



*Increasing the power of higher education institutions
as sustainable and scalable engines of development*

Webinar Summary

Transnational Higher Education Partnerships: What Does and Does Not Work

May 18, 2015

INTRODUCTION

In this webinar, Peter Koehn and Milton Obamba, share what does and does not work in transnational higher education partnerships (THEPS).

What does not work? *Use of an incomplete or fragmented approach to partnering.*

What does work? *Holistic partnerships.*

BASIC PREMISE: NEAR SYMMETRY

Symmetry works and asymmetry does not. Symmetry is used as shorthand for the concept of near-symmetry, where the sides are not equal – slight variations may exist – but they do not affect the overall balance of the relationship. Near symmetry is dynamic and allows for diversity.

Many partners adopt an approach based on complementarity and equity, rather than pursuing complete equality and that asymmetry is reduced and minimized in the pursuit. Near symmetry should guide the partnership process.

The webinar follows five fundamental dimensions identified by Koehn and Obamba: Initiating and constructing (design phase); managing; capacity building; sustaining and evaluating. Emphasis is placed on ensuring consistency across dimensions. Each dimension is further examined in this summary.

INITIATING AND CONSTRUCTING

What Does Not Work

Northern institutions or researchers who identify and select partners without equitable involvement of their Southern partners. Pursuing initiatives that are of particular interest to Northern institutions or donors and not the Southern partners is also a concern.

Showing little or no regard for identified sustainable-development needs in the country of operation or for the partner university's interests can also be detrimental to a THEP.

For symmetry to be a possibility, Southern partners MUST be deeply and directly involved in the drafting process.

What Does Work

Research shows that most fruitful collaborations grow out of facilitated or serendipitous contacts among individual researchers and educators and therefore the first step towards symmetry is promoting the establishment of open and supportive relationships with colleagues. Trust must be developed and can lead to joint problem and vision identification.

After partners have been identified and selected, joint planning of operational responses, including: partnership and project conceptualization; research design; resource mobilization and scheduling should occur.

MANAGING

The second dimension of THEPs is managing the partnership.

What Does Not Work

Disproportionate influence of Northern participants over project budget management is a major source of conflict and unequal resource distribution and can be distracting and undermine enthusiasm.

Imbalances in research responsibilities and scholarly opportunities are also often a source of friction. Establishment of separate administrative units for transnational collaboration leaves the rest of the institution excluded and uninvolved. This enclaving

ensures that other parts of the university do not know what the partnership is doing and the resulting confusion can undermine the THEP.

What Does Work

For managing a THEP, there are five areas of focus:

1. Administrative Symmetry
 - Designation of project co-coordinators on both sides who interact on a regular basis
 - Administrative symmetry among (1) the Southern co-PI and the senior international official of his/her university and (2) the Northern co-PI and the senior international official of his/her university
 - Roughly equal opportunities to influence management decision-making, including: scheduling visits, securing project resources, human-resource planning, research-leadership initiatives, curricula building, budget setting, allocating funds and other resources, conference attending and presenting, results reporting, financial monitoring and accountability, managing grants, and reporting
2. Transnational Research
 - Northern team led by someone with experience living and working in the South
 - Southern leader – a scholar with reduced teaching expectations
 - Northern and Southern co-managers possess a substantial measure of authority when dealing jointly with emerging issues
 - Light collaboration infrastructure that permits partners to keep their own working methods
3. Money
 - Transparent budgets and financial reports
 - Budget devolution¹ built upon in-depth training and mentoring
 - Procedural safeguards
4. Trust Building
 - Opportunities for egalitarian face-to-face, trust-building interaction²
5. Exit Strategy

- Early and persistent attention to an exit strategy

CAPACITY BUILDING

The book, as well as the webinar, focus on capacity building at three levels: Human, Institutional and Partnerships as a Whole.

Human

What Does Not Work

Focusing on technical competence without giving attention to interpersonal skills and civic engagement. And when it comes to training, there are two areas of concern: ignoring ancillary staff training and training in single-culture competence.

What Does Work

A comprehensive human development strategy incorporates four interrelated learning processes:

1. Enhanced leadership skill development of faculty and managerial staff. This diminishes need for project micro-managing.
2. Southern co-investigators able to determine the focus of investigation, design and plan the methodological approach, negotiate agreements, carry out the studies or development interventions, and engage in project monitoring and evaluation
3. Transnational-competence building³
4. In-country enhancements such as mentoring, distance education and sandwich programs.

Institutional

What Does Not Work

- Short-term, in and out “Procure and run” research arrangements
- Exaggerated capacity by educational policy makers
- Overlooking institutional weaknesses

What Does Work

- Enhanced administrative, personnel-management, and financial/grants-management procedures and processes
- Southern educational leaders “progressively take the lead” (DAC 1996, p. 13)

- Attract diaspora institution builders

Partnership as a Whole

In building the partnership as a whole, you are enhancing the “capacity to build capacity.”⁴ To build this capacity, a THEP should focus on:

- State-of-the-art technology transfer accompanied by training in its uses and applications
- Critical mass of researchers
- Additional partnership-capacity-building initiatives specifically focused on partner identification, budgeting, management and donor relations.

Capacity building for institutions is long-term work. By awarding institution building projects for a duration of 10 or more years, donors have the opportunity to empower universities to address the capacity building challenges of sustainable research and development.



Learn more about the Innovative Agriculture Research Initiative (iAGRI), a THEP between the Ohio State University Consortium and Sokoine University of Agriculture in Tanzania mentioned in the webinar at www.iagri.org. iAGRI is a Feed The Future project sponsored by the USAID Tanzania Mission.

SUSTAINABILITY

What Does Not Work

- Rigidity or failure to recognize that THEPs are dynamic
- Lack of support at the top
- Pursuit of short-term ventures rather than attention to long-term collaborations

What Does Work

In today's resource-constrained environment, the persistence of THEPs devoted to sustainable development activities requires a cultivation of connections with relevant stakeholders. Without ownership by key domestic stakeholders,

partnerships are unlikely to survive the termination of donor support.

In addition, the following is important:

- Commitment by senior management
- Adequate project funds
- Capacity-building support not prematurely terminated
- Continued donor funding for “*operating and equipment maintenance costs ... essential for retaining skilled staff*” and enabling them to work productively⁵
- Incorporation of additional helpful partners
- Links with community initiatives
- Partners balance project commitment with exiting, if needed, at the right time and introducing new partners to breathe life into the THEP.

EVALUATION

The final dimension of THEP covered both in the book and in the webinar is evaluation.

What Does Not Work

Improperly designed evaluations concentrate on delivery of readily quantifiable inputs and outputs, such as: number of partnerships entered, courses developed, professionals trained, reports issued, workshops conducted, and staff exchanged, rather than assessing the extent to which research and development outcomes were actually achieved.

In turn, donors often limit assessments of success to timeliness, cost containment, and short-term deliverables.

Benefits accrued to Northern institutions and societies are often ignored in partnership evaluations.

Process shortcomings in the evaluation can also be problematic. An example is given during the webinar of the evaluation of the Belgian VLIR partnership with the University of Zambia, where a 6 day evaluation of a 10-year program occurred 1-year after the end of the program.⁶

What Does Work

The symmetrical approach to THEP evaluation is inclusive; it emphasizes participation by all stakeholders and balances short-term and long-term outcome and impact assessments.

“Evaluation of the partnership itself, not just of outputs and deliverables”⁷ has to be built into the partnership.

THEP evaluators look for a strong evidence of a sense of *joint ownership* among partnered universities and communities. They look for strengthened trust, deepened connections and mutual-asset building.

Three questions are critical to evaluating the partnership:

1. To what extent did the partnership meet mutual objectives?
2. Are the combined transaction benefit and cost outcomes better than what they would be to engage in such transnational work outside of the partnership?
3. Are alternative partnership arrangements likely to generate superior results?

EVALUATION RESOURCES

Koehn, P. H. & Uitto, J. L. (2015) Beyond outputs: pathways to symmetrical evaluations of university sustainable development partnerships,

Koehn, P. H. & Uitto, J. L. (2013). Evaluating sustainability education: Lessons from international development experience

CONCLUSIONS

Asymmetrical partnerships generate conflicts and failures. (Near) Symmetrical THEPs work by allowing all partners to share in designing managing and implementing projects, and assessing outcomes. In a symmetrical THEP, all partners are willing to adjust positions, respect differences, modify objectives, and participate in a process they do not completely control.

Funding decisions and financial accountability are delegated as close as possible to the place where

the partnered research and development project is taking place.

Southern and Northern university partners' capacity to engage in sustainable development are dramatically enhanced when partnerships work to strengthen the capacity of collaborating civic organizations.

Productive and successful THEPs are future-directed. They are transparent and have shared accountability for performance.

CASE STUDY-AMPATH

During the webinar, an illustrative example of a THEP was given. Academic Model Providing Access to Healthcare (AMPATH) is a partnership between Indiana University-Purdue University, Indianapolis-Moi University Schools of Medicine Partnership, which began in 1989.



The partnership emphasizes mutual benefit, complementarity, equity, and long-term mutual commitment to the partnership's goals.

Learn more about AMPATH at <http://www.ampathkenya.org/> and watch a short video at <https://youtu.be/zkoWdaqHUs4>

ADDITIONAL INSIGHT

How did you measure 10 years (minimum) as the gold standard for THEPs? When APLU was launching the Africa-US Initiative, APLU spoke with the seven foundations that funded the Partnership for Higher Education in Africa (PHEA). The 10-year measurement is based on the time frame they

recommended. PHEA expressed that a full project lifespan of 10-15 year was optimal.

How do you get funders to buy into supporting the development of these types of collaborations so that they don't start off one-sided? You need to be able to show results and outcomes and this is where the evaluation piece of THEP has great importance. An evaluation scheme is needed that looks beyond outputs and at outcomes, in order to paint a compelling picture for donors.

Building capacity within the Southern partner institution is an obvious goal. What benefits to Northern institutions are ideal goals, assuming that raw capacity building (of the same sort needed in the South) is either unneeded or better accomplished in another way? This is one of the most overlooked parts of THEPs, as the emphasis is usually placed on the benefits to the Southern partner. Institutions in the North can still have institutional capacity building needs. Questions today are of global importance-we need to be collaborating transnationally to see impacts, for example, those associated with Climate Change. Benefits that accrue in the North are underestimated, not only to principle investigators, but also in terms of creating opportunities for creating globally minded students (the future generation of researchers, practitioners and community leaders).

Many partnerships also have a large faculty exchange component, building human capacity in ancillary staff. These types of exchanges are often overlooked in how they build the capacity of Northern partners.

What does the funding structure look like for projects with mutual capacity building mandates? Substantial proportion of the funding often comes from the partner universities themselves, making cost-sharing an important part of partnerships. This could go into capacity building for the north, even if the donor is not focused on this in their RFP. There is a possibility to go outside of the donor and get additional resources (private business, NGO, community organizations) and those donors could

be interested in funding the capacity building of Northern partners. Emphasis in the US on regional development is also an opportunity for linkages in regards to mutual capacity building.

I want to know what you mean by "involving the whole university." Take, for example, a STEM-based initiative. How do the humanities fit in and do they really need to be involved? The entire university may not need to be involved; however, emphasis should be placed in involving units that leads to creating synergy between projects and/or departments within the institutions. Specifically looking at the social sciences, they do often tend to be ignored in these types of partnerships. There is a need to have social scientists involved in partnerships so that we have the full picture is available.

An example of the inclusion of other university units was provided in the AMPATH example. Remember that AMPATH is a health focused program, but the Faculty of Law has been engaged and now provides legal support to women who have been traumatized by domestic abuse, HIV/AIDs and other factors.

Is it possible to think of the primary focus of sustainability being in the community? To the extent possible, community sustainability would almost be a requirement in a Global South partnership today. It is important to not minimize the importance of basic research-and what can be gained by partnering with Southern partners who can provide insight and findings that may be beneficial in the long-run to local communities in terms of sustainability.

Emphasis is placed on focusing on outcomes instead of metrics. What is the best way to monitor progress throughout a project? The issue of monitoring is one that needs to be addressed at the beginning of the partnership, with a process that calls for periodic monitoring so you can see how you are doing in terms of the partnership and the mutual interest of both parties. The key is to ensure that when you are monitoring, that you're not just looking at outputs, but that you're also looking

more deeply at what progress has been made in terms of outcomes. Checkpoints are going to involve conditions of capacity building. More detail on a framework for THEP evaluation is provided in Chapter 8 of *The Transnationally Partnered University*.

THIS WEBINAR WAS BASED ON



In *The Transnationally Partnered University*, Koehn and Obamba explore the transnational-higher education landscape in Africa and examine the extent to which the reality of partnership matches its golden rhetoric. By partnering across disciplinary and geographical boundaries, universities enable societies to

make progress in alleviating poverty, adapting to climate change, and dealing with other current and future challenges. Specific approaches for linking African scholars and institutions of higher learning through symmetrical and mutually beneficial North-South and South-South partnerships are explored. More information on the book is available at:

<http://www.palgrave.com/page/detail/the-transnationally-partnered-university-peter-h-koehn>

PRESENTERS



Dr. Peter H. Koehn is Professor of Political Science, The University of Montana's Distinguished Scholar for 2005, a Fulbright New Century Scholar, and recipient of APLU's 2011 Michael P. Malone award for international leadership and the 2012 George M. Dennison

Presidential Faculty Award for Distinguished Accomplishment. Over the course of his career, he has taught and conducted research in Ethiopia, Nigeria, Eritrea, Namibia, China, Hong Kong, and Finland. At The University of Montana, Professor Koehn has played an instrumental role in the establishment of undergraduate degree programs in Climate Change Studies, International Development Studies, Global Public Health, and the University's ground-breaking Peace Corps Prep

program. As APLU's first faculty fellow, he initiated the on-going international research and development project database in 2007.



Milton Obamba is Lecturer in the School of Education and Social Sciences at the University of Central Lancashire, UK. His recent publications have appeared in the *Higher Education Policy*, *Compare: Journal of*

International and Comparative Education, *Journal of Higher Education in Africa*, and *Sage Handbook of International Higher Education*.



Increasing the power of higher education institutions as sustainable and scalable engines of development

The Knowledge Center on Advancing Development through Higher Education works to create, curate, analyze and share knowledge about capacity building and institutional transformation in higher education for development.

Based in Washington, D.C., the Knowledge Center's activities provide policy makers, donors, researchers, and practitioners with evidence-based approaches to inform investments in human and institutional capacity development of institutes of higher education in developing countries. Our purpose is to develop knowledge in support of strengthening international higher education's capacity to address socioeconomic development challenges facing the developing world and improving APLU member university engagement with these higher education institutions.

Learn more about the Knowledge Center and access the webinar recording at www.aplu.org/knowledgecenter

¹ Soudien, 2009, p. 232

² CIDA

³ Koehn and Rosenau, 2010

⁴ Johanson and Saint, 2007, p. 5

⁵ Johanson and Saint, 2007, p. 55

⁶ de Nooijer and Siakanomba, 2008, p. 7

⁷ Wanni, et al., 2010, p. 58