaces, as discussed previously.

Conclusion

This article examines the complex ways in which disparities within the global knowledge economy are reflected in the inequitable discourses among participants in North-South university collaborations and reflects on the implications for working toward mutually beneficial and transformative partnership practice. When analyzed through a postcolonial lens, interviews with faculty participants reveal a tension between the ways in which these discourses perpetuate unequal power dynamics while at the same time highlighting opportunities to cultivate greater mutuality through efforts to intentionally reflect on this discourse and reframe partnership activities. The value that faculty participants placed on intercultural and interdisciplinary learning indicates a space of possibility for deepening awareness of inequalities within the current global knowledge economy and suggests important directions for how international partnerships are conceptualized, implemented and discussed.

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