

## International Partnerships in Educational Institutions and their Intricacies: Are Institutions getting the right “deal” in the Partnerships?

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### ABSTRACT

*International partnerships have become an interactive response to the impacts of globalization and global changes. Today, higher institutions of learning establish alliances to be able to compete for funds, students, researchers as well as academic programmes. These partnership initiatives are believed to strengthen quality of academic programmes, build capacity and strengthen institutional profiling; increase potential for research capacity, and improve the impact of research on policy and practice within diverse contexts. While it seems clear that international partnerships are inevitable, intricacies in agreements and deep inequalities undergird many of the current trends in these partnerships. The questions this paper attempts to answer in relation to international partnerships are; first, how do power-relations affect international partnerships? Second, are these international partnerships truly building institutional capacity? The authors adopted the “Critical Theory Approach” to explain the inherent inequalities which affect harmony, cohesion, success and sustainable relationships. This paper asserts that unequal power relations remains a challenge in international collaborations in education institutions and the more powerful partners dominate the direction of the partnership, although international partnerships remain critical in building institutional capacity. The paper concludes that lack of clear agreements have an impact on the sustainability of partnerships. Hence, institutions need to be vigilant to negotiate the powers that enhance harmony through formal and transparent agreements and bring everyone on board to avoid institutional conflicts.*

**Key words:** collaborations, critical theory approach, educational institution, higher education, agreements, international partnerships, globalization, linkages, power relations, researches, sustainability, universities.

## Introduction

International academic partnerships have been perceived by many (Altbach, 2004; Knight, 2006; Moja, 2006 and Hokenstad & Midgley, 2004) to have the potential to enhance the participating institution's efforts to become actors in the global educational arena. In this eager pursuit of international partnerships, Uganda has not been left behind. Most partnerships are both voluntary and self-organizing in nature; based on mutual agreement, trust and responsibility; sharing risks and benefits; and adding value to existing achievements. Green & Olsen (2003) found that while partnerships can be very exciting due to their numerous benefits such as visibility, quality, institutional profiling, and economic support, there are a number of factors that have the potential to overturn the objectives and goals of these partnerships. While Ishengoma (2008) found power relations, hidden agendas and institutional politics to constrain the relationships, Moja, (2006) found lack of conceptualization of partnership agreements to cause conflicts in partnerships. Thus the failure to conceptualise and to recognize unequal power relations between partners has often weakened and heavily constrained international partnerships.

While recognising the numerous benefits of partnerships, the existing literature has conflicting explanations for their failure. At least, we agree with Castells (2005) who attempts

to explain how the failure is caused by lack of those involved to understand ways, forms, and perspectives of the cooperation in these collaborations; knowledge and interpretation of collaboration documents, distribution patterns of resources; and the intricacies in the agreement and the general knowledge of partnerships themselves. In fact, even the management of these partnerships have remained a “puzzle”, and Altbach (2002) wondered how a well-intentioned venture can be obscured and become a tyranny in the long run. This contradiction continues to puzzle many and the authors of this paper try to find answers to these questions: How do power-relations affect international partnerships? Are these international partnerships truly building institutional capacity? And, what are the implications of failing partnerships for these institutions?

## **Background**

Partnerships have been widely accepted by many institutions and the collaborations have taken many forms – from the research sector to curriculum development up to joint degree ventures (Knight, 2005). With globalization feeding in every endeavour and adventure, and the quest for quality and survival, international partnerships have truly gained prominence in the recent years (Harman, 2005). Currently, external funding is increasingly being channeled through joint ventures and collaborations spread across several countries and emphasizing Sub-Saharan Africa (Preston, 2008) which among others include joint degree programmes (Kaguhangire, 2009). However, there have been challenges regarding the participation,

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management, curriculum, design, and syllabi completion, interpretation of documents, communication and decisions made during the collaborations. Kaguhangire *ibid* found this to affect sustainability, causing more anxiety than the expected excitement along the way. Many institutions have embraced international partnerships for various complementary or contradictory reasons but more so depending on their diverse interests (Chan, 2008, Kaguhangire, 2009, Knight, 2006) and; institutional philosophies. While accepting this argument for collaboration, Knight (2005) also posits that the issue of motivation in collaborative partnerships is both fascinating and a complex task to explain.

Research, (Kishun, 2007; Wit, 2006; Yang, 2003) indicates how the motivation for partnerships is mostly driven by academic and social-cultural forces. However, the authors find motivational complexities in the partnerships to be way beyond academic and social-cultural forces. While Kishun (2007) explored how power relations in the partnerships causes challenges, (Kaguhangire, 2009; and Samoff & Carrol, 2004) have identified intricacies in the partnership agreements, management, and decisions made and sharing of financial benefits as problem areas in these international partnerships. Marginson, et al (2007) explains show sustainability and harmony are constrained, conflicts have erupted and institutions' images have been tarnished. Hence, this paper highlights the benefits as well as challenges in international partnerships emerging from local and international literature and based on the experience of the authors with an international partnership that has failed in with recommendations on the way forward

## Theoretical Exploration

For the purposes of this paper, a “Critical Theory” has been identified to support this discussion. A “critical” theory may be distinguished from a “traditional” theory according to a specific practical purpose. Hence, a theory is critical to the extent that it seeks human emancipation, “to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them” (Horkheimer 1982, 244). In both the broad and the narrow senses, however, a critical theory provides the descriptive and normative bases for social inquiry aimed at decreasing domination and increasing freedom in all their forms. Hence a critical theory is adequate if it explains the inherent inequality, identifies the actors to change or transform the inequality, and provide both clear norms for criticism and achievable practical goals for social transformation. In trying to identify and explain all the circumstances that limit equal participation, multidimensional factors breed domination in partnerships must be explored. The normative orientation of critical theory is therefore to provide clear guidelines and principles in a partnership that will allow participation based on trust, equality, and mutual understanding and obligations through partnership principles. To do this, avenues for economic empowerment to overcome domination in partnerships should be explored to be able to sustain these partnerships and clear guidelines should be in place.

## **The Conceptual paradigm**

A partnership is a strategic alliance or relationship between two or more people, institutions or countries, and is based on trust, equality, and mutual understanding and obligations (Aka, 2009). They can be formal, with each party's roles and obligations spelled out in a written agreement, or informal, where the roles and obligations are assumed or agreed to verbally. It may include sub-contract, sub-grant, joint venture, consortium, and networks. *Moja (2006)* recommends partners to have mutual trust, a common vision and jointly agreed objectives. Altbach (2002) defines a partnership as interdependence, collaboration, alliance, linkage, consensus, joint-venture, and shared decision-making among individuals, groups, businesses and institutions. On the other hand, Samoff, and Carrol, (2004)) explain how international partnerships may be outside ones country, state or continent, and Knight (2006) argues how international partnerships are deemed by many to be 'a good thing' in their own right. However, developing and maintaining effective international partnerships is not a walk over. Individual partners must feel that they will achieve more by developing and maintaining a partnership than they could alone and the benefits should be shared equally. If this is not the case, Ishengoma (2007) argues that the effort necessary to maintain the partnership may erode good will in the long run.

## **Types of International Partnerships**

There are many types of international partnerships that exist with varying goals. Hence, Ishengoma (2007) lists the most common partnerships to include: international teaching partnerships; joint degree programme partnerships; international progression partnerships;

overseas student recruitment representatives; staff exchange programme partnerships; and joint collaborative research partnerships. These international partnerships usually require an agreement between the partnering institution, and this could be; departmental-based, school-based, and institutional-based or country based. Therefore, this paper discusses a Joint Degree Programme Partnership between three institutions that is institutional based.

### **Principles of International Partnerships**

The basic principle in an international partnership is co-ownership and shared responsibility based on mutual trust, equal participation and respect according to Altbach, 2004; Knight, 2007 and Mok, 2006. If co-ownership is lacking, efforts of the collaboration will be futile and the benefits of partnership will be obscured. Further, Meek (2006) argues that unless partners provide complementary resources and skills; and are willing to share power, benefits, risks and responsibilities then the partnership will struggle to survive. Kepe (2001) highlights eleven principles that should guide a partnership. These are; mutually agreed upon objectives of the partnership, developing mutual trust, sharing of information and development of networks, sharing responsibilities and creating transparency for the partnership to become meaningful. He also identified monitoring and evaluation of the collaboration, dissemination and application of results, sharing of profits equitably, increasing capacity through the activities of the collaboration and; build on the achievements thereafter. Hence, in a partnership agreements and memorandum of understanding, both parties need

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to recognize these principles so as to gird against inequalities in relationships. Such policies are required in order to construct a politics of partnerships embedded in democratic and participative processes (Harty, 2002). It should be noted however, that the partnership agreement in itself will not automatically change the relationships between partners if hidden agendas or implications are not established at the beginning of the collaboration. Therefore, transparency, respect and trust should be highly encouraged in these partnerships.

### **Problem Statement**

Partnerships have been widely accepted by many institutions and it should be noted that they require special attention, respect and commitment by the participating parties. However, there has been controversy and criticism regarding the motivation for developing partnerships. Although agreements in form of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) are signed and partnerships embraced by the institutions, just agreements in themselves do not automatically strengthen relationships between partners if there is hidden agenda. Power relations, political and economic interference, differing culture, norms and values, institutional politics and unequal distribution of financial benefits continue to exist and overturn the “would-be-good” intentioned partnerships to total failure or survive with difficulty. Most times, the more powerful party in the partnership manipulates the less powerful one, thereby creating unclear purpose, unrealistic goals, and ineffective communication, unequal and unacceptable balance of decisions in the partnership. If governments and institutions do not explore avenues for funding partnerships, dominance, exploitation and disrespect will persist and will continue to affect harmonious and successful relationships in the partnerships.

## Methodology

A rich, in-depth qualitative investigation was the most appropriate to address the inquiry because of the complexity, dynamic nature of international partnerships and their management, the scanty empirical research in this particular topic, and the exploratory research questions. Lewis (2000) recommends this approach in this kind of inquiry. A Joint Masters’ Degree Programme between the Universities of Oslo in Norway, Western Cape in South Africa and Makerere in Uganda was mainly used as case for investigation. The collaboration originated within the context of the development of a graduate Joint-Degree Programme between three institutions – one from Europe and two from South. The types of partnerships in Makerere University were explored and their management analyzed. The causes of conflicts were given critical attention especially in one School where there was a disagreement on the management.

Documents were reviewed and analyzed. These included proposals and their objectives, memorandum of understanding, correspondences of the partnering institutions, budgets, modes of accountability, programmes and disciplines involved, levels of participation, reports and activities in those partnerships. For empirical analysis, interviews were conducted with the director of Graduate School, the International Relations Officer, Heads of Research Units, Researchers, coordinators and beneficiaries. After interactions with various academic units involved in partnerships, the authors zeroed on one hosted by

the then School of Education that had numerous challenges especially at institutional level. This paper highlights participation challenges in relation to resource inequities, obscured agreements and institutional politics in partnerships in Ugandan public Universities. The critical factors identified from this ongoing partnership validate many cited in the literature. However, the authors integrates critical analysis to widen an understanding of the challenges in international partnerships.

### **Findings**

Apart from several external partnerships maintained at the academic unit levels, Makerere University as of 2010 had maintained three major university-wide partnerships; (1) the Partnerships for Higher Education in Africa (PHEA) (2) SIDA-SAREC (Swedish International Development Agency-Swedish Research Cooperation; and (3) the NORAD-NUFU (Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation-Norwegian and Council for Higher Education Program for Development Research and Cooperation. There were also a number of projects under the Norwegian Masters in Africa (NOMA); at the School of Education, Technology, Food Science and Technology and Agriculture, all funded by the Norwegian Government. However, this paper is based on the School of Education because it was found to have the most challenges that seem to have ...resulted in the discontinuation of the collaboration. ., This was a partnership of a Joint Degree Programme between the University of Oslo, Norway, University of Western Cape, South Africa and Makerere University, Uganda.

Although this was a joint teaching programme, each institution took a different instructional approach in its implementation. While Makerere University, adopted Plan A (Teaching and Research), Western Cape adopted plan B -purely research. More so, while this is a joint degree programme, Oslo teaches European higher education and Makerere – African higher education. The question then is what was the definition of ‘a joint degree programme’, since each institution runs a different curriculum and awards different degrees? Another issue was that Makerere instructors and students were registered at a university in a partnership spent about two months without fully participating in active academic work. While Oslo and Western Cape had a strong partnership contract, Makerere was just a participating institution. This meant that the parties involved did not have the same stake and obligation. Even then the guidelines for this project were not clear on who does what, with what and when, as such students had to cover the syllabus and sit for examinations within the shortest time possible.

It should be noted that the challenges of setting up these arrangements are not trivial. Often, the transaction costs are very high as found by Green and Oslen (2003). Setting up collaborations, for example, entail many rounds of discussions and many levels of approvals at partnering institutions. The discussions and agreements have to penetrate to individual faculty in departments, whole curriculum and perhaps even pedagogies have to be modified. The process is long and extremely tedious. The first challenge is getting such a programme

to get approved through bureaucratic processes (Quality Assurance Directorate, 2007). In this case, discussions with Makerere officials demonstrated that, communication was poor and the relationship appeared that of “master and servant”. Many times their input was not taken into consideration. As one Coordinator said:

...when we were invited for the planning meeting, we were like puppets.... none of us made any contribution that was taken into consideration...the chairperson talked throughout and occasionally asked questions on whether this would work, we would answer in affirmation or reject but I got surprised to see the contents in the final document ... it was different from the numerous agreements we made” (C12, Makerere).

This means therefore that the providing partners were not seeking approval from the participating partner but rather used the discussions to rubberstamp the conditions of the collaboration.

One such condition was the issue of finances which caused discontent and distrust among partners. As one of the coordinators said

...the amount that appears on the agreement is different from what is remitted on the accounts which has actually caused conflicts in my department...” (C12, Makerere) And another one echoed, “...we do not seem to speak the same language with other partners when it comes to budgetary terms...and because of this, my colleagues no longer trust me... they think I lie to them...”(C1, Makerere)

The programme involved students travelling together for a semester under the care of their instructor(s), learn about another country, but stay in their “environmental bubble”, remaining part of the large group from their home university and within a safe comfort zone. As such the joint programme may not have helped students to learn much or progress in their studies.

As one of the coordinators said:

... Other than the exposure, I really do not see why these students should spend two months in a university where they are not active participants and not even contributing to students’ academic

achievements...these people only want to make sure that their money is spent in their own countries, that is all the essence of such programmes”(C1, Makerere).

The other challenge in this partnership was the issue of decision making by partners. One coordinator said.

...we have acquired structures, vehicles, computers..... but still, decisions on where, what, who and when were made by funders....”(C12, Makerere) For this matter continuity has not been possible “...actually it was us who decided to terminate the collaboration due to too much disrespect and the dubious manner in which those people operated...”(C1, Makerere) Another coordinator echoed “...what is usually written in documents is not what is practiced in reality... (C12, Makerere).

These are cases of failure to make joint decisions that do not respect the interests of partners.

The nature, purpose and benefits of the collaborations understandably differ. While there were so many challenges in these partnerships regarding their development, management, curriculum, research dimensions, resource allocation, definitional and interpretational issues, these partnerships were found to build institutional capacity. Some academic units benefited through training, others through staff exchange, joint research ventures especially in the areas of health and others through development projects and infrastructure. One Principal had this to say:

.....with governments’ budgetary constraints, this university would still be the same as it was twenty years ago, if it was not because of international partnerships....” (C4, Makerere ) One Dean proudly showed off the infrastructure as a result of these international partnerships. “...we have over ten PhD holders and about five near completion as a result of these partnerships...” (C4, Makerere)

This is an indication that partnerships result into some form of capacity building for higher institutions.

Even then, it was also clear that not all partnership fail, others succeed other struggle and achieve minimum results. In a discussion with an officer from Makerere University international relations Office, it was confirmed that only three collaborations out of over forty registered partnerships had failed at the time of this research. Many failures were attributed to problem arising out of limited negotiation skills, critical analysis of collaborations documents and the inability to clarify issues at the start of the collaborations.

### **Discussion**

International partnerships in higher education, once a marginal concern, have moved centre-stage. It has become “mainstreamed” and is now regarded as part and parcel of “higher education policy” in most countries (Knight, 2006). There are two types of internationalization. “old internationalization” which concerns the mobility of students and scholars, and the “new internationalization” that deals with joint efforts related to structural and regulatory issues of higher education systems (Marginson & Wende, 2007). Although there have been many challenges in these partnerships, nobody should deny that partnership is a great concept that helps structure relations from the individual up to the level of international economic, social affairs, quality of research and academic programmes (Brinkerhoff, 2002). Like many other institutions, Makerere University has embraced international partnerships and many of the academic units are partnering with institutions outside Uganda. Makerere University has had a number of linkages, collaborations and

partnerships; including the NOMA in the Faculties of Education, Technology, Food Science & Technology and Agriculture. Partnerships have been central in most Ugandan public universities over the past decade (Katunguka, 2007), and have also presented us with numerous, often complex, challenges.

In reviewing these partnerships at Makerere University we have identified two macro issues that have shaped almost all their partnership relationships. These are the tensions that exist within varied power relationships; and the identification and actualizing of mutual benefits. It seems the level of development in the partnering countries provides a context that has affected negotiation of partnership conditions and their implementation process.

### **Power Relations and the Success of International Partnerships**

Clearly, the inherent inequalities in the old patterns of internationalization of higher education are rooted in the historical dominance enjoyed by the West or the global North that has dictated imitative modernizations elsewhere (Knight, 2006). Like in the case of the Joint Degree Programme between the Universities of Oslo in Norway, Western Cape in South Africa and Makerere in Uganda, relations between universities in the rich and poor countries are marked by complex connections, contestations and challenges that recent developments connected to the growth of knowledge economies and societies that reinforce and recast in new and complicated ways (Altbach, 2004). The western scholars are seen to set the terms, themes, topics and theories of intellectual discourse and research, as they are equally seen

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to set the terms for partnership. Even when individual partners have been involved in the development processes, the guidelines are often circumvented and the input of the less powerful partners usually neglected. Such circumstances have often made management of such collaborations extremely difficult where activities cannot be according to the plan. Grey (2005) for example found that any contribution made by the receiving partner on what works and what doesn't taking a number of factors into consideration were often ignored at the formulation stage. On this, Cornelius and Greif (2005) observed that the "superior- inferior" attitude in a partnership is quite demoralizing since what brings these parties together is a wealth of knowledge and expertise each brings to the table, hence in all fairness, respect should prevail.

While Conelius and Greif's (2005) is supported by Razack's (2002) more critical analysis of the purpose, planning, and nature of international partnerships and their findings are so much in line with the NOMA Project at Makerere University. Razack (2002) criticizes a well-intentioned, "professional imperialism", that occurs when western influences dominate partners from developing countries under the pretext of "internationalization" and "financial support". He boldly explains how this understanding is predicated on knowledge about imperialism, colonialism, post-colonialism, and globalization, and how it impacts partnering institutions. Although some scholars such as Kishun, 2007; Ishengoma, 2007 and Johanson, 2004 explain the reasons for international partnerships being developing harmonious linkages, competencies, confidence and esteem of the partners in many areas, the reverse

was true in the case of the Joint Degree Programme between the Universities of Oslo in Norway, Western Cape in South Africa and Makerere in Uganda, where all the hopes and expectations were shattered, making partners from the receiving institution appear inferior. Yet, with the exceptions of Razack (2002), and Carrilio and Mathiesen (2006), a significant omission in the literature is the lack of a critical analysis regarding the elements of power, political environment, resource inequities, institutional structures and academic orientation in the partnership process that have resulted into “Master-Servant” relationship in international partnerships.

While partnership may result in quantity accumulation of benefits, the findings in this inquiry are supported by Ishengoma (2007) at University of Dar es Salaam that actually quality and capacity will not be enhanced by international partnerships if the relationships continue to be dominated by the more powerful. Therefore, Samoff and Carrol (2006) advise that academic partnerships must involve collaborations that have mutual benefits and contribute to the development of institutional and individual capacities; respect sovereignty and autonomy of both institutions; are self-empowering; enable both partners to specify goals, chart directions, create appropriate governance strategies; employ effective administrative routines; involve mutual learning; enable relationship between equals despite their differences in wealth, expertise, experience and status; and focus on major objectives of the collaboration. In this case while department attained assets more damage was made in

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terms of trust among staff and respect for partners. Although Yang (2000) encourages good academic partnerships that is characterised by democratic participation and shared responsibilities, the failed project at Makerere University began with good intentions and brilliant academic ideas for a teaching degree programme that was hoped to bring on board numerous benefits which were not fully realised. Chan (2004) recommends critical salient requirements to strengthen international partnerships, and these include transparency, respect, trust and effective communication- which were all lacking in the partnership in question. Chan's recommendation on communication clearly supports causes of the failed NOMA Project at the School of Education, Makerere University. In this specific collaboration, the two institutions would leave out Makerere University in most communications until very late, when nothing could be done. Knight (2007) cautions partners on the issue of communication and explains how it is the "life-blood" of any venture.

Despite the existence of a multitude of donor-funded partnerships, evidence shows many challenges due to an operating environment where recipients have unequal relationships as well as perpetuating dependence on partners from developed countries. This dependency runs through the initiation and implementation of the partnership with parallel structures and operations. On the contrary, the Higher Education Masters in Africa that was under the NOMA Project, was and is still a fully accredited degree Programme at Makerere University. However, Hotland and Boeren (2005) explains how such limitations in the long run may lead failed projects or sometimes unsustainable and unpredictable. They concluded

that partnership projects are most successful when they fit organically in the development path of the recipient. Yet judging by the content and core activities of universities; the majority of the collaborations are not organically fitted in the development path, mission and vision of these universities. Unlike the NOMA Project therefore, Hotland and Boeren (2005) found that majority of the partnerships and links in many universities are unsynchronized projects or programmes (not linked to one holistic national higher education agenda) which are in practice indirect aid with limitations in terms of impact.

Related to the above factor, Johanson (2004) found that in majority of our public universities, partnerships operate under obfuscation without guiding policy, operational procedures, and organisational structures. He also blames the failures being one-sided, because they are funded by North universities and governments who control and allocate the funds and at times determine the form and structure of these partnerships from the inception to implementation (Samoff &Carrol, 2004). Kahn (2006) assert that power dynamics inside the collaboration need to be honestly defined because he found that 90% of collaborations that fail are because the power dynamics have been obscured and then, during the collaboration, they come out in an ugly way. Kahn’s finding explains the now existing sour relationship between the partnering institutions under the NOMA Project in middle and high economies.

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It has been observed especially by Carrilio and Mathesen (2006) that because of the nature of the power relations, many institutions do not critique the partnership documents. This finding is not far from the Joint Degree Programme between the Universities of Oslo in Norway, Western Cape in South Africa and Makerere in Uganda case. On this, Gibbons (2002) explains the intricate in the recipients' excitement that often pervades them and fail to critique partnership documents. For this matter therefore, Carrilio and Mathesen (2006) advise that parties should observe the importance of understanding the political context within which the partnership exists by analysing those documents. This should enable partners study, analyse and be able to enter into an agreement that will stand the test of time. To resolve this dilemma therefore, Knight (2007; 2008) encourages greater reciprocity in the continual development of these international partnerships to avoid one-way exchanges dominated by the most powerful and privileged parties. Knight *ibid* also advises participants to approach collaborative work with flexibility, humility, and respect, but above all, to be keen and analytical to iron out the intricate therein.

This is because, like the case of the Joint Degree Programme between the Universities of Oslo in Norway, Western Cape in South Africa and Makerere in Uganda, much collaboration comes with very attractive objectives which are obscured along the way. That is why Razack (2002) cautions the parties to be open to alternative methods of approaching problems and finding solutions when things do not move in the right direction. He advises parties to

synthesize the partnership documents and have a stronger input to be able to detect the shortfalls and risks in these collaborations before signing any agreement and recommends that institutions must establish conflict management strategies in order to sustain the relationship. Ishengoma (2007) recounts similar experience of developing so much trust with the partners in a joint venture that had numerous challenges. He attributed the failure on the laxity and the calibre of partners in the collaboration. He therefore cautions institutions to be keen in analysing partnership guidelines. However, Dominelli (2004) prefers to turn down the collaboration before it takes off than failing along the way and the collaboration turns dirty. Haigh (2002; 2008) supports this and advises institutions to be vigilant at the development stage and eliminate all possible roadblocks in the collaboration. The hasty nature in signing partnership agreement was found by Lynch (2006) to be dangerous and he attributes failed partnerships individuals “thirst” for financial benefits. He therefore discourages institutions not to focus so much on financial benefits in the collaboration, but rather, the long term benefits and relationship thereafter.

Castels, 2005; Chan, 2004; and Mziwandile; 2004 found that international partners usually give conditions, but that this comes later at the signing, therefore, at this stage, it might be late to change anything. Since the documents themselves are often misunderstood, especially definitional and interpretational challenges, the recipients often misunderstand them and later issues come up. Although Knight & de Wit (1995) reiterate that the motivation

for international partnership is mostly driven by economic, academic, and social-cultural forces, it is always not clear at the beginning. Since even interpretation of the policy guidelines and activities of the programme have remained unclear, so whether academic motive or social-cultural factors, it is difficult to tell. Kaguhangire (2009) however finds the biggest challenge to be the interpretation of the partnership documents, especially activities and the budget. This finding closely corroborates with the case under discussion, especially with the curricula that had no defined direction and budgetary terms.

Kali (1990) also wonders how simple terms can be misunderstood by many. For example, although curriculum integration implies the identification of shared educational goals and the drawing up of a common study path and cases highly compatible with national standards, many times, things are different. As noted by many scholars (Knight, 2007, Marginson & Wende, 2007), different terms mean different things to different people. For example, one would expect simple terms such as: administrative costs, collaborative costs and salary to mean exactly what they are supposed to mean. Hence Kaguhangire (2009) found that challenges the receiving partners in the NOMA Project faced was definitional terms. Samoff and Carrol (2004) found similar challenges, but in varying magnitudes when it came to budgetary issues. While the case under discussion had similar challenges, Ishengoma (2008) concludes that some of those terms are meant to simply justify the purpose. Ishengoma's (2008) assertion supports the findings of this case study, in that a purely "joint degree" is a highly integrated programme that envisage a parallel and

contemporary offer of the same educational activities in all participating institutions, and the complete sharing of teaching, learning and examination methods, thereby allowing participating students to follow the same course in different locations. Ishengoma’s concern therefore matches well with the case under discussion and clearly confirms that power relations has an influence on so many activities in a partnership, where even those involved are not able to notice such anomalies at the development stage.

The power inequalities in international partnerships have numerous implications to the successor failure of partnerships. First and foremost, whenever workers compete for scarce resources, recognition, and power in the organizations, “pecking order”, conflict can occur. Since everyone requires a share of the resources to complete their jobs (Hart, 2002), it should come as no surprise when the “have-nots” gripe and plot against the “haves” (Bell, 2002).The findings in this study indicate that there are conflicts arising from unclear guidelines. Herranz (2008) confirms that the management of alliances, partnerships, or networks is an inherently difficult and complex task, whether it happens in public or private arenas, or across sectors. While some reasons for the failed partnership is due to the framework, others have been found to be institutional. Park and Ungson (2001) and other scholars of business alliances estimate that more than 50% of the efforts to build and sustain alliances fail. Similar failure rates have been suggested in the nonprofit and public contexts (Huxham & Vangen 2000). Hence Ishengoma’s (2007) finding supports the case under

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discussion that partnerships and linkages in African public universities are imbalanced and uneven to have a significant impact on strengthening higher education collaboration.

### **Do International Partnerships truly develop Institutional Capacity?**

Partnerships between academic institutions have tended to be the product of working relationships between individual academics. Of late however, as the potential benefits and risks from overseas collaborations increased and go beyond individuals and Kahn (2006) calls upon universities and colleges to manage their international partnerships as university wide processes. According to Mok (2007) increasing competition globally is affecting the way universities think about their aspirations and how to maintain their international competitiveness. Hence this requires a strategic shift of not focusing on international student recruitment to a longer-term and more partnership based conceptualization of internationalization. Panos, Cox, Pettys and Jones-Hart (2004) found that while international agencies can offer low- and middle-income countries partial solutions to help resolve the challenges they face in developing institutional capacity, these countries require capable local leaders, managers, analysts, and researchers to identify solutions that work and are sustainable in their own countries. The starting point would be to build capacity by producing a critical mass of leaders, researchers, practitioners, and educators; create an enabling institutional environment through improved infrastructure and professional support; and fund a steady stream of diverse grants to sustain the efforts of researchers that would benefit

higher education in low- and middle-income countries and begin to address higher education leadership challenges including managing partnerships.

Although the authors found power relations to have strong impact of institutional conflicts, Dyer et al. (2007) found management and cooperative behavior to be strong determinants for success than structural characteristics. He explained how poor leaders caused joint venture to fail. Too often, joint partners insist on sharing a project leadership role. When the parties disagree, a standoff occurs and Harman (2005) found that if the parties do not agree from the very beginning who will have day-to-day operational control of the project and how fundamental decision will be made, the joint venture is bound to fail. Grey (2005) finds this a result of power relations. Grey’s finding supports the case under discussion where conflicts and misunderstandings appeared to have originated from power relations due to imbalance and has spread to the individual members. On the other hand, AFRODAD (2007) acknowledges that when decision making is difficult and change has become the order of the day, having the right leadership team in place is of utmost importance. Many times, partnerships have failed because of internal conflicts that have not been resolved. Hotland and Boeren (2005) supports this view and that all is due to poor leadership.

One major disadvantage found by Ishengoma was that some universities were donor darlings, which means more donor-funded partnership and links; while others not. This

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phenomenon has caused inequality in terms of creating rich and poor or in a crude terminology of “*Wet*” and “*Dry*” units that have funded projects and are able to do better than others. While the case under discussion, conflicts arising from inequitable distribution of partnership benefits exacerbated the fights and led to its failure. Although, in the case under discussion poor leadership was found to lead to the failure of the partnership, Faulkner and De Rond (2000) attributed failure of the partnership to greed, poor leadership and unclear guidelines. On the other hand, Ishengoma (2007) attributes this to stringent budgetary guidelines which do not allow equitable sharing. He found these imbalances in partnerships also reflected at the institutional level where some departments and academic units have more lucrative partnerships, links and research projects (which means more resources) while others have virtually none; consequently creating rich and poor departments and rich and poor professors in the same department or university.

Another notable challenge for many universities as highlighted by Moja (2006) is moving beyond the superficial rhetoric of internationalization. Of course every university, and its leaders, are in favor of internationalizing and Meek (2002) has noticed signs everywhere, from refashioned mission statements, to the building of some institutional capacity to understand and support internationalization, to the inclusion of the rhetoric of internationalization in speech after speech by university leaders. But what is internationalization? In the end, the process of enhancing the territorial spread of institutional networks, and sometimes architectures on internationalization become complex to these leaders.

Marginson and Wende (2007) have emphasized the need for the initiation and implementation of a strategic planning process, and the subsequent bringing to life of new linkages, partnerships, programs, and projects. All of these elements are more than technical issues but involve political negotiations and reorientation. They are highly political, not just in what linkages with whom, but how they are advanced. This argument was found to support the case under discussion where political and contextual factors were not taken into consideration. Mathiesen, Carrilio, Rasmussen and Engstrom (2004) found however, that this process should involve slow and steady development of an infrastructure of support to enable units within a university to go at their own speed, in their own ways, free of formal managerialism.

Researchers ( Altbach, 2002; Wit, 2006; Young, 2000) commend these partnerships as they found much of their work in building the capacity of institutional practitioners and researchers in low- and middle-income countries has borne noticeable results. They found that once dominated by educational experts, for example, professorial and high profile practitioners from advanced economies, the field of higher education now reflects a more diverse and globally representative group of experts and organizations. As a result of these partnerships, develop institutional capacity of universities and visibly public-private partnerships have trained the workforces of low- and middle-income countries in good research, laboratory, and other educational related practices (Chan, 2004; Harman, 2005

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Hokenstad and Midgley, 2004 and Tunny, 2002). While such efforts have helped to provide trained higher education specialists and researchers, Gray (2005) found that a lack of institutional support within these countries has often driven away the most promising and well-trained practitioners and researchers. Thus partnerships ought to factor maintenance of such capacity within the partner institutions among the process of partnership development and implementation.

Doylo, 2003 and Tetley, 2006 for example, found that universities in low-income countries, vital to human resource development often face a host of problems. They suffer from lack of funds, weak infrastructure, out-dated or misaligned training programs, overcrowded lecturer rooms, and overburdened and underpaid staff. Although in recent years, many universities in sub-Saharan Africa – Uganda inclusive have been asked to double or even quadruple the number of students without concomitant increases in their budgets and despite significant staff vacancies. For students, the shortage of professorial staff means a lack of mentorship and academic support. Students often graduate without being equipped to address critical tasks pertinent to higher education scenarios for which their service is needed (Hokenstad et al 2002). Both researchers and faculty struggle to find resources for substantive research projects. The consequent overall lack of opportunity and career advancement results in low morale, providing little incentive to work in academia or the public sector or to remain in the country.

International partnerships were found by Wit, 2006; to strengthen universities, research centers, and government institutes in low- and middle-income countries could have a direct impact on the ability of these countries to muster the internal resources needed to address their own institutional problems. In particular, Hokenstad and Midgley (2004) found that by supporting educational institutions, donor agencies can help to develop an environment of inquiry, entrepreneurship, and experimentation that brings together researchers, practitioners, and policy makers, across disciplines and borders, to solve some of the pressing institutional problems facing less wealthy nations. Like in Education Koplan, Bond , Merson, Reddy, Rodriquez, Sewankambo and Wasserheit (2009) emphasizes transnational health issues, determinants, and solutions; which involve many disciplines within and beyond the health sciences; promotes interdisciplinary collaboration; and is a synthesis of population-based prevention and individual-level clinical care. If transparency can prevail, international partnerships have the potential to redress challenges of African universities and other research institutions in resource-limited settings.

Therefore, López, 2008; many examples of capacity building partnerships among institutions exist, with different arrangements and varying benefits for participants. Traditionally, these partnerships have involved an institution from a high-income country and an institution from a low- or middle-income country (sometimes referred to as “twinning”), but increasingly, the partnerships involve partners from low- and middle-income countries only

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(López, 2008). It is our conviction that regardless of the country's economic strength, high income institutions have their advantages. However, each institution brings valuable expertise to the table hence the economically strong should not overshadow the other partner. On the other hand, the partnership between low- and middle-income institutions tends to be more equitable and less costly but offers fewer opportunities to transfer expertise.

## **Conclusion**

Globalization has brought new challenges to partnership orientations, notably issues associated with the power dynamics inherent in donor-recipient relationships, where the donor is often most powerful and is able to set the agenda for change. For this reason therefore, international partnerships have come with challenges as well as benefits, and; these international partnerships are here to stay; because collaborations create opportunities, not only for individuals, but also to the state. Thus, collaboration is not only a goal but a way to grow together and the overall benefits of international partnerships outweigh the questions, particularly since any funding that supports the capacity development of people should indeed be sustainable – even if the funding ceases to exist, the ideas remain. This is because host institutions or the more powerful institutions provide the necessary resources to make such partnerships happen, many times the direction of the collaboration is pre-determined. Hence, these partnerships are often ambivalent, as the benefits of international interaction are often marred with domination. With visible capacity

developed in developing nations and the lack of participation by the governments, a single institution or even a department negotiating a partnership with a donor country such as; Japan, Norway, Finland, Netherlands, United States of America, Canada etc gives no chance for the receiving partners to make any decision in the partnership. And of course, a failed partnership reduces trust and confidence in those institutions.

### **The Way Forward**

As a way of addressing power relations challenges in these institutions, this paper makes the following recommendations:

- (a) Institutions should become vigilant and honest and pursue their vision and achieve their objectives while maintaining a harmonious relationship; and these visions must embrace the ethics of social accountability and an expansive humanism that will elevate and empower all our people, enabling us to face the enduring and fresh challenges of our existence on this delicate, dwindling but delightful planet with greater confidence and success;
- (b) Institutions must resist the temptation to naturalize contemporary trends and ideologies that debase rather than elevate human dignity. This is important especially, since the fundamental element to the success of the collaboration, depends on respect, trust and transparency institutions have with each other;

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- (c) Institutions must be firm and critical during the negotiation process and be able to interpret collaboration documents so that the philanthropic of academic aims are not destroyed by the short term financial benefits. Agreements should be based on trust, ethical principles, transparency, and equity in exchange and ownership, where all partners find the relationship mutually advantageous and respect and understand differences in cultures and perspectives. Focus on strengthening the institution and not a particular individual, paying attention to the crucial need for improving the institutional environment to enable problem solving and policy engagement;
- (d) Institutions should define goals and metrics of success at the beginning of the partnership, and all parties involved must commit to evaluate the model and remain flexible to adjust as needed;
- (e) Commitment must be established between the collaborating institutions, and critical negotiations should be ensured regarding funding priorities, activities, and the nature of the collaboration to avoid hiccups along the way in the collaboration;
- (f) Institutions should look for solutions to the power relations' challenges through vigilantly and selflessly raising money from the alumni and private business enterprises for the benefit of effective functioning of their institutions and to

promote international partnerships, and university leaders should understand and embrace this point and feel an urgency to deal with it;

(g) Governments should be involved in these partnerships to embrace and support international partnerships through funding partnership activities;

Finally, the future of higher education linkages requires bold visions of internationalism and alternative globalization that transcend the edicts of market accountability and narrow commercial calculations. It is imperative that developing countries actively construct their legal, conceptual and operational architecture to take advantage of its opportunities and to limit its perils. I hope this paper elicits a sustainable dialogue on the nature of partnerships. We have attempted to reflect on the current practices in order to come to a better understanding of the unique nature of this collaboration. In addition, we hope dialogue can ignite on how collaborations can be meaningful, transformative and critical - not only during the collaborative process, but also long after.

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