

## **The Asymmetries of University Partnerships between Africa and the Developed World: Our Experience in Botswana<sup>1</sup>**

Prof John D. Holm  
Dr. Leapetsewe Maletle

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Prof. Holm is the former Director of the Office of International Education and Partnerships at the University of Botswana; Dr. Maletle is the current director of the same office. Their email addresses respectively are: [Jholm38@gmail.com](mailto:Jholm38@gmail.com) and [maletel@mopipi.ub.bw](mailto:maletel@mopipi.ub.bw). Request a copy of this paper from either address.

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of symmetry is not new with this essay. For instance, it is used in the titles of two recent articles on this subject: B. Olsson, 'Symmetry and asymmetry in research partnerships: Lessons from 20 years experience', *NORRAG News* 41, 2008, pp. 78–80; Milton Odhiambo Obamba and Jane Kimbwarata Mwema, "Symmetry and Asymmetry: New Contours, Paradigms, and Politics in African Academic Partnerships" *Higher Education Policy*, 2009, 22, pp. 349 – 371.

## ***Introduction***

In the last few years universities and foundations in advanced countries have launched a major effort to help African higher education institutions gain capacity to deliver much improved education and research to their countries. DFID and USAID both have substantial programs directed in whole or in part at such partnerships. The Scandinavian countries have long been focused on such change, facilitated by SANORD, an association of Southern African and Nordic universities. DAAD in Germany also funds university development activities on an extensive basis.

The first major effort to help African universities was spearheaded in 2000 by an association of major US foundations, called the Partnership for Higher Education in Africa. It focused on eight universities and funded both individual universities and collective projects concerned with capacity building. After ten years, the endeavor has ended with individual foundations going their own way in continuing to promote African university development. Outside of some substantial aid given in the area of web access and educational technology, it is not yet apparent how much else has been achieved. It would not be surprising if their effort has achieved mixed results, not unlike similar projects focused on promoting the development of other African institutions.<sup>2</sup>

All of these efforts start out with a basic idea: African universities have declined drastically in the quality of their teaching and research. Unless they are aided substantially, little chance will exist to create the manpower and leadership required for sustained economic and social development. The universities which existed at independence in such places as Kenya, Uganda, Ghana, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone have become institutions in crisis, battered by budget cuts, burgeoning student numbers, constant strikes, crumbling infrastructure, and massive migration of academic staff to developed countries. Many see the situation as desperate. Moreover, there is a fear that the world quality institutions in South Africa could be headed in the same direction. The problem is that the efforts of developed countries to remedy the African higher educational crisis are going forward with little critical examination of the basic assumptions underlying the assistance being delivered. As an example, at recent panels on partnerships directed at Africa higher education at the February 2010 AIEA meetings, there was no self-critical analysis of the perspectives motivating and structuring these efforts.

When representatives of universities from developed countries come to Africa to set up partnerships, the chances of success are very low. Even when agreements are signed, little happens. The argument of this paper is that the meager outcomes are the result *in part* of a set of assumptions underlying outreach by North American and European institutions to Africa. Some of these assumptions are obviously unrealistic; nevertheless they govern the dialogue. We are not saying that these assumptions are explicit. Indeed, in most cases they are not articulated. Rather, these assumptions are manifested in the behavior and speech of the representatives of developed country higher education representatives.

This paper elaborates on these assumptions and suggests some alternatives. The analysis and the data presented are based on the experience and reflections of the coauthors of this paper who are the

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<sup>2</sup> For an extensive overview of The Partnership for Higher Education in Africa see, its “Mid-Term Review (2000-2006) by Catherine Gwin, June 2008.

former director and the current director of the Office of International Education and Partnerships at the University of Botswana. Over the last four years we have worked on over seventy partnerships which have resulted in varying degrees of interaction between UB and our partner institutions.<sup>3</sup> It should also be noted that we are fully aware that there are other factors besides the assumptions discussed below involved in the failure of partnerships with African institutions. Many of these factors cluster around the reality of African academic institutions including UB. These factors will be explored in another paper.

One final caveat. We have not named the individuals or universities we cite as examples for the obvious reason that we would hope to work with them in the future under more favorable circumstances. In a very real sense this paper is a plea for changed behavior.

### ***Nine Challenging Assumptions***

*Assumption 1) Developed country academics know what needs to be researched in Africa. The primary role of African colleagues is to organize and carry out data collection and lobby for research permits.*

African “partners” need not be involved in the selection of the topic, the formation of the research proposal, or in most cases, the analysis of the data or its write-up. This situation is ultimately reflected in the lack of co-authorships of African and first world academics in journal publications<sup>4</sup>. The latter assume that African scholars obtain their payoff in terms of money and experience.

A recent HIV/AIDS research project exemplified the playing out of this assumption. An American academic came to Botswana with a funded grant from a prestigious international organization to study specific aspects of condom use. The researcher approached the UB saying she only needed a graduate student from her discipline to conduct the field research. She would pay the student well and allow the student to use the resulting data for a thesis. Manifestly this proposal sounds like a good deal – a graduate student is funded, data is shared, and an important issue is studied.

From the perspective of UB department members several problems existed. First, they had not been involved in the development of the problem, the hypothesis, or the methodology. Interestingly, the researcher had been in Botswana when she was developing the project, and she made little attempt to contact the department, let alone find out if one of the members might be interested in participating in the project. Her contacts with the department were limited to seeking the names of graduate students whom she could hire. Second, she was in fact proposing to take over a graduate student whom UB academics in some cases would much prefer to have working on their research. The result was a cold shoulder. Not surprisingly, this researcher had a history of similar interactions with the same department in the past. She was most puzzled that her generous offer had not been taken up.

The other duty foreign researchers allocate to African scholars is securing the research permit, a necessity in most African countries.<sup>5</sup> In Botswana two factors predominate in government approval of research permits. The government wants to know that the results will be useful for policy makers and

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<sup>3</sup> A complete list of the partnerships and the activities involved can be obtained from either of the coauthors.

<sup>4</sup> The premier British journal in African studies is the Journal of Modern African Studies. In the last complete year of its publication (2008) there are 3 coauthored research articles involving persons with African names out of the total of 25 published. The premier American journal, the African Studies Review, has not one article coauthored by an African and a developed country scholar.

<sup>5</sup> See for instance, Republic of Botswana, *Guidelines for Application for a Research Permit*. Gaborone: July 2004.

that some citizens will be involved in the project. The University has some influence in the government's decision process, but it will only exercise this influence if there are payoffs for the institution. An academic staff member who is enthusiastic about the project may well make the government and university move even faster.

Locating and mobilizing an enthusiastic and capable local partner is thus the announced goal of many developed country academics. However, in point of fact they do not do what would be necessary for such a result; namely to insure that a partner colleague is involved in all aspects of project formulation (i.e. topic, hypothesis and methodology). The common response is that there is not time before the grant deadline to engage in such discussions. Thus, first world researchers say, "Do not worry, when we start the project we can change parts of the proposal that do not make sense, or even the topic, if we need to". True. But, the reality is that

- There will be definite limits to what can be changed. You cannot go from studying a topic related to HIV/AIDS to labor migration.
- African "partners" will be in the position of having to challenge prominent scholars from prestigious universities. Not the easiest thing to do.

Another response is to agree that the process is not the best, but let's be practical. The first world scholar has money which can fund a research project. Research support is hard to come by in Africa, so why not do this project for which funding has been obtained by the first world researcher. Maybe sometime later we can do a project which is more Afro-centric.

This practical approach is forced on first world researchers in part by foundations in their countries which almost always have specific topics which will be funded in a given round of grants<sup>6</sup>. The foundations or aid agencies will say they consulted on the topics of a given set of grants, but the reality is that they consult with a few top administrators at several African universities. This approach is a dead end because African university administrators are most eager to secure whatever funds they can for their underfunded institutions, and in any case they are likely to know little about the research interests of their academic staff. They thus agree to whatever the first world grant agencies propose. In most cases, the consultation ends up being largely pro forma.

In one instance, a funder asked UP to send a delegate to join a number of top African university administrators for a two day session where they listened to donor officials talk about what they proposed to fund in African higher education. After two days the Africans were asked to respond. They had received no prior notice of what was going to be proposed; they were given no time to consult; and their responses after the discussion were summarized by the donor's consultant. The process might be termed "drive-by" consultation. Our university decided not to encourage participation in the subsequent competition unless we came across a proposal which fit in with our existing partnership activities. We received a number of requests from non-partner institutions. We turned them down because we would be developing projects before establishing a viable partnership.

If we are to have symmetry, there needs to be a meeting where both sides discuss a mutually agreeable set of project topics, or African universities need to seek assistance only when the topic fits in with their

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<sup>6</sup> One need only read recent USAID or DFID RFPs for evidence. This is not to say that funding agencies do not have legitimate reasons for specifying preferred topics, only that such specification makes the development of effective partnerships more difficult.

unique strategic plans. Also important is that projects are funded which are proposed by partnership which have emerged from a continuing dialogue among representatives of a developed country institution and an African university. In effect there must be a relationship first which results mutual knowledge of each other. When this does not happen, the result is most likely going to be confusion about the project goals, lack of motivation on the part of staff from the African country, and realization of few of the intended outputs. Academic staff members who have sustained connections in a developing country are very critical to the project generation process. Indeed, they need to be exploring possible research topics for joint projects every time they visit the country in which they have connections.

Africanist scholars in the developed world could be very useful in this endeavor if they disregard their research interests part of the time and focus on the needs of the African university with which they are associated, not an easy thing to do. Thus Africanists interested in the humanities or social sciences might propose projects to engineers or business professors at their home institutions.

*Assumption 2) Developed country scholars know the curriculum and knowledge which should be transferred to universities in the developing world.*

This is a variant on the previous assumption, but in this case the logic is even more offensive and potentially wasting of time and money. A recent experience of University of Botswana in this regard involved a graduate program which was very successful in Italy. The program was an interdisciplinary master's degree in community development which was established for Central European universities seeking to provide civil servants for local governments making the transition to a post-communist society. The degree was offered jointly by all the cooperative institutions. Our Italian academics proposed to launch the same cooperative program with virtually the same syllabi in conjunction with four southern African universities.

There were three basic problems. First, the context of southern Africa is quite different. The societies involved are at a minimum in a much less developed economic context; the universities participating are relatively new and with excessive student number; ethnic conflict is much more corrosive; and the transportation and communication systems hardly match those of Eastern Europe. Second, the tuition required to cover program costs of circulating among five universities (the university in Italy was to offer part of the program there) was beyond anything students, their parents or their governments in southern Africa could afford. Third, there were very comparable (although not as good) programs already operative within several of the participant countries at much less cost.

What was most interesting was that our academic staff did not confront their Italian colleagues with these realities, which allowed the Italians to persist in the misguided assumption that they knew what kind of curriculum was needed in southern Africa. The reasons for this silence were not hard to discern. One, UB staff expected that when all the parts of the curriculum were in place, the Europeans would find money to make the program financially viable. Additionally our UB colleagues were enjoying the planning meetings which often involved travel to very exciting cities in Africa and Europe. So, they did not rock the boat by raising difficult issues. These issues, particularly those related to finance, only came out when it was several months before the program was to be launched. Five years of planning went for naught.

Scholars from developed countries should not propose curriculum development programs with African institutions, let alone implement them, without beginning the process with an extensive needs

assessment to find out the realities. This process should involve, at a minimum, examining existing curricula in the market, knowledge and skill levels of the students coming into the program, realistic tuition charges, societal human resource requirements, and capacities of domestic academic staff to be involved in the project.

A good way to think about a curriculum development project in an Africa country is as a process by which instruction capacity in a given discipline is built up over time, and then the partners move to a new, more advanced level. Ideally this could involve going from a bachelors program in a particular discipline, to a masters and then a PhD. All sorts of variations could be imagined.

There also needs to be thought given to what developing country scholars will contribute to the knowledge base and curriculum of the university they are partnering with from a developed country. All too often curriculum development is looked at as a one-way street, where developing country academics subject themselves to a learning process. Curriculum cooperation ought to involve rewriting textbooks, curricula, course syllabi, and internships in the *developed* country as well as the developing one. We have yet to see anything like this proposed in Botswana, let alone implemented.

*Assumption 3) Top-down is the way to get things done at universities in developing countries.*

The idea is that the Vice Chancellor/President or another top administrator will round up the necessary academic staff and resources to insure project success. The posture is authoritarian, to say the least. In the short term, this approach will sometimes work. However, in most cases, and especially the long run, it does not work. New administrators come with new agendas and budget priorities, and previous partnerships have no value.

Top administrators buy into such solicitations by scholars from developed countries for two reasons. One is that they are long time friends with the scholar organizing the project. The other is that the project meets an important institutional development need. Neither reason is sufficient. The reality is that projects are sustained by personal and professional relationships which develop among the key persons who have operational responsibility. Top administrators cannot make this happen. They can make introductions and provide some initial financial support, but in most cases, such projects only exist as long as the top administrator retains his position. Once he or she leaves, the project collapses. Top administrators are better advised to refer those contacting them to academic staff with interest and expertise in the particular endeavor, and suggest that if concrete plans develop the administration will try to identify some necessary start-up resources.

This top-down assumption is particularly prominent in multi-lateral endeavors. The assumption is that if top administrators from several African universities meet and agree on a project, it will automatically succeed. Funding agencies from developed countries financing large projects involving a number of universities prefer to have African vice-chancellors or their deputies approving the project vision first, and preferably serving on some sort of project council.<sup>7</sup> More important to success, however, is that there is a plan which melds the interests of academic staff from a number of institutions. The key beneficiaries have to be involved and agree to provide sustained leadership. When it comes around to

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<sup>7</sup> See for instance the earliest of these endeavors, initiated by the University of Cape Town, the University Science, Humanities, Engineering Partnership in Africa (USHEPiA). A more recent example is the Partnership for Africa's Next Generation of Academics (PANGeA) which is being developed at Stellenbosch.

insuring that these projects have effective institutional support, top administrators do not have the time, energy, and usually the expertise to keep things on track.

*Assumption 4) African universities or their students and academic staff can mobilize sufficient funds to take care of significant project costs.*

One thing that surprises us in negotiating study abroad exchanges is that universities from developed countries only want to exchange tuition and fees, and sometimes not even the latter. This means that our Botswana students are required to pay for room and board in developed countries.

In some cases where these latter items are heavily subsidized (Japan and China) this sort of agreement is possible. For the most part, room and board are high cost items in developed countries compared to Botswana. One university was going to cost us £3700 per student per semester to fund room and board. By contrast, its students coming to UB pay little more than £900. When we protested that the ratio was not fair, we were told that they were just trying to treat Botswana students equal to all other students attending their university on an exchange basis. As one of our partners remarked, exchanging room and board between our two institutions was “building on but going beyond a previous aid relationship.” However, we would argue that the cost of living between the two countries is still vastly unequal, even if Botswana no longer receives foreign aid.

Finding a fair monetary basis for student exchanges is not easy. The best situation is for an African university is to exchange room, board and tuition with universities in developed countries. A number of universities have been willing to do this. UB tells its partners that most of its exchanges will be with universities accepting such an exchange. UB is able to cover the costs of students’ airfare and some other expenses like books, medical insurance and local transportation, but it cannot afford the cost of living gap. Some developed country universities channel part of their income from the tuition they receive from the students they are sending to UB into stipends to cover UB students’ room and board. Some even find a way to cover airfare. In other exchanges, partner universities send two students to UB for every one UB sends them. This is not as favourable unless something else is thrown in like airfare, room and board and medical insurance.

Because of Botswana’s income in diamonds, UB is able to cover some of the costs of their students going abroad. Many of our sister universities in Africa simply cannot afford to cover any costs of their students for exchanges. Unless a partner university is willing to be generous, student exchanges cannot become a reality. The key question is do exchange programs entail mutual (but not necessarily the same) benefit or paying costs for specific items.

*Assumption 5) Projects with third world countries are best done through multilateral arrangements.*

The reasoning, especially among project funders, is that combining a number of African universities together into a cooperative organization will produce a more productive endeavor in the long run. Resources and staff will be pooled and thus create a more robust academic enterprise. There are cases where this idea makes sense, but often it does not.

Two successes are particularly impressive. A sizeable number of economics departments in Africa pool a select group of their academic staff members one semester a year in Nairobi to offer specialized graduate courses to students enrolled at their various institutions. Over a thousand students have studied in the program. It has been partially funded for well over two decades by the World Bank which

has a major interest in staffing African governments and NGOs with well trained economists.<sup>8</sup> The other notable example was initiated by the Partnership for African Higher Education. They associated universities buy bandwidth together and are training their staff to manage its use.<sup>9</sup>

In other cases sufficient common interest does not exist or the funding is not nearly as long term as has been the case with the Bank's support of the economists. For instance, there have been several attempts to set up cooperative programs which bring doctoral training to a cooperative group of African universities. The reality is that most staff development fellows at UB, at least, consider training in Africa, even at Cape Town, to be their least desirable career option. Additionally senior staff members at cooperating universities have little reason to invest time and effort in a cooperative thesis supervision process. There is usually no payoff for them. Further complicating the situation is that these programs collapse as soon as the initial funding dries up. See for instance the difficulties faced by USHEPiA as it currently seeks a new funding base as American benefactors appear to be moving on to new projects.

Compounding the problem of multi-lateral partnerships is that they tend to be very expensive. Costs of communication and transportation are more expensive, at least relatively, than in Europe or North America. And, often there do not seem to be low cost options for the administration of the program, especially when paradigms from developed countries are transferred without change. Foundations may cover the costs of a multi-lateral program in the short run, but in the long run, as we just noted, African universities do not have the funds to sustain the administrative costs.

Our experience is that bilateral partnerships appear to have a much better chance of success. The costs are much lower, and much of the expense can be absorbed by the two universities involved because of immediate departmental or faculty interests/needs. There are also generally personal relationships which provide the emotional drive to sustain connections over a longer period of time. UB has a number of such projects on-going or planned with Witwatersrand in geology; Orange Free State for hunter-gathers; Northwest (in South Africa) concerning Setswana; Eduardo Mondlane relative to Portuguese and English Language training; and Dar-es-Salaam on archeology. None of these endeavors cost much; the subject of cooperation is focused and strongly desired; and there are a series of personal relationships to sustain the activity.

*Assumption 6) No equality can exist among First and Third world universities because the funds originate in the First World and must be controlled by those obtaining the grants.*

The funding issue is a very difficult aspect of partnership relationships. The scholars who write grants and are successful feel quite rightly that they are responsible to their funding agencies to insure that grant monies are expended in a manner which is both responsible and intellectually productive. While this is true of the management of funds, this reasoning need not prevent African staff members being involved in topic selection, formulation of project objectives, budget building, research site identification, and personnel selection, as well as the analysis and write up. Money is power in all circumstances and especially within African universities, where government provides very little support for research (Botswana and South Africa are to a certain extent exceptions). However, this power may be abused with adverse consequences for African staff development and project vision.

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<sup>8</sup> See "Mid-Term Review of the African Economic Research Consortium's Collaborative Masters Programme", by Milton A. Iyoha, February 2005.

<sup>9</sup> See the previously cited Mid-Term Report.

Some funders are attempting to reverse this situation by insisting that African scholars be primary investigators on projects. We have several such projects at the University of Botswana. Both are focused on medical health and involve several million dollars and have forced major research universities to adopt a much more equalitarian posture. The problem with this approach is that there must be senior scholars on African university staffs who can manage such endeavors. It takes experience, which has not been possible previously. Not surprisingly, this lack of experience can easily lead to micro-managing of the projects by funding agencies or African university administrations. This micro-managing is justified by some spectacular failures in terms of local corruption and mismanagement. The reality, however, is that a cadre of African academics who can administer programs must be created.

*Assumption 7) Top quality universities in Europe and America and their academic staff members can only join projects with students and staff from institutions of comparable quality.*

We at UB have been told on more than one occasion that a potential partner cannot work with our staff because the University does not have adequate status in global university tables. Mostly these are universities in Europe or Australia which are seeking to move up in international rankings. In effect, the product or the learning experience coming from a partnership does not count. It is strictly a matter of status as defined by central university managers. In one case, UB was encouraged to work with a surrogate South African university which had more status and was of adequate rank to associate with the status seeking European university.

Some instructors at UB do lack world competitive qualities (Some are very good), but in many cases scholars at African universities have not had the opportunities that first world scholars have enjoyed. Also, part of a partnership experience is learning. This may involve expanding staff and student perspectives in developed institutions with regard to the natural and built environment, social systems, and differences of culture in a developing context. The learning may also involve being forced to redefine methodologies of research and processes of analysis.

Interestingly, we find this status seeking behavior to be almost non-existent among American universities. Both Harvard and the University of Pennsylvania have MoUs with UB. In the latter case, the annual exchange involves over 100 students and staff combined.

*Assumption 8) Risks of health and safety are too great for first world students and staff.*

When we human beings travel to another country there are all sorts of fears that arise regarding health and safety, especially in Africa. In most regards these fears result from ignorance which can be easily countered. There are ways to cope with the feared situations in terms of shots, eating choices, forms of transportation used, etc., without living in isolation from the local population.

Thanks to the focus of newspapers in developed countries on political violence and health problems in Africa, partnerships with universities on the continent are perceived to be high risk activities, except for those who are well informed. In Botswana the two risks that are particularly well known and serious are HIV/AIDS and petty theft. Neither risk needs, however, to be considered sufficiently serious to be a threat to partnership activity. This is true for a different reason in each case.

HIV/AIDS is a significant risk factor in Botswana; however, the risk is not nearly as great as it might seem. The common perception was, and still is, that the country has one of the highest percentages of

prevalence among the sexually active population as any in the world. Usually the figure is put at 37 or 38 percent. This is a projection from samples taken at pre-natal clinics in the late 90s. The more accurate figure reported in recent government surveys is around 17 percent. That is still unacceptably high, but less than half the earlier figures. The 17 percent figure probably does not represent the reality on the UB campus. Studies show that the higher figures tend to be in the mining towns, among the less educated, those over 25, and migrants. In addition, a very aggressive educational campaign regarding HIV/AIDS among staff, students and visitors at UB has led to a very cautious attitude on the part of most toward sexual activity which could be dangerous.<sup>10</sup>

In the case of petty theft, culture plays an important role in Botswana. The people are a very non-violent, even shy, people relative to their neighbors in other parts of southern Africa. Crime tends to take the form of petty theft involving laptops, cameras and cell phones and rarely involves physical violence. There is no doubt that visitors, particularly from developed countries, are viewed as attractive targets by thieves. Almost all the thefts reported by visiting students and staff are because the owners did not follow the advisory precautions suggested by our university staff: Potential theft items should be kept out of public view when not in use. Dorm room doors must be locked. Windows on the first floor must be closed at night regardless of the temperature. Computer locks are a necessary protection.

*Assumption 9) African staff training can be done in short term workshops.*

Workshops may be productive for certain activities like computer programs, logistics processes, and accounting skills. For more analytical activities knowledge transfer through workshops often is much less effective. Workshops, usually a week or less, involve short blasts of knowledge followed by little or no reinforcement, application or sustained professional interaction. Many staff welcome workshop as time away from work with free food and time to socialize with friends in an enjoyable setting (maybe at hotel or conference center). Both staff and visiting instructors tend to view their workshop experiences at best as an emotional high because of the intense and inspirational interaction and the new knowledge presented.

Funding agencies like workshops or variations on this idea because the follow-up reports almost always show a significant number of participants impacted, provide positive survey evaluations, and insure easy monitoring of expenditures. Even more worthwhile to the donors is the idea that those trained go on and become trainers, which means more workshops where more people are impacted and return positive results.

The workshop process does not provide the sustained interaction and activity that prepares participants to take on new responsibilities, develop professional skills, or become managers. Workshops do not involve the kind of personal change which leads to new levels of thinking, perception, focus, mastery and performance. In effect, workshops are an artificial learning environment for such activities. They are not places where such things as leadership, conflict management or analytical approaches can be imparted, at least at any serious level. To obtain such change requires reading, repeated experience with feedback (both from mentors and colleagues), and reflection. Workshops in Africa easily deceive funders and leaders that real development is occurring when all that is happening is a series of very intense emotional interactions and a vacation from work.

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<sup>10</sup> See Central Statistics Office, Preliminary Botswana HIV/AIDS Impact Survey III Results, Gaborone: May 2009.

## **Conclusion**

This paper could be construed as negative in tone in the sense that we talk about assumptions which undermine the possibility of effective partnerships with African universities. We have tried to suggest approaches which could help in overcoming each of our troublesome assumptions. The overall thrust of these suggestions is that there must be engagement around the challenges to partnership before there can be effective partnerships. To this point, such a dialogue has been missing or intermittent for the most part. Part of the problem is that the academic staff members from developed countries who know the most about Africa are not needed for partnerships with developed countries. Partnerships which will make a difference need to be focused on skills which are critical to Africa's development. That means focusing on disciplines in engineering, the natural sciences, business, the health sciences, and some aspects of education. It is often a struggle to convince professionals in these areas to recognize that their knowledge and skills need to be delivered in a very different social and cultural context than they have heretofore experienced.

Africanist scholars may be able to help launch a dialogue between scholars who are professionals in the various above named disciplines and their African colleagues. More critical is that African academics in these disciplines engage their colleagues frankly over the conditions of cooperation. We have heard repeatedly our UB colleagues in the various departments grumble they receive no respect in partnerships. However, they do not speak up when they have an opportunity. They do not answer emails. They sit silently in meetings when a proposal is discussed. They do not engage in informal discussions of their feelings during social gatherings. In short, they do not lay their cards on the table.

The reasons for this silence are varied. Some of it has to do with the fact that our colleagues need the income which may flow from a partnership. Therefore, they do not want to rock the boat. In part, there is fear of offending someone they perceive as having more status or authority. In part, they do not feel comfortable engaging in conflict interactions. Also, they do not want to acknowledge the lower status that may be implied in requesting equal status. And there is concern that it would not be proper for a host to treat a guest in a challenging manner.

These feelings can be overcome. But they require the development of a relationship which comes from establishing some sort of friendship, trust, and mutual respect. Not something that can result from a one or two day visit. Rather it is a relationship that develops from experiences, disagreements, conversations, and problem solving activities among other things. In short, partnership around one project leads to more partnerships around other activities. In the process, professionals from developed countries start to obtain an understanding of the different culture in which their profession is being practiced. Africanist scholars may also be helpful in guiding an exploration of relevant cultural variables.

To summarize, to re-acclurate partnerships relative to the foregoing assumptions we have been discussing developed country academic staff members must:

1. Organize truly joint projects from conception to publication;
2. Adapt their curriculum ideas to the African context;
3. Focus their connections on professional peers, not administrators;
4. Find a workable financial balance between institutions;
5. Consider bilateral arrangements as well as multilateral connections;

6. Manage projects jointly with their African colleagues;
7. Value diversity of cultural experience rather than status as a primary objective;
8. Deal with risk without compromising social interaction;
9. Replace workshops with long-term professional development; and
10. Treat interactions with African colleagues as a learning experience

All of this is very demanding, even revolutionary, but not impossible. We have seen it happen.

### ***Post-script***

The above discussion is not meant to assert that all Europeans and North Americans regularly make the above assumptions as they interact with African university staff. What we are attempting to convey is that too often one or more of these assumptions end up undermining a potentially promising endeavor. The examples we have given may seem to be extreme. Be assured that they have all occurred in our experience at UB.

We are not contending that the assumptions being made by developed country scholars and foundations are unethical. The African Studies Association in the USA for instance published in 2005 a set of “Guidelines of the African Studies Association for Members” on “Ethical Conduct in Research and Other Professional Undertakings in Africa”<sup>11</sup>. All of the assumptions we have identified could easily be imbedded in partnerships without any of the ASA’s guidelines being violated. What we are talking about here is a set of assumptions which undermine the motivations required to sustain cooperative activity.

Also, it should be understood that the above discussion seeks to show how partners from the north are perceived by our African colleagues. It is not intended to be an explication of the intentions of European and American scholars. We are rather trying to encourage our peers in international education at this conference to help their academic colleagues understand better how they are perceived in Africa.

As we said at the beginning, we are not trying to argue that the previous nine assumptions are the only factors leading to the failure of cooperative projects. We are quite aware that there is much on our end which undermines potentially useful endeavors, but we do think that our colleagues to the north should be aware of how they are perceived. We hope that knowledge would bring some changes in their thinking and behavior.

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<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.innovation.ukzn.ac.za/InnovationPdfs/No34pp72-77Guidelines.pdf>.

