

A PARTNERSHIP OF UN-EQUALS: GLOBAL SOUTH–NORTH RESEARCH COLLABORATIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract: With the realisation that institutions of higher learning may play a powerful role in transforming the world, research partnerships between institutions in the Global South and North have gained popularity. These partnerships are meant to empower and strengthen the contribution of higher learning institutions and bridge the North/South knowledge divide. Considering the limited access to research resources in the Global South, it is anticipated that these partnerships will create research opportunities for scholars. However, while it can be acknowledged that the research partnerships can be of benefit to African institutions and economy, there are practical challenges that limit the success of most research partnerships. Using the authors's experience this article explores and describes issues that surround research collaborations between institutions of higher learning in the Global South and North.

Keywords: *partnership, Global South, Global North, research collaboration, higher education institutions*

Introduction

Research is one of the fundamental activities taking place in institutions of higher learning. Teferra and Altbach (2004) explained that as the 21st century is recognised as a knowledge era, universities and other institutions of higher learning are expected to be involved in more research so as to create the knowledge required and to be in a position to create knowledge pertinent to their local context. As such, collaborative research between higher learning institutions in the Global South and North has been seen as critical in improving the knowledge production of individual researchers and their universities (Collins 2014). In agreement, Obamba and Mwema (2009: 21) have opined that research collaborations between African institutions of higher education and those in developed regions constitute

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the most productive framework for reinvigorating and strengthening research capacity. As indicated by Dodson (2017: 2), we are in the “Fourth Age,” where new ideas and knowledge are developed by networks rather than by individuals, institutions or nations. However, despite the hype about international collaborative research, Mavhunga (2018) warned that there are also deceitful neo-liberal partnerships that continue colonial infrastructures of dependency among African institutions and scholars. According to Mavhunga (2018: 32), some research partnerships reveal Africa’s enduring colonial ties to financial dependence on the Global North and a struggle to be equal partners. It is reported that these collaborations are marred with many challenges that defeat the very purpose of their existence. These challenges include power inequities, communication barriers and diverging research priorities (Matenga et al: 2019). In reference to the issue of unequal power in the partnerships between African universities and those in developed countries, Cabonnier (2014) argues that although it is difficult to have equitable partnerships in practice, it seems that whoever wields the financial power in the partnership has the control. Using the authors’ experience, the present article seeks to explore and describe issues that surround general research collaborations between the Global South and North institutions of higher learning.

The Global South–North Knots: An Overview

Much has been written about the Global South–North divide. However, there is still contention as to what exactly the Global South–North divide entails (see Milani and Lazar 2017; Pennycook and Makoni 2020; Santos 2012). For some, this divide is simply used to illustrate a geographical positioning of countries on the map, while for others it points to geopolitical inequalities of power and power relations. As explained by Milani and Lazar (2017), the Global South–North divide may be used to capture geographical positionality and geopolitical power. Therefore, the Global South/North cannot be defined in priori substantive terms but rather needs to be understood in relational terms. We are reminded by Nandy (1983) that the modern world uses polarities to establish hierarchies and politics of difference.

According to Pennycook and Makoni (2020: 7), in many cases the “South” is doing various kinds of work: It is a label of political economy that refers to impoverished regions of the world, while the “North” denotes the wealthy first-world countries. The South, from Santos’s (2012) perspective, refers both

to the conditions of suffering and inequality brought about by capitalism and colonialism. In this regard, the Global South denotes the people, places and ideas that have been left out of the grand narrative of modernity, while the Global North is about people, places and ideas superior in position in the global space. As Slater (2004) notes, despite the different ways in which this divide frames the world, all attention is drawn to the dominance of Euro-American political economy against the so-called developing countries, of which Africa is a part. The Global North's dominance has been justified by some arguing that the Global South is the one that continues to maintain its domination by the Global North. According to Kabou (1991), as quoted by Horsthemke (2008), the Africans' lack of initiative, their laziness, victim-and-beggar mentality, and corruption continue to maintain the dominance of the Global North over Africa. Kabou (1991) further argued that the fact that Africans still think that others must take care of their development will obviously give the Global North an upper hand, even in partnerships. However, Kabou's argument seems to be quick to blame Africans for the effects of colonialism and the unequal power relations it comes with. Perhaps this issue should not be understood from the perspective of the beggar mentality alone because this ignores the role that is played by colonialism and the asymmetrical world order that is sustained not only by colonial matrices of power but also by pedagogies and epistemologies that continue to produce alienated Africans that are socialised into seeing the Global North as more powerful than them (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018).

Some scholars have already argued that the Global South–North divide has already differently positioned institutions of higher learning according to their country's position in the divide. For example, as argued by Connell (2014: 527), the “normal functioning of the global economy of knowledge” is a highly political economy that favours theory produced in the metropole and marginalises any forms of knowledge “from the periphery.” Evidence from the literature (Costello and Zumla 2000; Pennycook and Makoni 2020) has suggested that the Global South–North divide has many implications for collaborations that institutions of higher learning engage in. For example, there is a concern that, based on this divide, a particular geopolitics of knowledge privileges Northern perspectives and prevents Southern scholars from contributing a differently positioned interpretation of events and practices (Pennycook and Makoni 2020: 280–81). Pennycook and Makoni further explained that since the politics of the Global South/North has

privileged the North to determine what knowledge is and how it can be studied, scholars in the geographical South end up doing research on local contexts but doing so from what might be called Northern perspectives. Having said that, Connell argues that “northern hegemony and southern extraversion are massive realities that shape the research-based knowledge formation. Hegemony does not mean total domination by the North” (2014: 78). This illustrates how collaboration between institutions in the Global South and North is challenging because of the inherent power inequities already in existence throughout history. We are, however, reminded by Green and Johns (2019) that partners may never be “equal” in size, amount of resources or influence, but they should always strive to be equitable by respecting the value that each brings to the partnership.

What Are the Benefits of Research Collaborations?

Collaboration is a process of shared creation, in which two or more individuals with complementary skills come together to create a shared understanding about a phenomenon (Matenga et al. 2019). According to Shrum et al. (2007), international research collaboration is construed as a joint research activity with a common aim or shared objective among researchers in different countries or in different regions of the same country. The scholarship on collaboration and partnerships indicates that there has been a substantial increase in collaboration between institutions in the North and South. For instance, the National Science Board (2014) has indicated that there has been growth in cross-institution, cross-sector and cross-national collaboration in recent years. We are also told by Collins (2014) that a large number of higher education partnership activities have occurred between Africa and the US, the UK, Europe and many other countries including the G8.

Morfit et al. (2008) observed that the expansion of international partnerships in Africa is due to the growing belief that higher education plays an important role in both the economic and social development of individuals and nations. When specifically referring to Africa-US higher education institutions research partnerships, Collins (2014: 943) explained that the general purpose of these is to leverage the knowledge production and diffusion capacity of universities as institutions of social progress and development. In this instance, universities in the South/North are able to connect researchers who complement each other in different ways for the creation of knowledge and contribution to scholarship. For instance, for institutions in the Global North,

these collaborations give them an opportunity to gain access to knowledge in the Global South so as to contribute solutions to different global issues. Information on some issues of interest may not be available in the North but can be sourced from the South. For example, some diseases, such as malaria, are common in Africa and information about them can be sourced from there through research collaboration. Also, collaboration in such cases may help to research issues in local African contexts, with people who understand these (see Connell 2014 for a comparable argument).

Also, for African institutions, research collaborations may help with regard to an institutional internationalisation drive and access to funding, in order to advance research and contribute new knowledge. According to Maringe and Foskett (2010: 1) internationalisation should be seen as universities strategic response to globalisation. Maringe and Foskett (2010) describe internationalisation in higher education contexts as the integration of international or inter-cultural dimensions into the tripartite mission of teaching, research and service. This means that higher education institutions should provide an educational experience that prepares students to fit beyond their national borders, while also appealing to those outside the country. Based on this, with the current socio-economic landscape partly influenced by globalisation, the higher education institutions in Africa and the world over have to make themselves attractive to potential students even beyond their borders. Some of these countries are confronted with a decline in enrolments of domestic students and thus end up relying heavily on foreign students to remain viable if their main source of income is tuition (Dodson 2017). However, with the current labour market of globalisation, graduates are required to be able to grasp internal issues and operate in a global setting. With the infusion of internationalisation into the culture of higher education, students and educators can gain a greater awareness of the global issues and how educational systems operate across countries, cultures and languages (Hénard, Diamond and Roseveare 2012: 8). As such, “Institutions that are able to prepare ‘students of the world’ will be the universities of the new century” (Kishun 2007). Moreover, a country with more collaborative linkages with others is placed in an advantageous position, which endows it with privilege to leverage the domestic science and technology capabilities and exploit the foreign investments in research and development (Cabonnier 2014). An example of this is the University of Botswana, which currently has 40 various partnerships with universities in 18 countries around the world

and international students (www.ub.bw). Another example is the University of Cape Town that prides itself on several global research networks (www.uct.ac.za).

Alternatively, research collaborations can be used as channels to advance research and innovation. The importance of inter-disciplinarity and the cross-fertilisation of ideas and methodologies in contemporary research cannot be over-emphasised (Teferra and Altbach 2004). Most of the African institutions of higher learning are going through a difficult landscape, where political will towards research activities is limited. As such, research funds are very limited and can only rely on international collaborations for funding. In agreement, Dodson (2017: 3) reported that, due to the limited funding for research in some regions and the magnitude of socio-economic and developmental challenges, collaborative research should be seen as a strategy to develop research capacity and contribute meaningfully to solve challenges. As such, access to funding is the principal impetus for African researchers to partner with researchers from developed countries. Emphasising the important role played by research collaborations between North and South universities, Hénard, Diamond and Roseveare (2012) explained that these collaborations bring better access to scientific resources (laboratories, equipment, expertise), talent, expertise and ideas, including access to increasingly complex (and often large-scale) instrumentation. Beaver (2001) offered a summary on North–South research collaborations as including accessing expertise, sharing resources, improving funding potential, advancing professionally, learning tacit knowledge, tackling greater problems, enhancing productivity as measured in terms of publications and citations, getting to know people, learning new skills, satisfying curiosity, sharing the excitement of an area with other people, reducing errors, staying focused on research, reducing isolation, advancing education (i.e., among students), advancing knowledge and having fun. However, for many researchers in the Global South, research collaborations have become a constant reminder of being unequal in knowledge creation.

Conceptual Framework: Theory of Collaborative Advantage and Post- Colonialism Theory

The present article uses the theory of collaborative advantage and post-colonialism theory to describe research collaborations in higher education institutions of the Global South–North. When used in combination the two

theories illuminate that although collaboration between higher education institutions of the Global South–North may strengthen the capacity of African institutions, they may also be an instance of domination by the Global North institutions.

The use of “post” by post-colonial theory by no means suggests that the effects or impacts of colonial rule are now long gone, rather, it highlights the impact that colonial and imperial histories still have in shaping a colonial way of thinking about the world and how Western forms of knowledge and power marginalise the non-Western world (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015). From the post-colonial perspective, the mentality in which the institutions have when getting into collaborations is highly influenced by the contemporary remnants of established patterns of power between the coloniser and the colonised. This power pattern is referred to as the coloniality of power (Quijano 2007). According to Quijano (2007), the power of coloniality lies in its control over social structures so as to dominate. The concept of the coloniality of power enables delving deeper into how the world was bifurcated into those in charge of power structures and those who are not (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015). In the context of this article, the coloniality of power is reflected by the domination which is always exerted by the Global North partner institution and influencing the direction the collaboration should take. This illuminates an unequal collaboration based on the asymmetrical world order of the Global South-North.

The present article uses the theory of collaborative advantage, as espoused by Huxham and Vangen (2013), to analyse research collaborations between institutions of higher learning in the Global South/North. The first admission brought about by this theory is that normally when collaborations are made, it is because there is some real gain that can be benefited from working together as organisations (collaborative advantage). However, often in practice, the results of a collaborative arrangement are surrounded by stories of disappointments (collaborative inertia). The theory seeks to unravel the dilemma of, if collaborative advantage is the goal for those who initiate collaborative arrangements, why is collaborative inertia so often the case? Indeed, considering limited research funds and resources in the Global South institutions, research collaborations are mostly seen as a way to contribute to international research knowledge and innovation, and provide solutions to local problems despite limited resources. This explains what Huxham

and Vangen (2013) describe as collaborative advantage on the part of the Global South institutions. Conversely, with their collaborative advantage, universities in the Global North see these collaborations as their obligation to contributing to knowledge production, and conceivably to addressing global issues that are confronting the Global South and the world at large.

However, despite these positive ambitions, in practice the process does not run as smoothly as anticipated. The collaborative advantage is usually clouded with collaborative inertia, which makes the collaborations problematic and sometimes fail to reach the positive intentions previously sought. The theory of collaborative advantage uses themes to help us understand the collaboration context and its end results. The themes centre on issues of common aims, power, trust, accountability, democracy and equality (Huxham and Vangen 2013). By using the themes-based structure, researchers can examine which themes are the most explicitly present in a partnership and how the underlying key issues influence those themes and the partnership. The present article uses two themes – trust and shared ownership, which translates to relational power – in order to explain and understand the dynamics of research collaboration between higher education institutions in the Global South and North. Relational power as explained within the post-colonialism perspective, is strengthened by the remnants of the colonial histories. Even though the theory of collaborative advantage admits unequal power issues, this is not done in the context that will clearly explain the collaboration inequalities between the Global South-North higher education institutions. Based on this, the use of both the collaborative advantage and post-colonial theory will help understand the domination that usually takes place in the collaborations between Global North and South institutions.

The Nature of Global South–North Higher Institutions of Learning Research Partnership Relationships

As indicated above, the nature of partnership relationships will be explained by using two themes from the theory of collaborative advantage.

Trust

Much has been written about trust in partnerships. In fact, the literature on collaboration and partnership puts critical emphasis on the importance of trust within these. As explained by the collaborative advantage theory, trust is a pre-condition for successful collaborations and partnerships (Huxham

and Vangen 2013). Even in general contexts, trust has been seen as a glue that holds social relationships together because without trust in each other, society will disintegrate since most relationships are not based on what is known about the other with certainty (Covey 2006).

According to Bennett, Gadlin and Levine-Finley (2010), working with others means relying on them, and relying on others always entails some level of risk which requires some level of trust. This suggests that, for research collaboration to be effective, there has to be some level of trust, and if there is no trust between collaborators, the collaboration will suffer and perhaps result in collaborative inertia. Covey (2006) conceptualises trust as confidence in the integrity and ability of others, and a relative lack of suspicion. It should, however, be emphasised that trust does not just occur; it is usually based on an assessment we make about another person's abilities, honesty, reliability and intentions.

Even though the literature and collaborative theory report that trust is very critical in any collaboration, it is unfortunate that the literature on the research collaborations between higher education institutions in the Global South and North gives a dull picture when it comes to trust. According to Matenga et al. (2019), mostly it is the African collaborators who are not trusted. They are not trusted to deliver quality services, or their usage of funds is suspect. Putting this into funders' and donors' perspective, Walsh et al. (2018) observed that donors and funders do not trust Southern researchers to manage funds and account for the research budget, and as such they place more trust in Northern partners. As explained by Jones and Barry (2011), this one-way accountability can lead to mistrust between partners, where Southern partners are held accountable to Northern partners with regard to the use of funds, while Northern partners are not.

Lack of trust in collaborators from the Global South has also been emphasised through funding bureaucracies. Even though Collins (2014) believes that funding bureaucracies are meant to prevent corruption or inefficiency, he notes that some of them stall progress. For instance, in adherence to the funding bureaucracies, funds can be released late, and some of the funding procedures can be too demanding on the partner from the Global South and less demanding on the other collaborators. Some of the funding regulations can even be conflicting with the regulations of the Global South institutions. An interesting story has been reported by Costello and Zumla (2000), where a

scholar involved in research collaboration with a US institution indicated that the terms of funding were based on the fact that, in case of any discrepancy in regulations, the US law would be the one adhered to. This, according to Costello and Zumla (2000), shows that the research collaboration between institutions in the Global South and North are semi-colonial in nature. From a post-colonial view, this reflects what Quijano (2007) calls the coloniality of power, which lies in its control over social structures so as to dominate the Global South partner.

However, it is important to ask if the distrust is justified. We are told by Coleman (2008) that an individual's perceptions about another can raise issues of mistrust. According to Coleman, reputation connects closely with decisions of whether to trust or not. One's reputation is based on one's background and culture. For example, Africa is a continent marred with issues of corruption and money laundering. Can we say it is this reputation of Africa that is potentially perpetuating a lack of trust? Or is it just issues of power? Green and Johns (2019), however, observed that trust leads to sharing of power and sharing of power may lead to trust. In trying to explain the root of mistrust, Grill (2003: 165) as quoted by Horsthemke (2008) has argued that Africa has taught the chronicles to be cautious and alert to corruption.

Shared Ownership and Power Sharing

The distribution of power is one of the aspects discussed as problematic within collaboration by the collaborative advantage theory. Without shared power, research partnerships are simply ways for the Global North to control what happens in the Global South. Hence, power in this instance is conceptualised from Mosse's (2007) perspective, where power is not seen as an attribute but in a relational sense – “power over others.” In this sense, therefore, powerlessness is not a lack of power but a subjection to the domination of others. Evidence from the literature suggests that partnerships between Northern and Southern partners are faced with power imbalances that usually privilege the former over the latter. According to Costello and Zumla (2000), this power discrepancy can be understood in terms of a new imperialism, whereby the North extends its power and recolonises the Global South, creating intellectual dependency. Explaining further the idea of intellectual dependency, Costello and Zumla reported that, in the collaborations, the capacity of the Southern partners is always built on the assumption that they are clueless and that Northern partners are superior

to their counterparts, which thus creates a paternalistic kind of capacity-building and a North–South dependency. In relation to this, the social critical theory perspective reminds us that all social relations are power relations and those who are dominant continue to use their power to (re)produce their position of privilege.

According to Huxham and Vangen (2013), power in a collaboration exists at different points; for example, the power to decide who may be part of the collaboration, the naming the project, the arrangement of meetings, writing funding proposals, etc. From this, it shows that those who are responsible for the administration of a collaborative project are powerful, as they decide the parameters of the project. From Green and Johns's (2019) perspective, researchers confirm their power through “co-opted” relationships, whereby other partners are slotted into a designated role created for them by the principal investigator.

In contrast, power dynamics are illuminated through funding processes. Research funding agencies usually prefer to fund collaborations between the Global South and North institutions through research institutions or academics based in the Global North (Costello and Zumla 2000). It is common for calls for research grant applications to indicate that the principal investigator should be from a Global North-based institution. From the start, this puts the principal investigator at the centre of power and those invited are kept at the periphery, taking instruction from the one who applied for funds. As argued by Huxham and Vangen (2013), those who do not have financial power are automatically deprived of power and people behave as if the collaboration is only based on the purse strings. Dodson (2017: 5) reiterated the same and observed that “economic and scientific inequalities between countries contributes to inequitable research partnerships with the wealthier partner prone to dominating the selection of partners, the research agenda, the decision-making process, budget management and publication.” This confirms that power inequalities are a common experience within all stages of South–North research partnerships, from funding and agenda setting, to data collection, analysis and research outputs. This is usually unhealthy for South–North research collaborations because it reinforces the undervaluing and marginalisation of the interests of partners from the South.

A Research Collaboration Between a Global North University and Global South: Our Experience

As a researcher in the Global South (University of Botswana), one of us was involved in a collaborative research project with a university in the Global North. After a few months, this person was dropped from the project because the two institutions had differing regulations concerning research funds. It is important to note a few research expectations from both universities to have a clear background of why this specific collaboration could not eventually work out.

In its aspiration to be a world-class research university, the University of Botswana was encouraging its staff to seek external funding as internal funds were limited (Guidelines for Research Funding 2009). Also, the university's internationalisation policy classified expansion into international research cooperation as important in giving it a competitive edge within international scholarship. As per the University of Botswana research strategy document (2008), significant research increasingly depended on researcher involvement in the international scholarly networks and on research projects that are undertaken through international collaboration.

As the university emphasised collaborative research and external funding, measures were put in place to facilitate procedures for external funds with due diligence. According to the Guidelines for Research Funding (2009), the research funds will normally be paid as advances to the researcher for a need not exceeding one month and the researcher will be expected to retire the advance, failing which the amount may be deducted from their salary. It was emphasised that payments to the researcher will only be made when their specific research account would be in credit. This means that the university expects the funder to deposit the money for the researcher to start to claim for the specific research project. However, the other university, as the wallet keeper (funded by the Scottish Funding Council), had different expectations that guided the collaboration. As observed by Dodson (2017) in collaborations between the Global North and South institutions, it is the wealthier partner who dominates the collaboration processes and activities. In this particular collaboration, the domination really started at the proposal-writing stage since the principal investigator was from a North-based university. The principal investigator from the Global North had the privilege to decide on the type of project to be undertaken and with whom.

I was invited when the parameters of the project had already been set. As explained by Green and Johns (2019), this shows how researchers confirm their power through “co-opting” other partners and slotting them into designated roles created for them by the principal investigator. This means that, right from the beginning, power was skewed towards the Global North collaborator. As an invited partner, you cannot do much but follow the rules set before your invitation. As argued by Huxham and Vangen (2013), those who do not have financial power are automatically deprived of power and choice. Although this reinforces the undervaluing and marginalisation of the interests of partners from the South, considering that research funding is very limited there, it is sometimes very difficult to turn down such offers or to strongly emphasise about having to be actively involved at all stages.

Inequality in power was also shown when the collaboration agreement indicated that it was to be interpreted according to Scottish law. This means that whether or not Botswana had a differing interpretation, this did not matter. Using Costello and Zumla’s (2000) view about collaboration between the South and North institutions, using a foreign law in another territory may be interpreted as new imperialism, whereby the North extends its power and recolonises the Global South, creating intellectual dependency. As Cabonnier (2014) observed, it seems that the financial power in the collaboration is used to determine who should be in control.

However, it is because of the payment arrangements that ended up with one of us having to be dropped from the project. The collaboration agreement indicated that payment was to be made quarterly in arrears. This meant that the expectation was that the University of Botswana should give the researcher some funds from its coffers to cover expenses and later invoice the other university to be refunded. However, as indicated earlier in this article, the University of Botswana funding regulations required that the funder should deposit the funds with the university and the money would then be monitored. As with most of the universities in the Global South, the University of Botswana could not engage in this kind of collaboration because this is against its regulations and, furthermore, it does not have the money to run this project and claim later. However, since the terms of the project were dominated by the Global North collaborator, which was bringing in funding, it meant that if the University of Botswana could not accommodate

the requirements of the lead collaboration institution, the said collaboration would not take place.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there is no doubt that research collaboration between the institutions of higher learning in the Global South and North may be beneficial if carefully carried out. However, for many researchers in the Global South, the inherent power and trust issues in partnerships have constantly reflected their status of unequal partners in knowledge creation. As such, there is a need for decolonising these collaborations to effect the impact that is needed from research collaborations. These research collaborations should put more emphasis on mutual respect and valuing each contribution made by the partners – not simply their financial power or geographical location. It will be interesting to see what will happen if research funders give funds directly to institutions in the Global South and then ask them to look for partners in the North.

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