

Multi-Institutional Partnerships for Higher Education in Africa: A Case Study of Assumptions of International Academic Collaboration

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Abstract

Public and private universities in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, South Africa, and elsewhere in Africa, were experiencing all time high enrollments since the late 1990s. To address these demands, university administrators sought partnerships with universities of the global North to facilitate the necessary educational reform and curriculum transformation to meet the needs of the increased enrollments. In spite of these efforts, in the past 10 years the partnerships failed to meet expectations. A case approach was used to study reports, journals, interview notes, surveys, and qualitative data collected during 2007 – 2012 from one university selected purposely to shed light on partnerships and linkages with African universities. The authors examined the expectations, dynamics, and intricacies of academic partnerships and the reality of African academic institutions. The analysis revealed perplexing assumptions that undergird the expectations of collaboration between U.S. and African partners as well as cross-cultural dynamics that govern, sustain, and sometimes frustrate such engagements.

Keywords: Higher education, Partnerships, Linkages, Academic collaboration

1. Introduction

Partnerships in education and development have been described as mutually beneficial relationships between two or more institutions, including businesses, industries, universities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), school systems, and service organizations (Alpert, 2009). Terms like higher education partnership, institutional linkages, and academic collaboration have appeared in comparative and international education literature but there have been few systematic and critical studies to examine such relationships (e.g., Hamrita, 2011; Williams et al., 2011; Witt, 2010). The assumption of such bilateral or multilateral relationships was that academic institutions agree to cooperate to advance their mutual interests. In spite of advances made by European and United States (U.S.) universities and foundations in the past 10 years, partnerships have not yielded tangible outcomes and in many instances have not lived up to expectations (Jowett & Dyer, 2012; Wiley & Root, 2003).

Some skeptics argue substandard outcomes had to do with inequalities within such partnerships. That is, partnerships involving disenfranchised peoples or rural communities in countries of the global South were not mutually beneficial but rather largely benefited the priorities and the production of knowledge of the partner(s) in the global North (Kothari, 2001). In fact, multi-institutional partnerships and international academic collaboration with African public universities were not new, and in recent decades, overall, cross-national collaborations with U.S. Universities were on the rise (Cogburn & Levinson, 2003; Witt, 2010). Some scholars speculate further that the worldwide expansion of international knowledge and linkages was spurred as recently as 2003 by the altered conditions across the globe resulting from expanded globalization and the sense of heightened international conflict after 9/11, followed by the Iraq war (Wiley & Root, 2003).

A case study approach was used to examine reports, journals, interview notes, survey, and qualitative data collected from 2007 – 2012 in one university selected purposely to shed light on partnerships and linkages with African universities. The goal was to expose the dynamics and intricacies of academic partnerships and the reality of African academic institutions. The analysis disclosed the challenging assumptions that undergirded expectations on both sides—the U.S. University and the African universities—as well as the dynamics that governed and sustained such engagements. This paper's intention was to share with readers a response to the call from African university administrators who wanted to partner with a U.S. university. The analysis aimed to illuminate this topic, expose intricacies involved in negotiating partnerships, and shed light on the dynamics of what makes a successful collaboration effort that allows partners to focus energy and resources to produce strategic outcomes and establish sustainable collaborations. The individuals or universities studied were not named.

2. Background of the Research Problem and Context

The educational reforms and the pursuit of partnerships came after many years of neglect resulting from the economic down turn of the 1970s, the socialist policies, and the outright preference of donors to fund primary education at the expense of higher education. Global policies introduced by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and implemented by African governments shifted funds and resources to primary education, placing the burden of higher education costs on the institution and the individual (Parker, 2010). Only lately, ambitious programs like the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals have encouraged those benefactors to view universities as critical to Africa's economic and social development, particularly in such key areas as agriculture and engineering (United Nations, 2010). At a time now when African university applicants were at their highest, institutions were unable to provide students with the necessary resources to succeed. Table 1 depicts a selected number of partnerships with African universities.

Table 1. Spread of African Universities and Their Level of Engagement

Country	Host Institution	Country	U.S. Institution	Date of Award	Funding Award (USD)	Cost Contribution (USD)	Share
Ghana	University of Cape Coast	of	University System of Georgia	2000	100 000	27 000	
Kenya	University of Nairobi, Kenya ^a	of	Tufts University School of Medicine	2003	125 000	71 000	
Democratic Republic of the Congo	University of Mbuji Mayi	of	University of Northern Illinois	2004	100 000	64 000	
Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda	Makerere University, Egerton		The Ohio State University	2005	800 000	310 000	

Note: ^a The collaboration built an Internet-based, interactive curriculum to improve public health in Kenya.

Source: Appendix B, HED/USAID Higher Education Partnerships in Africa, 1997-2007

Ideally, the possibilities of engagement were limitless for academicians collaborating internationally with colleagues in other institutions and settings. Among other benefits, the principal expectation was that international partnerships provide professional development opportunities for faculty and administrators, interaction among students, enhancements to the curriculum, increased effectiveness in achieving educational goals, and even provide efficiencies that result in financial savings (Cogburn & Levinson, 2003).

During the last decade, a flurry of memoranda of understanding (MOUs) were signed between the U.S. university studied in this article and universities in 17 African countries to collaborate at different levels of involvement in teaching, service learning, and research by connecting to international networks through the use of advanced technology. This rush was further encouraged by the view contained in the declaration of higher education as a vital development tool and on the basis of which multilateral and bilateral regimes, foundations, and other development partners had a change of heart and were to favorably support the sector, though still with constrained enthusiasm as the latest African Commission Report (2010) had indicated.

Lately, partnerships were favorably viewed as being vital for capacity building in teaching, learning, and research. Ideally, joint research activities have played an important role in fostering research capacity, nurturing research culture, pushing the frontiers of knowledge, as well as being used as a tool for benchmarking quality. In the United States, by expanding, and deepening higher education linkages abroad, U.S. higher education could increase the quality of international education at all levels of education in U.S. institutions. This renewed cooperation between continents pushed to the front the need for research studies on partnership dynamics between donor agencies, Western universities, and African higher education institutions.

3. Literature Review and Theoretical Assumptions

The authors found theories about partnerships were as slippery as the definition of the practice. The term “partnership” conjures up a variety of significations, including cooperation, collaboration, linkage, and so on. King (1991, p. 171) suggested that there was a double role of partnerships in higher education which tended to include (a) forms of development cooperation to lead to further internationalization of their own higher education systems; and (b) concept of institutional building leading to inter-institutional linkage—linkage between institutions for higher education in the global North and in the global South. Gronski and Pigg (2000) defined partnerships within a collaborative approach as an “interactive process among individuals and organizations with diverse expertise and resources, joining together to devise and execute plans for common goals as well as to generate solutions for complex problems” (p. 783). Samoff and Carrol (2002, p. 44) distinguished partnership from foreign aid and situated the relationship as one of mutual benefits, empowerment, sovereignty, and capacity development for both institutions. Scholars Tedrow and Mabokela (2007) took an organizational approach to the definition of partnership to conclude that organizations were dynamic entities comprised of shared values, beliefs, and ideologies. These shared characteristics often bound organizations but also became problematic to minority views and those who wielded less power within the organizations’ framework.

An abundance of literature on partnerships between non-profit organizations and higher education institutions in Africa is available (Morfit, Gore, & Akridge, 2009; Lewis, Friedman, & Schonenboom, 2010). This literature typically focused on the initial goals and objectives of the partnership, areas funded, and the outcomes of the identified projects. Very little information exists in regards to partner dynamics and the perceptions of the actors involved. Consequently, literature discussing academic institution perceptions and dynamics was quite sparse. Scholars (Fisher & Lindow, 2008; Holm & Malet, 2010; Samoff & Carrol, 2002) on academic partnerships defined the perceptions and dynamics of their collaborative interactions but the specific details that characterized the partnership between faculty members was limited. Thus, this research built on these scholars’ work and added to the limited body of knowledge on understanding global North faculty perceptions of working with their counterparts in the global South.

Next, the authors examined contemporary forces that influence current attitudes, funding and intergroup relationships among university partners. A probe of the literature identified four areas: (1) neoliberalism, (2) globalization, (3) the brain drain dilemma, (4) and university research and publishing imperative.

3.1 Neoliberalism in African Higher Education

Neoliberalism in its most simplistic definition described a market-driven approach to economic and social policy based on neoclassical theories of economics that stressed the efficiency of private enterprise, liberalized trade, and relatively open markets, and therefore sought to maximize the role of the corporate sector in determining the political and economic priorities of the state. These policies have played a significant role in the development of sub-Saharan Africa’s higher educational policy. Significant resources directed towards higher education in the 1960s (often stated as the golden age of African Higher Education) were to rapidly increase development as the newly independent African countries struggled to catch a globalizing world after years of colonization. Subsequent decades saw the financing of higher education institutions shift as government subsidies were cut in the name of privatization and aid organizations such as the World Bank and the IMF began to focus their support on funding primary or basic education. For example, according to Bloom, Canning & Chan (2006):

From 1985 to 1989, 17 per cent of the World Bank’s worldwide education-sector spending was on higher education. But from 1995 to 1999, the proportion allotted to higher education declined to just 7 per cent. Higher education in Africa has suffered from such reductions in spending. Many African countries struggle to maintain even low enrollment levels, and the academic research output in the region is among the world’s lowest. (p. iii)

This explanation however did not alleviate culpability of the nation-state in regard to higher education funding. As the Task Force on Higher Education (2000) pointed out, mismanagement of funds and corruption of government officials has influenced spending on higher education as well. The Taskforce reported:

Most public universities are highly dependent on central governments for their financial resources. Tuition fees are often negligible or non-existent, and attempts to increase their level encounter major resistance. Even when tuition fees are collected, the funds often bypass the university and go directly into the coffers on ministries of finance or central revenue departments. Budgets must typically be approved by government officials, who may have little understanding of higher education in general, of the goals and capabilities of a particular university, or of the local context in which it operates. (p. 25)

Obviously not the only factors currently impacting Africa's higher education institutions, neoliberal policies and government mismanagement have resulted in a lack of funding, creating endemic problems for these institutions and in turn pushed universities to seek external assistance and engage in entrepreneurial endeavors.

3.2 Globalization and its Impact on Institutional Change

Another noticeable force in the struggle to expand higher education was the impact of globalization. Based on western values of competition, efficiency, cost effectiveness, accountability, and entrepreneurial growth (Ritzer, 2003), globalization brought multiple diverse economies, political systems, countries, and cultures across the world into one single free market economic structure. Generally not viewed as a positive force by higher education scholars, globalization outcomes included diminished government support for education, the privatization of services or outsourcing of services, a competitive marketplace orientation to recruit and serve students as customers, and "vocationalization" of curricula that provides education for specific jobs rather than an individual development focus (Clark, 1998, pp. 3-8; Levin, 2001, pp. xvii-xxiii).

In the current climate of economic liberalization, propagation of democratic institutions, the imperatives of globalization had inevitably penetrated and shaped institutional change, which in turn framed academic partnerships to accommodate enterprises that made money including hosting study abroad programs and establishing centers to attract students from Northern universities to study African languages, cultural history, environmental sciences, etc. A number of African universities, many in South Africa, along with a handful of foreign colleges and foundations, were pooling resources to develop new ways to turn out more Ph.D.'s in Africa using economies of scale as a means to contain their runaway budgets. More foreign universities and donors needed to step in, they said, because Africa simply could not solve the problem on its own. Between a quarter and half of all staff positions at African universities were typically vacant, according to William Saint, a specialist in African higher education who formerly worked for the World Bank. The sheer number of scholars needed was "mind-boggling," Saint wrote (Lindow, 2009).

3.3 Brain Drain vs. Brain Gain Dilemma

A third force was the impact of brain drain facing African higher education. Over the past 20 or more years, African universities have been challenged by their limited ability to keep their professors and students from leaving the continent and never returning to Africa to work. This "brain-drain" phenomenon had serious implications for developing countries in regards to retaining home-grown knowledge for the betterment of their own society(s). According to Carrington & Detragiache (1999):

One important implication of the brain drain is that investment in education in a developing country may not lead to faster economic growth if a large number of its highly educated people leave the country. Also, efforts to reduce specific skill shortages through improved educational opportunities may be largely futile unless measures are taken to offset existing incentives for highly educated people to emigrate. (p. 46)

Leaving African universities with a severe shortage of faculty members, the high-level flow of expertise leaving higher education to enter the private or governmental sector cited better pay and/or working conditions, access to technology resources, health care provisions, and fringe benefits such as access to bank loans, vacation package or personal time off. For example, Wondimu (as cited by Teferra & Altbach, 2004) described

the large number of Ethiopian academic staff who quit their teaching profession to take other jobs or go abroad for training or other reasons and do not come back. Though the number varies from institution to institution, the estimate of brain drain from Ethiopian universities might be as much as 50 percent. (p. 43)

Staying in higher education often required holding more than one job outside of the university to supplement the income. This situation not only led to poor morale but also hindered their ability to effectively teach, perform scholarly research, and publish in quality peer-reviewed journals.

3.4 Research, Publishing Imperative, and Physical Environment

With contributing variables such as war, political and civil unrest, government corruption, and a lack of funding based on policy decisions, African higher education faced many challenges: lack of up-to-date journals and libraries, diminishing publishing opportunities, meager resources to support faculty productivity and cutting-edge research, and poor connectivity infrastructure. And most of all, universities lacked the capacity to accommodate a growing student population seeking admissions. “In virtually all African countries, demand for access to higher education is growing, straining the resources of higher education institutions” (Teferra and Altbach, 2004, p. 25). Libraries were not being maintained and science laboratories were overused or without necessary supplies and equipment; a strain was placed on the physical facilities, supplies, and remaining staff (Sunal & Haas, 1998). It was not uncommon for only a few textbooks to be available and borrowing limits to be imposed to use books only in the library. The cyclical effect of the inability to capture additional funds from accepted students created a continuous budget shortage, deepening the resource constraint problem and added to the important fourth force, lack of funding.

Given the grim situation with most African universities not having resources to support research at their universities, African scholars were severely handicapped to succeed in competing for research funds in the world of knowledge creation and knowledge economy. Serious inequalities were introduced in the North and South university partnerships. As Teffera & Altbach (2004), state:

By all measures, research and publishing activities in Africa are in critical condition. The general state of research in Africa is extremely poor, and its research infrastructure is inadequate. Scarcity of laboratory equipment, chemicals, and other scientific paraphernalia; a small number of high-level experts; poor and dilapidated libraries; alarmingly low and declining salaries of academic and research staff; a massive brain drain out of the academic institutions; the “expansion” of undergraduate education; poor oversight of research applicability; and declining, nonexistent, and unreliable sources of research funds all remain major hurdles to the development of research capacity across the continent. (p. 38)

This inability for professors and students to research and review quality journals deeply impacted all university participants and hindered opportunities to inform scholarly research and publish new knowledge. Professors’ capabilities were limited in the research they could perform, thus, the intake and transfer of new knowledge was stalled, restricting production of ideas to aid the developing society. Furthermore, within an emerging competitive global society, African professors were unable to secure grants and funding for research that could benefit both the institution and African society as a whole, leading to professors leaving African institutions.

4. Research Methods and Findings

The present case study examined the dynamics and intricacies of academic partnerships and the reality of African academic institutions from the perspective of university faculty members within a large research institution in the United States. Applying grounded theory research techniques, the present study revealed the study’s themes based on the findings to generate a theory from the data to explain the dynamics and intricacies through constant comparative methods within the partnerships (Conrad, 1978). Geertz (1973) prescribed in this method that notes and data must be read and reread to interpret and uncover key themes. This reflective practice and analysis revealed basic assumptions of partnerships with African universities. Using Holm and Maleté’s (2010) challenging assumptions as baseline questions, faculty involved in partnerships with African universities were interviewed to determine whether or not these challenging assumptions ring true in their international collaborations. Key themes from the literature were examined on a deeper level: (a) the historical and socio-cultural traditions of a land-grant university that impact inter-group relations; (b) organizational culture of global programs; and (c) globalization framework (i.e., perspectives and overall practices of international exchanges, theory, and its impact on institutional change). These frameworks were used to understand cultural differences and how they impact the success and sustainability of international partnership programs.

4.1 Research Design

This case study approach was selected due to the defined boundaries of the participants and the particular topic being researched (Creswell, 2007, p. 74). The steps taken were to: (a) define a problem; (b) review literature for historical context of problem and current research on problem; (c) select participants; (d) schedule interviews and observation with participants; (e) conduct interviews and observations; (f) transcribe interview data; (g) analyze and report outcomes. Permission was received from the university’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to any contact with potential study participants.

4.2 Participants

Participants for this study were defined and purposely selected; participants had to be currently employed by the university and partnered with an African colleague on a project within the last five years (2007-2012). Potential participants were identified by researching the university's website and from a list provided by the university. An email request for participation with an IRB approved consent form was sent to each of the 15 potential participants outlining the focus of the research. Eight chose to participate in the study, three did not fit the sample profile, and four did not respond.

4.3 Limitations

Participants were purposely chosen for this study from one large public research university in the northeastern United States. Participants who represented a different type of institution (e.g., small liberal arts college or private university) might have had different perceptions of their partnerships in Africa. The aim of this study was to understand the assumptions characterizing the partnership between the participants and their African counterparts.

4.4 Method of Data Collection: Interviews

To understand the foundation of qualitative research and essentials in understanding how participants view their world (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p. 176), researchers conducted structured interviews with open-ended questions to uncover the assumptions and perceptions of university faculty and their partnership effectiveness with African faculty. Questions were designed to determine whether or not the challenging assumptions outlined by Holm and Maleté (2010) rang true. Following the guidelines established by Creswell (2007), an audio recording device was tested prior to the interview and an interview protocol was created, tested, and refined (p. 133). The one hour interviews were conducted one-on-one in the participants' offices. The location was chosen primarily to accommodate the participants and enabled the researchers to "develop a level of detail about the individual or place and to be highly involved in actual experiences of the participants" (Creswell, 2003, p. 181). For example, the interview of one participant from the Integrative Arts department revealed adornment of the office with African art, colorful tapestries, and a shelf full of books on Africa. This small glimpse into the individual's working environment created a broader sense of the person's relationship with Africa.

4.5 Observation

Systemic poverty issues and lack of reliable technical and communication infrastructure and connectivity at times hampered the ability to partner and collaborate. These systemic issues created a tension between partners in their approach to collaboration. Although this research project did not avail itself to direct observation of all participants working with their counterparts in Africa, the tension created by lack of connectivity and technology issues of one participant's interaction with a colleague in Mozambique via Skype technology was observed.

An email was sent to the colleague in Mozambique requesting a schedule change to their regular meeting time of one hour later than the original time. Confirmation was never received from the colleague. The participant logged into Skype at the new meeting time. While waiting twenty minutes before the colleague signed on, the participant's facial expressions and tone of voice communicated frustration. After brief cordial conversation, the colleague mentioned that the network had been down for over two weeks. As they conversed, concern related to task progress was expressed; the associated project deliverables schedule and project scope were visible on the desk. The colleague was receptive of the questions but could not provide definitive answers. Furthermore, the technology supporting the conversation became problematic. Four disconnections stalled the discussion points and created a disjointed conversation. After, the participant threw up both hands as if to say, "What were you going to do?" The observations recorded in the field notes reflected the participants resigned look of frustration. These communication conditions presented an obstacle to both participants attempting to accomplish their collaborative tasks.

4.6 Researcher Positionality

Prior to conducting any interviews, the researchers reflected on researcher positionality and personal assumptions. As Sword (1999) stated, "Although some would criticize the subjectivity that is inherent in interpretive work, no research is free of the biases, assumptions, and personality of the researcher; we cannot separate self from those activities in which we are intimately involved" (p. 277). Some of the researchers had never traveled to Africa, thus the media primarily shaped their perceptions of the Continent. The researchers shared thoughts of Africa as a place riddled with disease, corruption, and underdevelopment and how these thoughts influenced perceptions of Western academic relationships with African universities. The researchers understood Western involvement in Africa as either a land grab by corporate entities or some form of altruistic charity. Sometimes the researchers found themselves internally asking the question, "Why Africa?" Not part of the original interview protocol, the question was added to

discover why faculty members chose to work in Africa and for the researchers to change individual frames of reference and question underlying assumptions.

Of the participants interviewed, three were faculty members in the African American Studies department and were African. Based on personal perceptions of Africa, the researchers had an expectation that the three participants would talk favorably of working in Africa. This perception did not shape the interview protocol or the analysis of data other than the researchers were very surprised by their answers! What became apparent was that these faculty members were much less forgiving of some of the transgressions of their African counterparts than others who had been interviewed.

4.7 Data Analysis

According to Bogdan and Biklen (1998), “analysis involves working with data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, synthesizing, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what story you will tell others” (p. 157). The data was collected from six structured interviews and transcribed verbatim into 45 pages of text. A line-by-line analysis of the text was conducted in order to generate categories and themes within each category. The text from each category and theme was grouped and analyzed to determine any patterns.

4.8 Findings

Four themes emerged from the line-by-line analysis of the transcribed data as determinants for a successful relationship between participants and their African counterparts: (a) Expertise; (b) Infrastructure; (c) Incentives; and (d) Patience. These themes reflected the participants lived experiences in partnering with African faculty. Included below are thick, rich quotations that lend further validation to the findings.

4.8.1 Theme One: Expertise

Two of the assumptions put forth by Holm and Malet (2010) were that developed countries’ academics understand what needs to be researched in Africa and possess the knowledge that needs to be transferred to the universities in the developing world. This might have led to the assumption that a top-down, expert approach from the developed to the developing was the best approach for successful partnering. The participants had a different understanding of their role as “expert” as it related to their collaborative efforts.

One participant noted the implicit effects of the brain drain:

So when you go to Guyana they may have some human capital and even then there you will find it is limited. Maybe limited to education or sociology, but not in engineering. You know not science. Not technology and here for example you know with my friend in the history department in Guyana, they have three full time faculty. My friend is the only professor who has a Ph.D. The other two are master’s students that he taught. See and that is a whole department.

Similar to the statement above, another participant stated:

Because believe me most of them they don’t do research that much. Not because they don’t want to, but the greater part of it is one my friend for example he teaches his history class.... See they don’t have enough faculty. So one person.... I mean he is teaching about 1,500. 1,500. Everyone wants to survive. So they are more interested in the economic survival and they and their families you see. Not getting into some academic journal.

Another participant shared similar thoughts on writing the grant proposal:

Well the way it works and this is just a way our funding programs operated. Even though I would like to put together a collaborative proposal the truth is we write it. We write it. We have access to the literature. We know what is in the 2012 articles. Many of the Guyanese universities and in Tanzania it is a little better. They don’t have access to science directives. They are not up to date on the recent debates. Especially if they are interdisciplinary, then, their system does not allow that freedom to engage in these interdisciplinary debates.

The participants did not think their own knowledge was any greater than their African counterparts. Rather, they understood the resource constraints that limited their partners’ abilities to contribute to the more technical aspects of the project. This did not mean that the African counterparts were not consulted on or did not collaborate in this process. As a participant noted:

You have more information and more resources than they do. So you need to dictate by providing comprehensive information in the beginning. They can take from it what they want to take ... and then, add what they can add.

4.8.2 Theme Two: Infrastructure

All of the participants spoke of structural issues as an unpredictable influence on the partnership. While most agreed that these issues impacted effective communications and were at times a source of frustration, they understood that this was just part of the process of working in the global South.

As long as the electricity was on and it goes down. You cannot predict it. Sometimes even when I was in residence for the two years, that would be a week to ten days to sometimes two weeks without electricity and if there were problems with water and that did happen when some pipes or some issues with water coming into *. Nobody had water. So those kinds of things got in the way of.... While I was there I could deal with it because I could lecture and so forth, but without electricity you cannot work at the computer nor could I show them the slides.

They had no access on campus or the *. The students all had to go like five, six, seven miles if they wanted to Skype and pay for an Internet café to do it. So logistically nothing was happening between the students, my communication with the faculty.

E-mail is always a problem but you just work with it. Yes sometimes it is annoying when they don't answer for a week but we know that and we work around it. If there is something urgent, I know I can call. Everybody has a cell phone.

4.8.3 Theme Three: Incentives

Colonial legacy, Neoliberal economic policies, and the impact of globalization on institutional change triggered a crisis in African higher education, the effects of which were still prevalent during early 21st Century. The participants acknowledged that with grant money being controlled by the university it was imperative to incentivize their African counterparts. They further acknowledged that without financial incentives their African counterparts misinterpret the partnership equality and limit full participation.

One participant stated in regards to a lack of financial support for their African counterpart:

So yes the logistics. There wasn't any incentive for them to participate. It was new. It was.... They saw the value of it, but then the whole concept of customer engagement and community engagement was not what they were about at all.

Another participant stated:

So I would think first and foremost and in my experience there has to be some income generated. They have to receive money for it. There has to be a sense of ownership on their part.

Finally, a participant acknowledged the need to distribute funds to the African counterpart with the caveat only once the work has been completed:

If there was that reward or incentive then, but don't make the mistake of giving the money first. Ah, ha if you give the money first, no. No you will not get the work. You won't get the work. Just tell them that this is the amount that you will get out of it, but at the end of the work.

4.8.4 Theme Four: Patience

The last theme determined in the analysis was the cultural understanding of time and the need for patience:

That makes it exciting at the same time, but it is almost in contradiction to how we structure and who we are here at *. A very structured place. You know what is going to happen and you know when it is going to happen and it works like clockwork. So how do you work in an unpredictable situation and then try to sustain that situation? You have to understand the African way of thinking and the African way of functioning. After two years there I learned to hurry up and wait.

Okay when somebody says you are going to do something, get ready and you gear up and then you have to be prepared to wait until they come to do it or to be involved. That is a different kind of thinking than what we have.

So for example like you, if you didn't know their society and you partnered with somebody there, you will find that you might think, oh yes, okay, we will do this and we will do that and we will do that and you got to be joking. You need to be very patient and understanding otherwise you will be frustrated.

It is just part of it, you build that in and if you get upset then you should not work in Africa. It is not reasonable. You just live with it.

The participants acknowledged that the concept of time and the "African" way can be a source of frustration. They learned to work around it and enriched their own lives by participating in a different culture.

5. Discussion

Examination of current attitudes, funding and intergroup relationships among university partners began with a probe of the literature which identified four areas: (1) neoliberalism, (2) globalization, (3) the brain drain dilemma, (4) and the tension between lack of funding for university research and the publishing imperative. The researchers identified four themes that emerged from the study: expertise, infrastructure, incentives, and patience; each of which had an imprint of unyielding legacy of colonialism and dependency, including social and cultural sways.

5.1 Influence of Colonialism on Institutional Partnerships

Challenges related to institutional partnerships were not isolated and grew out of colonial legacies, which have stubbornly persisted and refused to go away. This theme was central to the overarching climate of university governance and administration. The continuous dependence on outside financial help and material resources was pervasive. The data showed that “dependency” on external funding, personnel, donations of books for the library and other equipment was deeply-rooted. Such long-term dependency was responsible for much of the inertia and lack of follow-up to the initial euphoria of signing Memoranda of Agreement (MOUs) and subsequent collaboration.

This situation explains why the realities of international linkages and affiliations sometimes were perceived as disappointing. Samoff & Carrol (2002) provided a comprehensive analysis of partnerships among U.S. and African academics and administrators during 1995-1999; the period, they argued, when the history of partnerships between universities in the global North and the poorer global South countries were problematic. They showed that affiliations, linkages, and partnerships followed an inequitable model that was engrained in the colonial legacy of dependency. The colonial relationships between institutions of the colonizer and the colonized nations were designed for intellectual domination.

The colonial relationship was reflected (as cited in Samoff & Carrol, 2002), for example, in 1961 in the University College of Ibadan, Nigeria’s largest institution, when it appointed more faculty members in Classics than any other department, offered drama from Shakespeare but seldom from African playwrights, and had almost no faculty expertise or research in agriculture. The post-colonial relationships of Third World universities with premier sponsoring universities in the global North continued the pattern that denied autonomy to the institutions of the global South. The most important of the colonial powers in Africa, Britain and France, for example, have left by far the greatest lasting impact, not only in terms of the organization of the universities and ties to the global North but also in the language of instruction, communication, connectivity, supply of instructors, and teaching materials, including textbooks (Brock-Utne, 2001).

Researchers (e.g., Ajayi, Goma & Johnson, 1996; Teferra & Altbach, 2004; Assié-Lumumba, 2006; Coker-Kolo, 2009) have argued that the policies implemented during the colonial reign defined common elements of higher education for the African society. Throughout the colonies, instruction was taught in European languages (e.g., English, French, or Portuguese), a policy that still impacts African higher education in significant ways today (Brock-Utne, 2001). Finally, those countries that established their own institutions were often funded by European countries, which compromised their autonomy in terms of curriculum development, policies, disciplines and management (Coker-Kolo, 2009).

In sum, the elements of a colonial education and their overriding impact on African higher education were crucial to understanding the crisis that African higher education experienced in early 21st Century. The underlying assumption was that as practitioners sought to understand the dynamics of what made a successful collaboration effort or the basis on which partnerships were formed, they tended instead to focus more time, energy, and resources to producing strategic outcomes and recommendations on how to improve university education, institutional research, and sustainable collaborations. Colonialism seemed to influence the need for patience and incentives within the institutional partnerships the researchers studied.

5.2 Social and Cultural Environments of University Partnerships in Africa

The second overarching theme reflects the socio-cultural influences on partnerships. The ominous forces impacting African scholarship at universities provided a partial picture of the African reality relative to their position in partnerships with U.S. and European universities. Neoliberal economic policies in higher education, the impact of globalization on institutional change, the rampant brain drain, and lack of productive research and publishing—collectively put any partnership on unequal footing.

This study revealed that scholars from the North countries were socialized with very different work habits, remuneration and benefits packages, research traditions, and constantly reminded of the “publish or perish” imperative. This imperative is continuously enforced in U.S. universities through annual career evaluations and a

rigorous tenure process. By comparison, scholars at universities in the global South lack similar incentives. The majority of them work at public universities which rely on government salaries and a heavy teaching load with little or no research scholarship requirement. Because of low salaries, faculty members are compelled to seek supplementary incomes from consulting fees, petty trade and other means to survive.

Under such circumstances, time management becomes problematic. “There are not enough hours in the day to do all the required tasks: teaching, grading, advising, research, committee service, and more. Obviously, something has to give,” a member of one African university lamented. An examination of résumés of African faculty members submitted for joint grant proposals to USAID revealed high percentages of their publications were reports submitted to Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) or multilateral entities, rather than books or peer reviewed articles published in known journals of their disciplines. These practices have been in place for a long time, but the trends are shifting with more administrators paying attention to scholarship in recent years and insisting on rankings of universities in countries where private and public universities are competing for government loans and bursaries for their new admissions and frequent evaluations for accreditation purposes.

Partnerships are difficult under such circumstances where there is disparity in the distribution of resources, research and publishing opportunities. The state of African higher education due to decades of disregard had created a sense of urgency amongst Western universities and donor agencies to help build capacity for a strong higher education system as fundamental to economic development and growth. This recognition has led to an increase in collaborative relationships between Western countries and Africa. In April 2000, Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Rockefeller, Ford, and MacArthur foundations joined together to help strengthen African higher education, recognizing that universities play a critical role in efforts to reduce poverty and stimulate economic and social development (Partnership for Higher Education in Africa, 2000). As Fischer & Lindow (2008) note:

American universities and other partners say they are determined to build long-term relationships that will allow African universities to guide their nations in this century...partnerships, which could involve multiple institutions, would focus on critical fields such as agriculture, health care, and teacher training. They would also seek to strengthen the African collaborators in areas like institutional management, fund-raising capacity, and faculty and curriculum development. (p. 21)

The renewed commitment energized the climate for partnerships immensely and subsequent recognition by African governments partly explained recent wave expansions of linkages with African Universities and levels of engagement, including collaborative teaching and academic exchanges. Recognition of the expertise of African partners, increased understanding of the limitations of the infrastructure in place in Africa, and the planning for incentives help to expand the engagement within the partnership and increase the probability of success of the goals set forth when creating the partnership.

5.3 Challenges to Collaborations with African Universities

A third theme that emerged from this study has to do with poor infrastructure of African universities. It is difficult to fathom how serious teaching, research and outreach can take place at some African universities where the infrastructure is old and crumbling, government bursaries dwindling, and lack of up-to-date libraries, books, journals, photocopying machines, computers, access to broadband Internet and so on. Under these circumstances it would seem like partnering with universities of the North might mitigate some of the adverse conditions or contribute insights toward solutions, even if short-term.

The first major effort to help African universities was spearheaded in 2000 by an association of major U.S. foundations known as “The Partnership for Higher Education in Africa.” The foundations focused on eight universities and funded both individual universities and collective projects concerned with capacity building. After ten years, the endeavor ended with the foundations individually continuing to promote African university development (Lewis, Friedman, & Schoneboom, 2010). Outside of some substantial aid given in the area of web access and educational technology, the achievements were not yet apparent. An outcome of mixed results was likely similar to projects focused on promoting the development of other African institutions (Gwin, 2008).

Overall, higher education was repeatedly positioned by the international community as a central site for facilitating the skills, knowledge, and expertise that were essential to economic and social development in low-income countries (Roberts, 2005; UNESCO, 2003; World Bank, 2010; Bloom et al, 2005; Commission for Africa, 2005). Globally, there were concerns about access and specifically who gained entry to higher education and whether some socio-economic groups were persistently marginalized (World Bank, 2010). Newfound educational opportunities for African women were offered; full partners developed in the process of improving public services and governance,

stepping in to expand the pool of skilled professionals entering national and local government. To accomplish these goals, African universities had benefited from partnerships (See World Bank, 2010, Figure 3.11 Assistance from the Partnership for Higher Education in Africa, 2000-08).

In a report, *Educational Partnerships with Foreign Institutions for Increasing the Quality of International Education in the United States*, Wiley and Root (2003) outlined partnership expectations implied in international conversations and guidelines, suggesting the road map for successful partnerships between the U.S. and other powerful nations with colleges, technical institutes, and universities in Africa as well as to relationships of individual research scholars with their foreign colleagues and study abroad programs. The expectations assumed that partners would commit to some principles such as:

- 1) Work with a deepened understanding of each other.
- 2) Be clear about goals of the partnership.
- 3) Commit internal funding to the partnership, not only grant funds
- 4) Build for the long-term.
- 5) Seek broad support from both relevant faculty and administrative leaders.
- 6) Make decisions collaboratively.
- 7) Operate with written agreements.
- 8) Have transparency on allocating all funding and other resources.
- 9) Address openly the problems of inequality of resources between the partners.
- 10) Have transparency on all issues of power and decision-making.
- 11) Be constant in the goals of the partnership.

(See Wiley & Root, 2003, Appendix A: Guidelines of Best Practices for Partnerships). The principles were a work in progress, but represented a consensus of a considerable number of scholars in the U.S. and Africa (p. 4).

The meager outcomes were the result in part of a set of assumptions underlying outreach by global North institutions to Africa, part of the global South (Holm and Malet, 2010). Some of these assumptions, though sometimes tacit and not explicit, were obviously unrealistic but nevertheless governed the partnership negotiations and dialogue. The assumptions were:

- 1) Developed country academics know what needed to be researched in Africa. The primary role of African colleagues was to organize and carry out data collection and lobby for research permits.
- 2) Developed country scholars knew the curriculum and knowledge, which should have been transferred to universities in the developing world.
- 3) Top-down was the way to get things done at universities in developing countries.
- 4) African universities or their students and academic staff could mobilize sufficient funds to take care of significant project costs.
- 5) Projects with third world countries were best done through multilateral arrangements.
- 6) No equality could exist among First and Third World universities because the funds originate in the First World and must be controlled by those obtaining the grants.
- 7) Top quality universities in Europe and America and their academic staff members could only join projects with students and staff from institutions of comparable quality.
- 8) Risks of health and safety were too great for First World students and staff.
- 9) African staff training could be done in short term workshops.

In spite of some advances made in the past ten years of the foundation grants, in many cases, partnerships did not simply live up to expectations for a number of reasons: from insignificant financial resources to weak logistical support, from poor planning to substandard execution, from bad policy to cumbersome guidelines, from unstable leadership to inconsistent follow up.

7. Conclusion

The disparate literature of the challenges regarding academic partnerships in higher education was assessed to determine best practices, qualities or actions that should serve as guidance and lessons in the future. This case study examined the assumptions that existed within university partnerships when scholars engaged in academic collaboration between global North and African universities. The research revealed a complexity of relationships that were tangled around the emergent issues regarding expertise in institutional research, infrastructure, incentives for scholarship work connected to partnerships and patience to accommodate disparities in work habits, time management and academic competence. The study also revealed how the relationships engendered delicate dynamics of cooperation with African universities within a situation of vastly unequal distribution of resources between the partners' institutions. Assessments of current expansions of university linkages with African universities contain a variety of scale, forms, and levels of engagement including increasing collaborative teaching and academic exchanges.

Project success was not dependent upon choosing a partner from those with more resources; success was obtained through partnering with more needy universities as well regardless of whether they were public or private. African university partnerships that were longer term with opportunities for the global North participants to collaborate with the global South seemed to be the most fulfilling and perhaps have the greatest probability for success. While health and safety risks may have existed, faculty who spent time in Africa enjoyed more success and gained a better understanding of the conditions and limitations; they were less likely to be frustrated with the lack of electricity to connect or respond to e-mail. Elements that held partnerships together included shared information, personal friendships and hospitality; collaboratively developed solutions for endemic problems, and properly managed funds that provided tangible outcomes after completion of the work.

It seems that the present study has only scratched the surface of a huge problem. Further ethnographic research is desperately needed to understand the African faculty's perspective on working with their counterparts in the global North to paint a more holistic picture of key determinants in faculty partnerships. Additionally, the concept of space and time as it relates to the distinctly different cultures, time zones, notions of what is urgent or not, inter-personal communication competence, and cultural values could provide insights that would help strengthen working relationships. In sum, this brief excerpt from one of the study participants on why she chose to work in Africa captured the response to the question: Why Africa? She states:

I saw a thirst for education and a thirst for understanding the roles in the broader perspective. It was late one night and sometimes the people save money by having low lights like we do. When you strain your eyes and you cannot read. I thought about the future of Africa when I saw a young man, he must have been ten or twelve. It was near the market place where you have houses close together and it was late at night and people were burning some candles so they put a little kerosene in a tin-cup with a rag and so you have all of these beautiful lights and then they have streetlights. There stood a young man with his book and his pencil and he was standing under the streetlight reading or even doing his math. Whatever he was doing, he was doing his homework and I thought that is the future. That is the future.

The words of this researcher and partner of an African University summed succinctly the many pages of transcripts of data to illustrate the complexity and the rewards of research work in this region of the world.

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