

THE SOUTHERN PERSPECTIVE OF THE NORTH-SOUTH EDUCATIONAL PARTNERSHIP IN IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF TEACHER EDUCATION: THE CASE OF LESOTHO COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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Introduction

Over the years, we have known global North-South dealings to have been based largely on traditional donor-recipient relationships. Foreign aid, uni-directional from the North to the South, was central to these relationships and showed how partnerships in academia 'have been and continue to be rooted in the assumptions, understandings and practices of foreign aid and must be understood in those terms as well' (Samoff and Carrol, 2004: 71). The history of these relationships has been well documented. Gaillard (1994), for example, showed how changes have evolved from technical assistance, overseas training, institution building, institutional twinning arrangements and collaborative research partnerships.

As far back as the 1980s, the Independent Commission on International Development Issues chaired by Willy Brandt produced a ground-breaking report which influenced the relations between the so-called developed North and the under-developed South. Since then there has been a perceived need for a new international economic order and international relations in which the privileged and rich North and the disadvantaged and poor South would benefit in a sustainable way (cf. Sifuna, 2000). Since the publication of this report, there have been better understandings of the complex realities of the North-South relationships that had been conditioned, among other factors, by the postcolonial experience of the South, and perhaps those of the North as some may argue.

This paper will focus on the current trends in North-South relationships where development assistance is built around partnerships. In particular, it will focus on partnerships in the context of educational improvement and provision in higher education. The author shares the

experiences of Lesotho College of Education's participation in a partnership involving thirteen Irish third level institutions and one Ugandan teacher education institution under the aegis of the Centre for Global Development Through Education (CGDE) based in Mary Immaculate College in Limerick, Ireland. In the process of sharing these personal experiences the author takes a critical stance, providing both the positive lessons as well as pointing out areas in which improvement would be needed in this partnership, and hopefully in other North-South educational partnerships. The author draws most of the information for this paper from direct personal involvement in CGDE and its activities. He draws further information from some interviews with Lesotho participants in the CGDE activities. CGDE documents and the literature on partnerships were also useful sources of information

The paper is divided into six sections. The first section introduces the concept of partnerships and the second provides the national and institutional context of Lesotho College of Education. The third section briefly outlines the key features of CGDE, its background and the partnership itself. The fourth section is a brief review of existing relevant literature on North-South educational partnerships. The fifth section provides a critical discussion of this CGDE-led partnership from the author's Southern perspective. Finally, the sixth section looks into the lessons learnt and, hopefully, areas for consideration in future North-South educational partnerships.

National and Institutional Context of the College

Lesotho is a mountainous and landlocked country in southern Africa, completely surrounded by South Africa with a population of 1.8 million. It was a British colony, politically and economically under the British tutelage although on the socio-cultural side the French (Paris Evangelical Missionaries Society, later the French Catholic Missionaries and the Anglican missionaries) established churches and schools. Therefore most schools have historically belonged to the Catholic, the Evangelical and the Anglican Churches. The churches also owned teacher training colleges until 1974 when the National Teacher Training College (NTTC then) and now Lesotho College of Education was established.

Lesotho College of Education opened its doors in 1975 after the seven church-owned teacher training colleges were abolished. It was then run as a department under the Ministry of Education until 2002 when it became autonomous through an act of parliament to be renamed Lesotho College of Education. Since then the college has had the authority to determine its own programmes and strategic direction and to allocate its resources. It continues to be a public institution, financed by means of a subvention from the government. The Ministry of Education and Training is the main custodian of educational provision and management in Lesotho from the primary schools to the tertiary and higher education level.

The College currently has about 5,000 students and is the only teacher education and training college in Lesotho, particularly catering for pre-service primary teacher training. It offers diplomas and certificates for primary, secondary and early childhood programmes, some through a full-time pre-service mode and the others through a part-time in-service distance learning mode. The majority of its student population (over 50 percent) are in the part-time programmes. Entry into the programmes, except the early childhood programme to which the minimum entry criterion is a junior secondary certificate, is a high school 'O level' qualification. The College also provides continuing professional development for practicing qualified teachers in the areas of pedagogy, special education and technology in education. It also participates in research, consultancy and evaluation work relevant to the education system.

Some of the major objectives of the College as articulated in its 2010-2013 strategy include: programme and curriculum review and development of quality assurance systems; strengthening information and communication technologies for administration and teaching; and improving teaching and teaching practice services in teacher training. One of the key strategies for achieving these objectives is through partnerships with other institutions locally, regionally and globally. The next section examines the notion and practice of partnerships.

Literature on Partnerships

Partnership as a development strategy has come to replace the distant, hands-off and disengaged approach to development in the form of hand-outs and give-and-go development support. In education, the challenges of Education for All (EFA) as articulated in Jomtien in 1990, have necessitated a partnership approach to development according to Draxler (2008). As a result of these education challenges as well as the urgency resulting from the approach of EFA and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – scheduled to be delivered by 2015 – North-South partnerships as a development strategy have become common both in the language and practices of policy makers. These development targets appear to be premised on the idea that such partnerships will not only speed up implementation through the experience and expertise in the North, but will enhance capacities in the South and ensure sustainability beyond the partnerships.

But what exactly do these partnerships involve and represent, particularly in a North-South educational context when the notion ‘North-South’ is itself problematic? Samoff and Carrol (2004) saw the notion of partnerships as an elusive target; a view also shared by Ishengoma (2011: 9). Dell further pointed to the fact that ‘building and maintaining successful partnerships that can work within and challenge the tenacious asymmetries of global power, resources and capabilities often requires sensitive planning and attention to detail’ (2010: 1). But what are these partnerships? And is there anything in how they are defined that could help us understand how they could be made effective in spite of the problematic history of North-South relationships?

The Concept and Practice of Partnerships

Draxler (2008: 31) viewed partnerships as the pooling together and managing of resources, and the mobilisation of competencies and commitments for the purposes of achieving some development goals and agendas. Others see partnerships as collaborative arrangements between actors in two or more spheres of society involved in a non-hierarchical process to achieve some goals (Glasbergen, 2010: 1). In some cases, especially in the academic sphere,

partnerships are used interchangeably with academic links and linkages (Ishengoma, 2011).

The World Economic Forum (2005a) defines a partnership as ‘a voluntary alliance between various *equal* actors from different sectors whereby they agree to work together to reach a common goal or fulfil a specific need that involves *shared* risks, responsibilities, means and competencies’ (author’s emphasis). That said about partnerships in general, Dell argued for a definition of an effective educational partnership as ‘a dynamic collaborative process’ in which there is ‘*mutual though not necessarily symmetrical benefits* to all parties’ (2010: 1). Today, educational and academic partnerships are generally viewed as being among several strategies for effective and working cooperation and collaboration between institutions in the North and South. They appear to be valorised as a *sine qua non* for the development and capacity building of the higher education institutions in the South (Dell, 2010; Ishengoma, 2011). This view is shared by Draxler who posited that partnerships can ensure cooperation, and enrich and build the capacity of the institutions involved. But is the reality as rosy and romantic as this?

In terms of the literature, a number of factors are important in defining effective partnership arrangements. For some researchers, the agency of organisational actors is an important factor. In this context partnerships are ‘expressions of voluntary agency’ (Ashman, 2000: 5). The notion of the agency of actors in educational partnerships is important because it is one of the key determinants as to whether a genuine asymmetrical partnership will be achieved. Yet I have noted elsewhere that ‘agency’ is a complex notion in postcolonial settings such as Lesotho’s (Oliphant, 2008) for it assumes that individuals have a fair amount of freedom and individuality to act without restraint or with some autonomy. This is not always the case in Southern (or non-Western) contexts, for individuals are part of the collective and act in that context. Therefore, I share Draxler’s (2008: 35) view that one problem associated with partnerships is in regard to differing power bases and the learning processes involved. He argues that partners can come together for a common objective, leaving their institutional culture at the door. However, in reality, things are not so simple.

Draxler also highlights the importance of transparency in partnerships. He has acknowledged that in partnerships which bring together a number of institutions with different systems of management, responsibility and accountability, partners can quite easily be pressured into devoting more attention to streamlining the partnership functioning than to ensuring that there is transparency (Ibid.: 34). Effective partnerships are also those in which there is the development of trust, cooperative interpersonal relationships and processes which promote communication, mutual influence and joint learning (Ashman, 2000). In terms of their structure, effective partnerships are viewed by Ashman as having governance arrangements that promote shared control, are horizontal and not vertical, representative of partners and relatively autonomous from funders. Moreover, partnerships are effective, according to Ashman, if both partners agree on their goals and express satisfaction with the partnership. Another essential ingredient in Draxler's view is that in a successful partnership there is partner learning resulting from the capacity to look at difficulties and problems, and solve and progress them together. For Dell (2010), effective UK-Africa educational partnerships are characterised by a shared sense of ownership, an appreciation by parties of the local context, and the need for partnerships to be demand-driven and sustainable.

Against the background of this brief review of the literature, this paper turns to the description and analysis of the partnership between the Lesotho College of Education and the Irish institutions within the CGDE. In subsequent sections, the paper will analyse the LCE-CGDE partnership in terms of the features of effective partnerships described above. These features include the following: collaboration and pooling together of resources, competencies and commitments; the extent to which they are asymmetrical; shared risks, responsibilities and means; mutual even if not symmetrical benefits; agency of actors; shared ownership; and the extent to which they are demand-driven and sustainable.

Africa-Irish Education Institutions Partnership

In 2007 Mary Immaculate College in Ireland established a partnership of teacher education institutions in Ireland and two in Africa including their Ministries of Education. The partnership obtained support under the Programme of Strategic Co-operation between Irish Aid and Higher Education

and Research Institutes (2007-2011). Through this partnership the CGDE was established as a hub for thirteen partner institutions in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland and two African countries: Lesotho and Uganda. Mary Immaculate College was the lead partner with the CGDE housed in it. The CGDE was a coordinating structure with a secretariat for the partnership situated at Mary Immaculate College.

The Centre for Global Development through Education

In the Concept Note for the application to Irish Aid, the Centre was meant to ‘increase the capacity of teacher educators in Ireland to support the work of Irish Aid and the initiatives of partner countries in educational research and teacher education’ (2007: 1). It was to coordinate existing research and teaching capacity and systematically enhance that capacity. The Concept Note added that:

“The central aim of the CGDE is [sic] to enhance the quality of basic education in partner countries and to enhance access to basic education. The Centre will [sic] achieve this aim by strengthening the field of teacher education and educational research so that the capacity of Southern partners to provide high-quality teachers and to respond to educational need on the basis of high-quality, appropriate research is enhanced” (Ibid: 1).

Central to the work of the CGDE, therefore, was capacity building of teacher educators in research; professional development’ education quality enhancement of teacher education; and development of an evidence-based understanding of development and inter-cultural issues in teacher education to inform North-South practice (Ibid.: 3).

The principles guiding the Centre, as articulated by the Director of the CGDE in 2008 from the Irish Aid White Paper (2006: 9) were partnership, public ownership and transparency, effectiveness and quality assurance, coherence and long-term sustainability. The concept of partnership, in terms of the Director’s presentation, was understood to cover the following elements: working together for common purposes, cooperation, common aims, activities and goals, pooling of resources, expertise and experience, and promotion of social interrelationships

Governance and Structural Arrangements of the CGDE

The CGDE had a semi-autonomous status within Mary Immaculate College (and Irish Aid) but was not directly involved in its day-to-day running. The Centre had three full-time staff: a Director for the management of the Centre, an administrative secretary and a post-doctoral fellow for facilitating and coordinating the technical, research activities of the Centre. The post-doctoral fellow had extensive experience working in higher education in the South and was employed at the Centre having previously worked at the Lesotho College of Education. At each of the south institutions there was a programme associate coordinator appointed to coordinate the partnership activities at the local level, and to be a liaison with the Centre in Limerick.

The CGDE had a steering committee with two subcommittees that were established later in the life of the steering committee, which was a policy and over-sight structure. It was made up of representatives of all partners (North and South). The sub-committees, in which the South and the North were represented, were the executive sub-committee and the planning sub-committee. While the steering committee met only four times a year, the other committees met more often. Lesotho was represented in these sub-committees, by an officer in the Lesotho Embassy in Dublin. To ensure transparency and accountability, there was a mid-term review of the CGDE in July-September 2009, and, in 2010, a final, summative evaluation was carried out.

The Partnership Main Focus Areas

The CGDE partnership had three main areas of focus in its capacity building of the teacher educators in the North and South. These were the research component, the PhD element and the Teacher Educator Exchange Programme. Each of these areas is discussed below with specific reference to their implementation in Lesotho.

The Research Component

The research targeted the real issues in the South as one of the interviewed College colleagues observed. The research areas were proposed by the Southern partners and accepted as such (I was personally involved in the development of these initial proposals). Two research studies were carried out in Lesotho in the

following areas of current educational policy concern (the same happened in Uganda with different research areas):

- Assessment practices in the education system of Lesotho;
- Identification, assessment and inclusion for learners with special educational needs (SEN) towards a national system for Lesotho.

Both studies were carried out and successfully completed.

The Teacher Educator Exchange Programme (TEEP)

This was a mentoring and shadowing component intended to enhance the teaching and learning effectiveness of those involved (North and South). It involved visits to institutions – primary and secondary schools in both the North and South. It involved four Lesotho College teacher educators and their four Irish counterparts for Mathematics, English, Education (Special Education) and Educational Technology. Four Northern educators spent two weeks in Lesotho, each with a Lesotho counterpart and the same happened to four Southern (Lesotho) educators in Ireland. The programme soon ended before any further exchanges and visits could happen, and before any meaningful reflection took place. Only one visit each way had been completed and there was no arrangement for sustainable follow up activities.

The PhD Component

This was a capacity building initiative with the potential to help those involved, their institutions and countries that was to go on until the end of 2012 as part of an ambitious, three year part-time programme. Each of the participating countries had the opportunity of identifying and enrolling three teacher educators in the areas of their choice with host institutions in Ireland. In Lesotho, the areas covered were Mathematics Education, Science Education, and Education for Sustainable Development.

Summary and Discussion of the Key Features of the Partnership

The Southern partner, Lesotho College of Education, was involved from as early as the conceptualisation of the CGDE and its focus areas. The needs assessment study that informed the establishment of the partnership was carried

out in Lesotho under the direction of the CGDE Director in 2008. Lesotho College of Education participated in the exercise. The research areas of assessment and special educational needs were provided by the College and they were in line with Lesotho's priorities as shown in the institution's and the education sector's strategic plan for 2005-2015, as well as the quality improvement priority of the College. The College researchers were identified by the College itself with the PhD candidates identified and nominated by the College. These are some of the features of a demand-driven development partnership that we can attribute to the CGDE-led educational partnership with which Lesotho College of Education was involved.

The research design and methodologies for the research partnership was participatory and the College participants were directly involved. The main difficulty imposed by distance and lack of resources in the South was that the initiation of most of the work on the research design and instruments was done in the Northern institutions, where a larger number of the partners were concentrated. This in turn caused dependence and weakness of initiative in the South. This kind of dependence does not help to build capacity and confidence but to a large extent and as far as possible, in spite of spatial challenges, there was collaboration and pooling together of competencies and commitments. Although technology can mediate in these cross-border challenges, it remains weak in the South. Lesotho's bandwidth for internet, for example, continues to be very weak.

The Teacher Educator Exchange Programme (TEEP) participants were identified and nominated by their institutions within provided guidelines. This ensured that the partnership was demand-driven. The focus of the partnership was on capacity building in line with the College and the Lesotho education sector's needs and priorities. The College had submitted a shopping list of areas of need and priority and some of these priority areas were drawn from the national education strategic plan referred to above. For example, both in the education sector and at the College there is consistency on 'improving access to quality education with particular focus on the following areas: numeracy and science; literacy in English, research capacity development; and special education capacity development. For these reasons, among others, Lesotho's contributions to the content of the partnership projects and activities helped to develop a

sense of ownership for the partnership in the College unlike in many other North-South partnerships in which some of the decisions are made and concluded in the North.

The CGDE had a steering committee which served as a forum for communication, decision-making and policy review and direction and all partners were represented in this committee. The South and North partners participated openly and freely in meetings of the committee. From time to time as the partnership developed and need arose, the areas of focus were presented to the committee and revised. Lesotho took an active part in the decisions and this participatory feature of the partnership engendered a sense of ownership, mutual responsibility and commitment.

The CGDE budget was managed transparently with all partners involved in budget allocations and receiving the reports of expenditures. In my years of working with development partners as head of an educational institution since 1994 I had not been so closely involved in the running and management of a development partnership to the level of the details of finances, their allocation and reallocation. Notwithstanding all the foregoing positive features of the CGDE-led partnership, there are a number of areas that could have been done differently to ensure that the partnership was effective, had sustainable benefits and impacts, and had most of the features of effective North-South partnerships. It is to these that we turn below.

What Could Have been Done Better?

In Lesotho and Uganda, there were programme associate coordinators appointed from among the existing employees of the Ministries or institutions in Lesotho and Uganda to coordinate the activities of the partnership at the local level. The programme associate coordinator system was a good idea although coordinators were to be remunerated which for Lesotho was problematic as it sowed seeds of unsustainable practices. The coordinator in Lesotho was the Director of Academic Planning, Research and Consultancy (DAPRC) employed at the College. The main duties of the DAPRC involved coordinating projects and programmes that the College was involved in. He was therefore already getting paid for activities such as those supported through the CGDE partnership. This additional payment for the Associate Coordinator

role was therefore money that could have been used differently. It resulted in employees expecting payment for their engagement whenever programmes involving external partners were introduced into the College as they sought to couch these programme chores as additional to their official duties.

Notwithstanding the weakness described above, the system of having a local associate coordinator was good as I have indicated earlier. This arrangement was different from many partnerships or development programmes sponsored by the North which tend to have a Northerner appointed to oversee and coordinate the programme activities from start to end at the implementation locales. The question remains as to whether or not it would not be more beneficial if a Southerner is capacitated to coordinate and manage the partnership at the local level. For capacity development and sustainability, this option could be the way to go provided appropriately qualified people are engaged; reporting and accountability frameworks are well defined and a system of monitoring is in place.

The Teacher Educator Exchange Programme was a good programme with potential for capacity development benefits, inter-cultural awareness raising and global citizenship development opportunities. All those who were involved indicated that they benefitted: they received per diems; they spent time in Ireland and their institutions; they had access to good library and technology facilities; and they worked with Northern partner professionals. These are some of the benefits they mentioned. But the TEEP was too brief to make any meaningful impact and there was insufficient time and provision for the evaluation of the TEEP. This is one programme that should have had more time to develop and mature to support the development of better mutual understanding and appreciation of the participants' differences.

The demise of the partnership in 2011 when Irish Aid support ended led to the closure of the CGDE. The partnership did not quite result in the development of institution-to-institution long-term sustainable relationships. Nor did it leave a legacy of ongoing professional partnerships among the individual teacher educators. In the view of one College-based Southerner interviewed 'sustainability planning was lacking ...research then what?' This interviewee went on to suggest thus: 'I didn't expect the Centre...would be

something that would die. The Centre should always be there' (November 2011),.

Conclusion

In conclusion, therefore, the CGDE-led partnership was one of the few meaningful partnerships with which Lesotho College of Education has had the opportunity to be involved. Although sustainability planning was weak, and comparatively little attention was paid to residual developments such as the South-South partnerships, the CGDE-led partnership was largely demand-driven. It addressed the issues of relevance to the College and Lesotho's education sector. Although asymmetrical relations are an ideal, one cannot claim that the partners, especially at the level of the various projects or activities, had these kind of relations. The programme was delivered over too short a period to observe this. However, the working arrangements and relations at the level of the steering committee and its sub-committees where the author was a direct participant, met many of the effective partnership conditions. There was a strong sense of ownership and mutual belonging and responsibility among members at this level mainly because they regularly engaged on a face-to-face basis. There was also a conscious effort to ensure that everyone was comfortable and participated. All views were listened to and respected even where there was sometimes disagreement. In my experience, even with the weaknesses described, the CDGE partnership was a positive example of a North-South arrangement that had several features of an effective North-South educational partnership. Much can be learnt from this educational partnership, about how partnering for development with the South can be conceptualised, structured and managed.

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