

# SYMPOSIUM ON NEW MODELS OF NORTH-SOUTH PARTNERSHIPS

Organized by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, Ottawa

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## I. Introduction

Canadian universities have been engaged in partnerships with Southern partners for decades. Implemented within a rapidly changing international context where innovative approaches are urgently needed to successfully overcome challenges and build on opportunities and new capacities, these partnerships are becoming increasingly multifaceted. A single partnership initiative can include a wide range of partners from various sectors and countries.

As a follow up to a previous symposium in 2010 on the role of North-South partnerships within universities' internationalization strategies and as part of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada's (AUCC) and the International Development Research Centre's (IDRC) long-term collaboration, AUCC proposed to research and document the characteristics and success factors of new models of North-South partnerships implemented by Canadian universities as part of their internationalization strategies.

**“To reach beyond our own institutions to create alliances, partnerships and initiatives of shared purpose to address the challenges facing the world”.**

- Paul Davidson, President, AUCC

A key step in this research process was the organization, by AUCC, of a second Leaders' Symposium, this time on «New Models of North-South Partnerships», in Ottawa on June 12 and 13, 2012. The Symposium's goal was to give an opportunity to participants to share their innovative North-South partnership experiences and to identify the opportunities and challenges related to the development and implementation of new models of partnership. Ninety participants from Canadian universities, including pro-

fessors and International Liaison Officers-ILOs, and from various Canadian and international governmental and non-governmental organizations took part in the Symposium.

On June 12, the AUCC's President, Mr Paul Davidson, officially opened the Symposium. He welcomed all the participants, addressing special words of appreciation to the developing country partners who travelled to Canada to take part in the two-day knowledge sharing event. Mr Davidson emphasized the long term collaboration between AUCC and IDRC in areas related to the study and promotion of North-South university partnerships. He mentioned that past initiatives implemented through the AUCC-IDRC's partnership have focused on several dimensions of North-South partnerships, including their role within universities' internationalization strategies, dialogues on universities' policies towards the recognition and compensation of professors engaged in international cooperation activities and on the participation of university professors from the diaspora in international partnerships.

Mr Davidson also introduced the goal of the Symposium as a key step in the exploration of new models of North-South partnerships and to identify the characteristics of some of the best innovations in approaches to partnering within the shifting context of the global community. He highlighted the fact that the Symposium also contributes to one of AUCC's five strategic objectives “to reach beyond our own institutions to create alliances, partnerships and initiatives of shared purpose to address the challenges facing the world”.

His opening remarks ended with an overview of the Symposium's program.





IDRC Photo: Anna Lartey

## 2. Context: the Need to Adapt to a Changing Global Environment



Mr. David Malone, IDRC

Mr. David Malone, president of IDRC, presented his organization's experience in supporting and initiating various types of North-South partnerships involving Canadian and Southern universities. He emphasized the changing global context and the need to adapt to a global world and gave many examples of IDRC's involvement in innovative partnerships: linking scholars from various Southern countries and Canadian scholars with their peers from the South, supporting the development of independent policy research organizations in developing countries, engaging with individual philanthropists interested in supporting applied research activities, supporting partnerships between universities and other sectors like the private sector and the civil society.

He also emphasized the importance to go beyond the university framework to include organizations from various sectors in collaborative research. His key messages were that it is important to focus on the results to be achieved and to acknowledge that we live in a globalized world in which researchers must be linked at the global level through multiple models of partnerships. Tackling urgent issues like climate change and food security requires global level long term collaboration of many types.

Ms. Hélène Giroux, Director General of the Human Development Directorate at CIDA also commented on the impact of the changes in the global context on the partnerships. She added the need to emphasize economic growth, the evolving world demographics with the main trend being the relatively large youth population and high unemployment rates, the fact that Official Development Assistance flows are a small part of the North-South financial flows and the need to invest public funds in high value programs that can support economic growth as well as produce development results, such as support to generic drugs production and distribution. She also highlighted the importance of establishing broad knowledge exchange frameworks to give significant room to equitable access to knowledge and other resources.





IDRC Photo: David Barbar

### 3. Challenging the Received Approach to North-South University Partnerships



Dr. John Gaventa, Coady Institute

In his inspiring presentation Dr. John Gaventa from the Coady Institute invited participants to reflect on what characterizes new models of partnerships, compared to what he referred to as the «received approach» to North-South partnerships. The tendency to focus on technical assistance aimed at transferring knowledge from the North to the South to fill perceived knowledge deficits on the part of the South, instead of building on its assets, as well as the centralized and hierarchical management style that has been the typical way that such partnerships have been managed remain problematic in light of changes needed to overcome current global challenges.

Dr. Gaventa highlighted the challenges that the changes to the global context pose to this received model: the impact of globalization brings the need to establish South-south and other types of connections, the rise of the voices putting forward the ethical imperatives of recognizing the importance of local knowledge and innovation related to the overall notion of «epistemic or cognitive» justice. According to him, the necessary shift in North-South partnerships' paradigm must lead to the creation of transnational knowledge networks and to the building of a wide range of initiatives on multiple forms of knowledge, the promotion of a culture of mutual learning and

innovation based on collaborative research and learning networks, as opposed to the old North-South knowledge transfer activities still prevalent in a lot of the partnerships. But in order to ground this new paradigm into partnerships, it is key that northern organizations learn to take part as participants and accept that they will not always be in the drivers' seat, valuing and rewarding diverse types of outcomes.

He also highlighted some needed changes for the higher education to move beyond the received approach of partnership. Partnerships take time to mature and develop and achieving the necessary transformations will require a longer time horizon than what is currently allowed by traditional funding channels. There is also a need to review our definition of what constitutes success and best to integrate research, communications and policy influence at the onset of an initiative, a key factor in achieving impact.

His presentation also featured an account of a ten-year multi-country university partnership initiative, the Citizenship Research Center, initially convened by the Institute of Development Studies (Sussex, U.K.) and based on a model of non-traditional partnership that contributed to the production of multiple research outputs and brought a real sense of personal and institutional transformation amongst many of its organizational and individual participants.

A former participant in the CRC, Dr. Bettina von Lieres from the University of Toronto but formerly from the University of Western Cape in South Africa, shared the learning and reflections that arose from her participation in the project when she was a professor at the South African university. She shared it from the perspective of a southern institution, indicating that it was first presented to her as a different type of initiative from the partnerships that she had previously been part of, mainly because of its focus on how to build real collaborative research. The fact that the proposed initiative was built in harmony with the complex role of the researcher in the southern context doing a mix of research and policy engagement was also a deciding factor in her decision to contribute to the CRC project.

The more pronounced social and political embeddedness of the Southern researchers, as compared to that of the Canadian researchers, also emphasized during the June 2012 Symposium by Pablo Heidrich from the North South Institute, was mentioned by Dr. von Lieres as one of the key determinants of the type of research that can be done through such collaborative partnerships. Dr. von Lieres also concurred with Dr. Gaventa in emphasizing the need for appropriate participatory leadership exercised by leaders skilled in mediating between the various contexts.



Dr. Bettina Von Lieres, University of Toronto





Photo: Apurba K. Deb

## 4. Innovation in Action: Examples of Innovative North-South Partnerships

The Symposium participants were also presented examples of innovative partnerships involving, Canadian universities and a wide range of partners.

### Three Cases Discussed by Participants

Three of these partnerships were presented and discussed in small groups during the first day of the Symposium. Each group was asked to discuss the success factors, opportunities and challenges in implementing such partnerships and how they can promote collective understanding and learning. The results of the discussions were shared during a plenary session and three panelists offered closing remarks to close the session.

We are presenting each of these three initiatives below.

- **Building Capacity Outside the Classroom: Water Management in Bolivia,** University of Calgary, Universidad de San Francisco Xavier (Bolivia) and participating communities. This project engaged communities alongside universities to address the challenges of ground water availability and safety for drinking and irrigation and its management in Bolivian rural communities. The main activities included the establishment of an M.Sc. program in hydrogeology to train Bolivian hydrologists. The training of USFX faculty and of 24 Bolivian M.Sc. students from the government, university, NGO and private sectors. The program included training in participatory methodologies and required that they conduct field work in close collaboration with key stakeholders. The project also featured policy research and fora on water resource management. Applied research for the purpose of their thesis was focused on the needs



Antonio Barroso and Brendan Mulligan, University of Calgary



of communities. Thus the partnership between the Canadian and Bolivian universities was grounded in the need to respond to priority issues of improving the management of water resources by Bolivian communities.

- Building Environmental Governance Capacity in Bangladesh: University of Manitoba, North South University (Bangladesh), BRAC University (Bangladesh), Centre for Natural Resource Studies (Bangladesh). This project achieved its results through the creation of a two-year master's program in Resource and Environmental Management (MREM), by training faculty members and training more than 60 graduates in field-based experiential learning and by supporting the development of women-owned micro-enterprises. In addition, the project supported the creation of a Sustainable Development Policy Network.



Photos: University of Manitoba



- Developing a research-based monitoring system to prevent maternal deaths in Mali: Université de Montréal, Direction Régionale de la santé de Kayes and participating communities. Through various research and capacity building initiatives implemented since 2004, the Université de Montréal developed a monitoring system aimed at preventing maternal deaths in Mali. Partnerships between UDM and the Malian Regional Health Directorate.

These initiatives have in common to involve various partners located beyond the higher education sector, to aim at developing solutions to specific development challenges thus improving people's lives but all the while pursuing academic results like the creation of programs, the publication of articles or the training of graduate-level students. Such innovative experiences are very powerful examples of the many opportunities that university partnerships can offer to all partners but also of the challenges that such partnerships can present. The opportunities for the partners, both from the North and from the South include: support to the internationalization of Canadian universities, the development of new programmes, academic publications, interesting research opportunities for academics and students, rich cross-cultural experiences.

**The challenges include: building bridges between knowledge and action, the rigid funding requirements, understanding cultural differences, maintain continuity within a framework of short term funding and the limited organizational incentives for Canadian university professors to take part in such initiatives.**

In closing the session, three panelists indicated their appreciation for the lessons identified through the presentation of these field experiences. Ann Weston, Director, Special Initiatives Division, IDRC, indicated that it would be important to learn from failures and challenges and not only about success and that the examples presented would be an interesting starting point to develop a typology of partnerships, to draw common patterns and to reflect on ways to adapt such

experiences to the Canadian context. Tom Tunney, Manager, Special Initiatives, from the World University Service of Canada (WUSC) drew participants' attention to the richness of experiential learning embedded in these initiatives and the need to make the most of methodological and other differences to better tackle the complex issues facing the international community. Professor Ernest Yanful from Western University (London, Ontario) added that strength and innovation do not necessarily come from experience and that it is important to be open to new initiatives and to start small.

### **New Opportunities: Some Examples**

- The panels held on the second day of the Symposium gave participants an opportunity to listen to presentations about new dimensions of university partnerships developed within the DFID's bilateral program, with industry, with the use of information and communication technologies and on multi-country research partnerships in Latin America. They had been selected and were presented as examples to illustrate the many shapes and dimensions that North-South university partnerships can take.

Mr Phil Dillon from the British Council presented the approach undertaken by the DFID-funded Development Partnerships in Higher Education (DePHE) program to support the implementation of innovative North-South and South-South partnerships to contribute to the Millennium Development Goals. The main component of the programme was the creation of linkages between British universities, their southern partners, communities and various types of bilateral and multilateral organizations. The partnerships involved northern

and southern universities in North-South and South-South partnerships. South-south collaboration was also applied to other areas like research programmes. About 75% of the partnerships were directly managed by the Southern partners and 68 of the 200 projects involved three to five partners.

For the universities in the South, the opportunity to share knowledge on a regional basis was a key benefit resulting from their participation in the programme, thus echoing what Mr Malone had said the previous day about the fact that *«for developing countries, success resides in another developing country»*. Other benefits for them included improved capacities for both staff and students, the establishment of a credible track record to secure future funding, access to best practices and knowledge through networking at regional level and improvement in the globalization of their university. There were also benefits for British universities, including the enhancement of their international profile, the strengthening of their linkages with their Southern partners, an increase in student recruitment and, in some cases and the reinforcement of their position as world leaders in a variety of science and technology related fields.

Mike Volker, Director of the Innovation Office at Simon Fraser University presented the opportunities and challenges of university-industry partnerships and Professor John Ssebuwufu from AAU emphasized the importance of university-industry strategies to invest in key productive sectors like information technology and the environment. There are many of potential returns in such initiatives: useful research, student placements and the potential for large returns on technical innovations are all very attractive benefits for universities engaged with industry. Some of their main challenges include the need to find non-traditional ways to finance these partnerships as they often do not fit within regular university partnerships funding programs, the intellectual property rights (if research is funded by the university), the use of research to develop new policies and the frequent tension between, on the one hand, development and, on the other, industrialization objectives.

Another inspiring initiative was the development and delivery of a web-based course on gender-based violence in higher education linking professors and students from Ottawa (Carleton University), Sierra Leone (University of Sierra Leone) and Tanzania (University of Dar es Salaam). The project included the development of the course's curriculum and support to students who had to design and implement an action research on their respective campus through ongoing connections established between the students and professors of the three universities. This was a real innovation in the use of web-based technologies to connect the three participating groups and creative use of various means like videotapes, video conferencing, and electronic blackboard was certainly a key achievement in this project.

Dr. Pablo Heidrich from the North-South Institute presented the trilateral research partnerships in which his organization is engaged. In particular, the global impacts of some issues like mining and the environment require going beyond a country to country approach. For example, policy research in the mining sector, done by NSI and its Latin American partners from four countries, combined with active and engaged dissemination strategies with governmental and nongovernmental organizations has generated promising results so far.





Photo: IDRC

## 5. Reaching out beyond Universities' Borders

The Symposium was a chance to feature the participation of civil society and other organizations in North-South partnerships.

### Civil Society Organizations' (CSO) Partnerships with Universities

Two presentations addressed the opportunities and challenges of CSO-university partnerships.



Mr. Khalil Shariff, AKFC

In the second day's opening session Mr. Khalil Shariff, Chief Executive Officer of the Aga Khan Foundation Canada (AKFC), proposed some key principles that could help Canadian universities and CSOs to make the most of their partnerships:

- Build relationships over time instead of project-based: long term commitment is important.
- Create opportunities to collaborate and co-create knowledge: it needs to be a collaborative, joint achievement.
- maintain high standards of excellence, «world-class standards» are required;
- Be prepared to be changed, to be transformed, exposure and opportunities to be transformed should become a key objective.
- Positioning partnerships as an area in which to invest, coming from a position of strength as an institution that has something key to offer.

The principles put forward by Mr. Shariff are supported by findings of a recent research conducted by Elena Chernikova while she was a research awardee at IDRC, through which she studied the partnerships between Canadian universities and CSOs. She identified four major types of university-CSO collaboration: collaborative research, joint training programs, research fellowship of CSO experts in university, placements by or in CSOs for students or academics.

She outlined the many challenges faced by partners in such collaborative initiatives: differences in organizational culture and structure, building lasting relationships beyond the limitation of the project, cost-sharing and uneven funding flows, struggles to identify and pursue convergent goals, reconciling different incentives, motivations, interests and needs and the long time needed to build relationships. The factors that had a positive influence on partners' capacities to overcome these challenges were the joint design and identification of expected results, the development of a solid understanding of each other's goals and tackling challenges related to the management of the partnership in the early stages of the process.

### **Learning from Partnerships in other Sectors**

Representatives of three Canadian organizations -the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), the Association Community Colleges of Canada (ACCC) and the Canadian Council for International Cooperation (CCIC) shared their partnerships experience with participants.

The FCM establishes partnerships with local government associations around the world, supporting the strengthening of local governance structures through FCMI's expertise and sharing between Canadian municipal representatives and their counterparts in host countries. Canadian municipalities also learn new practices in the process.

The ACCC representative presented the partnerships for employment between Canadian and Caribbean community-based colleges, relevant ministries and councils and employers which aim to train Caribbean youth in sectors where there is an acute need for trained workers. The partnerships are implemented at individual and organizational levels.

The participants were also presented with the process implemented by CCIC, its members and partners to create, implement and sustain the Global Forum on the role of civil society in development effectiveness. Initiated in 2009, this process included several consultative steps, leading to the first civil society statement on aid effectiveness. In 2004, CCIC's members adopted a revised version of its code of ethics that included a section on partnership principles that outline their commitment to engage in equitable and mutually beneficial partnerships involving accountable partners.

## **6. Next Steps: an Agenda for Learning and Change**

The participants discussed the need to learn more about the factors contributing to the success of effective and innovative North-South university partnerships. The in-depth case studies to be completed by AUCC will offer the possibility to gain a better understanding on some of these questions. Their main findings will lead to the completion of a guide summarizing their most promising practices\*.

This learning agenda will contribute to further policy discussions on how to support Canadian universities and their partners in their efforts to remove obstacles to the replication of these promising practices.

*\*AUCC published a report in 2013 on this research along with six case studies. Please see [www.aucc.ca](http://www.aucc.ca)*