



How to build effective partnerships as a soft power tool?

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8 August 2019

Question

What does the literature say about partnerships as soft power tools?

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1. Summary

This rapid review synthesises the literature from academic, policy, and knowledge institution sources on how partnerships can be effectively used as a soft power tool. Indeed, the review concludes that partnerships have the potential to be part of a soft power toolkit in the post-conditionality era of international cooperation, often used as a form of country branding combined with self-interest. This conclusion is based on the literature on two types of partnerships: north-south peer-to-peer partnerships and north-south public private partnerships. While the evidence base to support peer-to-peer partnerships remains embryonic, some studies and evaluations give insights into their effectiveness and impacts. However, there is far fewer evidence that links the effectiveness of partnerships with soft power outcomes.

The literature presented in this rapid review, concludes that:

- Long-term partnerships are able to change attitude and behaviour that are important for systems to change. This occurs particularly when partnerships link up, establish synergies and are more strategic, for example by using the partnership to align with local government, which could result in institutional changes.
- Most partnerships are short-term focussed, based on donor-funded projects. This makes it more complicated for these partnerships to engage with policy-makers. These partnerships have been mostly promising for the people directly involved.
- Partnerships seem to be most effective when they connect to national policies, priorities and strategies, including broader development objectives and linked to other ODA programmes. Furthermore, for partnerships to be effective as soft power tools, it is important to creating personal relationships and understanding that needs to be cemented through reciprocal visits.
- North-south partnerships are mostly not equal as the donors in the north often set the agenda. This means that all too often the partnerships become one of dependency rather than mutual learning. There is even evidence of paternalism, increasing support for more charitable based approaches, overlooking the potential of institutional or system change.
- Embedding the monitoring, evaluation and learning through ongoing real-time data analysis and adaptation of the provided support is important. Assumptions around linear and predictable pathways to impact do not apply when working on institutional reform through a partnership approach.
- Some partnerships are formed around businesses. These public private partnerships (PPPs) are often established with the purpose of cost-effectiveness. However, they often deny their broader embeddedness within the economy and society.
- PPPs that have been successful as a soft power tool are shaped around long-term business relations that engage fully with local partners (e.g. governments, businesses and NGOs). Donor involvement in these PPPs goes beyond grants provision by acting as facilitators and brokers.

Most of the literature used in this rapid review comes from evaluation reports and academic articles. They all mention the lack of good monitoring, which makes it difficult to measure real impact of partnerships. Most evidence is anecdotal, leaving a gap for evidence on the effectiveness of partnerships, in particular for institutional change. Finally, the literature was not abundant in highlighting partnership's gender issues.

2. Framing soft power and partnerships

Before digging deeper into the effectiveness of partnerships as a soft power tool to deliver on development goals, while gaining some influence abroad and achieving forms of self-interests (e.g. culturally, strategically, and economically), this report firstly and briefly frames the concepts of soft power and partnerships.

Pamment (2018) suggests that 'deliberate and coordinated joining' of international development activities with nation brands, such as in partnerships that include high profile institutions and businesses from high-income countries, aims to influence the economic, cultural and political development of foreign countries, while using this influence to some extent for self-interests. He makes a direct link between the surge of such development activities (as instruments of soft power) and the replacement of tied (conditional) aid, as the new emphasis on partnership and dialogue fits within a general pattern of post-conditional engagement with multiple sectors in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).

To cite Pamment (2018, p.397):

"[T]he nation brands of developed countries play an increasingly salient role in the economic development of developing countries. As the traditional levers of conditionality between international development, diplomacy and trade have declined since the late 1990s, brands provide a means of linking official development assistance (ODA) to a country's overseas political and economic interests. ... Thus, the nation brands of developed countries may be considered in terms of post-conditionality, a form of indirect influence commensurate with recent debates on soft power."

The idea of soft power emerged with increased interdependency between different areas of international affairs after the Cold War in the 1990s. Nye (1990, p.158) outlines soft power as a means to build international relations in a new era characterised by "the fragmentation of world politics into many different spheres" where "interdependence is often balanced differently in different spheres such as security, trade, and finance".

To cite Nye (1990, p.169) on one of the main characteristics of soft power:

"Co-optive power is the ability of a country to structure a situation so that other countries develop preferences or define their interests in ways consistent with its own. This power tends to arise from such resources as cultural and ideological attraction as well as rules and institutions of international regimes."

Van Ham (2010, p.9) uses the term 'social power' as a variant of soft power that focuses on "non-material power resources, ranging from expertise, knowledge and information, credibility, respect and authenticity, to framing, representation, and discursive power". Pamment (2018, p.400) links such approaches to "an expanded concept of diplomatic influence that focuses less on 'command power' and more on forms of attraction, structural influence and strategic coordination to leverage relative advantages between sectors of societies." Soft power enhances the value of dialogical engagement and partnership with foreign actors, and increasingly in LMICs through ODA.

Soft power is not something new, as the Marshall Plan for Western European countries after the Second World War is often mentioned as an example. However, in an interconnected and multipolar world in which the exchange of information and ideas is faster than ever before thanks

to new technologies, non-western countries are becoming more aware of the importance of increasing their influence through soft power tools. For example, China is on course to have opened over one thousand Confucius Institutes around the world.¹ Other emerging countries are also expanding their international cultural and educational programmes and news broadcasting outlets to enhance their influence abroad (e.g. Brazil, India and Russia) (MacDonald, 2018). Indeed, soft power is often related to offering scholarships, supporting language schools and programmes on education, creativity and entrepreneurship (e.g. through special institutes like the British Council, Instituto Cervantes for Spain, Institut Français for France, Russkiy Mir Foundation for Russia, Goethe Institute for Germany, Confucius Institute for China).

Partnerships are part of the soft power toolkit in the post-conditionality era of international cooperation. This rapid literature review focuses mainly on peer-to-peer partnerships and public private partnerships as soft power tools. Through such partnerships, the aim is that people within institutions or businesses can be connected through dialogue, knowledge exchange, capacity building, innovation and entrepreneurship for mutual benefits. However, the literature on partnerships are still mainly focussing on their effectiveness and management challenges, with some new studies emerging with empirical evidence on their development impacts, but there is no abundance in empirical evidence that links the effectiveness of partnerships directly with soft power outcomes.

3. Peer-to-Peer Partnerships

Introduction

Building partnerships between institutions in developed and developing countries, based on peer-to-peer relationships and lesson-sharing, is seen as an effective approach for international development. There are a number of features that distinguish north-south peer-to-peer partnerships from more traditional technical assistance (DFID et al., 2018).

- They are oriented around a long-term relationship based on mutual trust, including personal relationships between individuals with similar professional backgrounds, rather than a simple task or discrete objective.
- The activities which drive the partnership are based around sharing lessons learned and joint problem-solving, rather than replacing local implementation of core institutional functions.
- Peer-to-peer learning is inherently iterative, guided by short delivery cycles with an emphasis on learning and experimentation and reflection points and feedback loops.

To cite from the DFID et al. (2018, p.1) conference report on peer-to-peer partnerships in London:

“Where countries are looking to move out of chronic aid dependency, these partnerships can be used to positively influence policy and behaviour, without relying on direct financial assistance. Developing country institutions can benefit from transfer of knowledge that comes from working with counterparts who have lived experience of

¹ Information retrieved from the website of the British Council <https://www.britishcouncil.org/research-policy-insight/insight-articles/how-soft-power-can-help-meet-international-challenges>

addressing similar problems. Peer-to-peer learning may also be better equipped to support some of the 'softer' dimensions of institutional reform, including through advice on topics such as stakeholder management and leadership. As the value of peer-to-peer partnerships becomes more widely acknowledged, in a diverse array of sectors, those engaged in these activities should be encouraged to share their own learning."

Hence, a peer-to-peer problem-solving or knowledge exchange approach should emphasise that it is not the job of external experts to implement anything, but rather to help others implement things for themselves (ownership), taking into account local circumstances, and make them work. While the evidence base to support peer-to-peer partnership remains embryonic, some studies and evaluations give good insights into their effectiveness and impacts. They mainly focus on the impact for the Southern partner without delving deep into how it benefits (short-term or long-term) donor countries and their institutions.

Evidence

1. Health Partnership Scheme:

The Health Partnership Scheme (HPS), which started in 2011 and runs until 2019, is a DFID funded scheme that support partnerships between health organisations in the UK and LMICs. In the past eight years, the Health Partnership Scheme has formed 191 partnerships and delivered 210 projects. Over 2,000 NHS staff volunteered overseas and trained 93,112 health workers across 30 countries in Africa and Asia. A significant majority of LMIC health workers who received training have gone on to train others.² For example, in 2017 the HPS started the development of a mental health centre of excellence in Tanzania for the therapeutic management of violence and aggression by partnering the Mirembe Hospital and Nursing School in Tanzania with the Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust.

The evaluation synthesis report, which was authored by Taylor et al. (2016), states that HPS demonstrated the effectiveness of the partnership and volunteering approach in supporting health worker capacity strengthening. An important point that the evaluators make, is that many HPS projects not only have improved the knowledge, skills and confidence of LMIC health workers resulting in several cases of increased quality of care or new services; the long-term volunteering and partnership development in HPS also has promoted "the attitude and behaviour change that are important for systems to change" (Taylor et al., 2016, p.9). This last point is important to show the potential of partnerships as a soft power tool. This was in particular true in partnerships that were able to link up, establish synergies and be more strategic, for example by using the partnership to align with local government commitments and priorities. However, because most partnerships lack the expertise, experience and capacity to build broader networks and dialogues; this was more often the exception of the rule.

To cite Taylor et al. (2016, p.9):

"Future programming for health partnerships would do well to plan more strategically by country in line with national and international strategies and goals (SDGs and UHC) and provide longer term funding that can enhance a range of health system changes. Future

² Information retrieved from the THET website <https://www.thet.org/our-work/health-partnership-scheme/#close>

partnerships would also do well to develop synergies with other aid programming and with other partnership projects in order to maximise effectiveness.”

The evaluation report highlights further that training and education capacity, accreditation and curricula have been improved in most cases, but that there is less evidence of wider outcomes such as strengthening human resources financing, recruitment, deployment and retention. This means that these partnerships have been mostly promising for the people directly involved, while structural changes in human resources for incorporation of new practices are limited; which could limit partnerships lasting impact to change the health institutions' internal working system. However, “[s]ome projects have empowered women health workers because of leadership and other training and opportunities, and women volunteers have acted as role models” (Taylor et al. 2016, p.6).

Overall, the evaluation report does not show any direct evidence of how the partnerships have improved the broader UK brand recognition or how the reputation of the NHS has contributed to higher effectiveness, development impacts and changes in domestic health systems. What it mentions is that “[s]ome success factors of stronger partnerships were: longevity, experienced UK partners, long-term volunteers, empowering behaviour and supportive management structures” (Taylor et al., 2016, p.6). This means that long-term volunteering shows “a greater potential for enhancing the partnership relationships, strengthening the health workers' application of skills learned in training, enhancing attitude and behaviour change, and ability to act as role models and mentors to support change. Short term volunteering placements can work well as part of a wider project approach and in combination with long-term volunteering” (Taylor et al., 2016, p.8).³

The partnerships also serve for self-interest, as the evaluation mentions that the HPS has benefitted volunteers and the UK health system by “providing volunteers with opportunities to learn and enhance important competencies that they can bring back to their work in the UK” (Taylor et al., 2016, p.6). Volunteers gain a number of new skills, self-confidence, better cultural understanding and new levels of motivation and appreciation of the NHS. The report mentions some evidence that volunteers bring these back into the workplace in the UK and benefits the UK health system.⁴ Furthermore, there is some evidence that “volunteers, their institutions and their southern hosts see the opportunity as a way of connecting with the wider global health community and building global excellence and networks” (Taylor et al., 2016, p.8), which has the potential to increase further reputational benefits on a global level for UK health institutions. For that reason, the evaluation report mentions that partnerships should be supported to have a more strategic approach to UK health worker professional development and health system strengthening in the UK.

The conclusion of the evaluation report is that these partnerships were effective (value for money) in particular because of their flexibility and the use of volunteers who are most effective to enhance southern health workers' learning and application of skills. Well-functioning

³ A recently published flyer claims that 765 participating institutions in LMICs are demonstrating a higher quality of specified health services. https://www.thet.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/20443_HPS_Impact_Report-2019-8.pdf

⁴ A recently published flyer mentions that 74% of UK volunteers reported bringing back new approaches and techniques, which can improve their practice in the UK. https://www.thet.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/20443_HPS_Impact_Report-2019-8.pdf

partnerships have a long term vision and involve the host partner in decisions on recruitment and appraisal. However, health system constraints are inhibiting health workers' ability to improve service delivery and to change the wider health workforce. Taylor et al. (2016, p.7): "Partnerships that have grouped together and developed projects with synergies for addressing health system constraints appear to be more successful". Further development of the partnership and volunteering approach was advised for a better understanding how health system strengthening (in other development programmes) can be maximised.

2. School Partnerships:

DFID has supported the development of partnerships between schools in the UK and LMICs since 2003. The first major education partnerships programme was the Global Schools Partnerships (GSP), running between 2003 and 2012, which reached over 9,000 schools in the UK and 58 LMICs. Overlapping this programme was the British Council's Connecting Classrooms programme, which ran between 2008 and 2011. Because of the recommendations of an independent review of DFID-funded development education programmes, the British Council and DFID agreed to invest in a new, joint intervention that combined the GSP and Connecting Classrooms. The new programme cancelled the exchange of pupils, and aims to build the capacity of teachers and school leaders to integrate a range of global learning and core skills into the curriculum, and to facilitate international partnerships between schools.

The new programme was developed into the DFID and British Council jointly-funded Connecting Classrooms 2012-2015 and 2015-2018 programmes. Phase one (2012-15) focused on using school partnerships to promote global citizenship. The second-phase three-year programme (2015-2018) responds to a wealth of research and consensus amongst experts that, in addition to developing "the basics" - reading, writing and arithmetic - schools must also increasingly focus on supporting young people to be effective problem-solvers, innovators, communicators and collaborators, and to use ICT effectively.⁵ In 2018, a renewed programme was launched named the Connecting Classrooms through Global Learning (CCGL) programme.

In 2011, the National Foundation for Educational Research published the evaluation report of the GSP, authored by Sizmur et al. (2011). The focus of their evaluation was on the impact on UK pupils involved in the programme. It stated that involvement in the GSP programme "has a significant positive effect on the awareness, attitudes and response of pupils about global issues at both primary and secondary school level" (Sizmur et al., 2016, p.3). Pupils in both GSP and comparison schools showed positive attitudes to global issues, but pupils in GSP schools, generally, demonstrated a deeper understanding of a wider range of issues. In the short timeframe of this rapid review, no evaluation could be found on the impact on pupils in LMICs.

The 2017 Annual Review focusses on three outcomes: teacher development, school leadership, international partnerships, policy dialogue. The review is positive about the teacher development and school leadership outcomes achieved mainly through in-depth core skills courses, which generated significantly increased knowledge and understanding in, for example, creativity and imagination, and critical thinking and problem solving. However, the review was more critical on the progress made in building professional partnerships. The main problem was that the programme no longer provided funding for an inwards visit by overseas teachers to partner UK schools, which had impacted on the attractiveness of the programme, both in the UK and

⁵ Information retrieved from the 2017 Annual Review.

overseas. The annual review (2017) states: “UK schools have commented that this reciprocal visit was particularly important for bringing the partner school (and country) to life for their students. ... Schools have found creative ways to stay in touch with partner schools (e.g. Skype, exchanging teaching materials etc.), but the funding for such visits, which helped to cement relationships, increase cultural understanding, and facilitate the exchange of teaching practices, was clearly a big draw for the programme.”

From this remark, it could be concluded that for partnerships to be effective soft power tools, is about creating personal relationships and understanding that needs to be cemented through reciprocal visits. From that perspective it is also interesting to mention that the recently published *Connecting Classrooms: At a Glance* flyer hardly mentions peer-to-peer partnerships as a tool for the mentioned achievements.⁶ It focusses mainly on the core trainings and establishing a policy dialogue. This also suggests that for increased impact, policy-makers in education and practitioners have to be aligned to the programme, and the projects should link with national or regional education strategies and priorities. However, there is no mention that the partnerships themselves could create such connections (which is also important for their soft power purposes). Examples that the Annual Review (2017) mentions:

- The South African Council for Educators (SACE) formally recognised, on behalf of the national government, the Connecting Classrooms core skills teacher training as part of its national teacher professional development accreditation framework.
- As part of curriculum reform in Kenya, the British Council worked closely with the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development to embed core skills in the new Basic Education Curriculum Framework. Five of the seven new core competencies for basic education in the new curriculum have been influenced by work undertaken through Connecting Classrooms on core skills.
- The Faculty of Education at the Lebanese University in Beirut has committed to embedding core skills training into its initial teacher training for all new teachers.

Box 1. Case study: England-Jordan partnership

This partnership’s objective was to develop critical thinking skills for pupils in England and Jordan through sharing perspectives on world hunger. The St Joseph’s Catholic Primary School in London partnered with Marka Prep Girls’ School in Heteen Camp, Jordan. By collaborating with each other, exchanging information and discussing issues related to hunger. In both schools, children were able to ask higher order questions. To cite the British Council flyer *Connecting Schools at a Glance*:

“They have a better understanding of world hunger which includes different cultural perspectives. Involving parents deepened the children’s engagement and understanding of world hunger, in both schools. The partnership helped pupils grow in confidence, communicate effectively and share learning internationally.”

A 2017 K4D Helpdesk report on school partnerships (Blum et al., 2017) looked at studies on impact and contribution of school linking to understanding development and global issues. It

⁶ Author’s own observation based on the flyer *Connecting Classrooms: At a Glance*; retrieved from https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/connecting_classrooms_concise_report.pdf. The document highlights only one peer-to-peer partnership the England-Jordan Partnership (see box 1).

states: "What all these studies show is that whilst there is evidence of the popularity of linking and its support by both teachers and pupils, there was concern about the extent to which links encouraged a more critical view of development and questioned assumptions about schools and communities in Africa and South Asia" (Blum et al., 2017, p.4). Bourn and Cara (2013) reviewed 16 different linking programmes and found that the majority of the partnership programme support was based on linking advice, professional development, teaching resources, partner allocation, arranging visits and online resources. 80% of the organisations received external funding to operate their programmes.

The Blum et al. (2017) literature review shows how little research focusses on the impact of these partnerships on pupils and teachers in LMICs. The K4D study mentions (cited):

- *"Leonard's (2004) doctorate is perhaps the most important and distinctive because it focuses on the southern impact of linking and emphasises the potential value of connections to the Millennium Development Goals. Her research however also poses the dangers of colonial relationships and emphasises the value of inter-cultural understanding. These themes can also be seen in the dissertations by McNichol (2012) and Hulton-Harrap (2015)" (page 7).*
- *"What is noticeable from investigating a range of partnerships, is the challenge of sustaining them beyond an initial input of grant income. Some partnerships have a long history and have gained support from local authorities, charities and private companies. But what is clear is that any form of private or charitable income has often been related to sponsoring or supporting the Southern partner school with equipment, resources and professional development. What this has meant is that all too often the partnership became one of dependency rather than mutual learning" (page 7).*
- *"There is evidence as suggested above that linking experiences can reinforce notions of dependency and paternalism, increasing support for more charitable based approaches such as raising money for infrastructure development and resources. [...] Colonial influence is not only about how the partner in the Global North views the relationship, but also how the Southern school views it. For example, Alcock (2010) notes how a teacher from Kenya commented on how she saw their link through the legacy of colonialism and the expectation that the partnership was a way to gain funding and resources: 'Since independence, Africans had believed that the white people are colonialists and are rich, so as the Partnership started most people had believed that the partners were pumping a lot of money to the school and that if any person from this end goes to the UK then one was being given a lot of money and they expect a lot.' Alcock (2010: 104-105) however, also notes that the Kenyan teachers she was working with saw things differently and believed the partnership was about 'what we learnt from each other'. This reflects the importance of recognising the conflicting tensions that can exist within a link" (page 8-9).*

Again, what this says about such partnerships as a soft power tool is that there are assumptions about a recognition of what the UK brand has to offer in partnerships, but also assumptions about power dimensions, dependencies and values that shape partnerships.

3. City to City North South Partnerships:

This section draws on the conclusions from the study of Bontenbal and Mamoon (2017) on City to City North South Partnerships. The process of decentralisation in both North and South has changed the role of local government. City to City (C2C) North South Partnerships are seen as

an instrument to improve capacity, learn from good practise and enhance city governance – by targeting a range of local authority personnel such as mayors, councillors and administrators. Based on a number of case studies from the literature, Bontenbal and Mamoon (2017) define general success factors and challenges to city to city partnerships. They state: “It appears that capacity building through C2C is likely to be more successful in strengthening urban governance at the operational level than at the institutional level of local authorities.”

Bontenbal and Mamoon (2017) mention that the academic body of knowledge on benefits and challenges of C2C is scarce and highly anecdotal. There is no common agreement on what constitutes good C2C that significantly contributes to good governance practice and urban development in developing countries. Some benefits, success factors, weaknesses and constraints can be extracted that are both tangible and intangible (see Table 1).

See: Table 1. Institutional twinning: conditions, benefits and challenges, (Bontenbal & Mamoon, 2017: 14), <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/3863/5f8f5e01f8b0ab7140c227f02ae84db713c8.pdf>

The conclusion from Bontenbal and Mamoon’s (2017) research that the development goal of institutional and organisational structural change is more difficult to achieve through peer-to-peer partnerships could have consequences for the effectiveness of partnerships as a soft power instrument.

4. Partnership for Mental Health Development in Sub-Saharan Africa:

The Partnership for Mental Health Development in Africa (PaM-D) aimed to bring together diverse mental health stakeholders in Sub-Saharan Africa, working collaboratively with colleagues from the global north (USA and UK), in partnership with government departments and non-governmental organisations. The aim was to create an infrastructure to develop mental health research capacity in Sub-Saharan Africa, advance global mental health science by conducting innovative public health-relevant mental health research in the region and work to link research to policy development. Participating countries were Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Nigeria and South Africa. The research component of PaM-D focused on the development and assessment of a collaborative shared care programme between traditional and faith healers and biomedical providers for the treatment of psychotic disorders, as a way of improving the outcome of persons suffering from these conditions. The capacity building component aimed to develop research capacity and appreciation of the value of research to a broad range of stakeholders through bespoke workshops and fellowships targeting specific skill-sets as well as mentoring for early career researchers. Gureje et al. (2019) studied this partnership and mention that it has resulted in 35 early and mid-career researchers who participated in the training workshops of which several established mentor-mentee relationships were with senior PaM-D members.

To cite Gureje et al. (2019, p.389):

“The success of PaM-D in energising young researchers and implementing a cutting-edge research program attests to the importance of partnership among researchers in the global south working with those from the north in developing MH [mental health] research and service in LMIC.”

PaM-D is a network of a multidisciplinary group of researchers from diverse areas of expertise: epidemiology, social science research (including ethnography and qualitative research), health systems research, primary mental health care, statistics, ethics, mentorship, randomised controlled trials and policy development. The partnership leverages on the strengths of the

different partners while at the same time addressing the weaknesses of traditional north-south and south-south collaborations (Gureje et al., 2019). Activities of the peer-to-peer collaborations are established through mentorships and by creating a hub in each country. The physical distance between the researchers was bridged through both a participatory management approach, with researchers in the various sites serving on different committees, as well as through the setting up of communication portals, online meetings and face-to-face meetings (Gureje et al., 2019). Service users in mental health care were involved in the partnerships.

Achieve Gureje et al. (2019) mention that for research findings to serve for real changes in improved patient care, this can only, when research findings influence policy development directly. The study shows that when policy makers are involved consistently within the partnership, this could influence policies. In the PaM-D representatives of each of the governments of the participating countries served on the hub's Oversight Advisory Committee which met once a year and functioned to advise the hub on how its activities could be relevant to the policies of the member countries. This was particularly important to solve common problems of low policy priority for mental health in LMICs, extreme paucity of human resources, under-treatment of these conditions as well as the human rights abuses of the mentally ill. PaM-D was innovative as a partnership as it brought together policymakers, service users and their families, government department and non-governmental organisations and researchers with direct experience in the complex mental health situation in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The study claims that PaM-D have generated a new and innovative body of knowledge that demonstrates the applicability and feasibility of a peer-to-peer partnership approach for better psychosis care in LMICs. The partnership established a hub that evolves into a centre of research excellence of dedicated mental health researchers from the north and south. It facilitates collaborative research in global mental health, as well as a management strategy that builds partnerships between local and international partners for efficient coordination and timely achievement of set goals. Although Gureje et al. (2019) do not mention evidence of policy changes directly influenced by the partnership, the collaboration and involvement of policy makers in the partnership has increased awareness of the importance of a different approach to the mentally ill. This shows the potential of peer-to-peer partnerships, in particular the ones that look for ways to engage with other stakeholders, as a soft power tool to establish some systemic changes.

5. Higher Education Partnerships:

Peer-to-peer north-south partnerships in higher education, for example for collaborative research, capacity building and institutional change are common. Ishengoma's (2016, p.149) literature review combined with empirical evidence from Uganda, writes that "despite having the potential to enhance the research capacities of universities and individuals, North-South research collaborations have had limited impact because of the neo-colonial nature of the donor-recipient framework within which most North-South research collaborations operate". He emphasises such partnerships "perpetuate power asymmetries and resource dependencies between both South and North, and between research and donor institutions" (ibid).

Referring to the Irish-African higher education partnership model, Nakabugo et al. (2010) acknowledge that North-South partnerships on research capacity building (in the South) do have an impact, however, more on individuals than on institutions. Echt (2014) argues that this lack of

tangible impact in LMICs higher education institutional change can be related to the dominant research-funding model, which is linked to the control of research agendas, and suggested that the fact that sources of funding are generally limited to Northern countries threatens the autonomy and objectivity of research output. One of the main problems Ishengoma (2016) mentions in his study is that research partnerships are often formed around short term research projects (3 or 4 years) and difficult to maintain on a structural basis after the funding has stopped. Even if a single donor/funder supports several research projects with the partnership, these interventions are seldom synchronised and their impact in terms of capacity building at an institutional level is very difficult to determine.

UK-Africa HE/FE partnerships faced a number of different challenges that could severely impact the effectiveness or sustainability of the partnership (The Africa Unit, 2010):

- **In the survey conducted by the Africa Unit, the major challenge facing the success of a partnership was 'time'.** Finding the adequate time to carry out the activities and projects due to other commitments was considered the top obstacle challenging partnerships. In the UK, the staff are often under intense pressure to publish research papers in internationally recognised journals. In Africa, the challenges facing staff members include the heavy teaching load, low wages and the rising enrolment without an accompanying increase in funds. The situation is made more difficult by the fact that many funding schemes do not fund staff time.
- **Supportive infrastructure in partnerships requires substantial funding, particularly to cover such basic running costs.** However most funding schemes do not address this in their rationalisation of funding. This can often seriously hamper the African partner institution which finds it much harder to cost-share the partnership than the UK partner. The result is that many partnerships have to scale down or increase the time allowed for each partnership activity.
- **Although there are also a number of funding schemes specifically designed to strengthen capacity, these are often short-term measures.** This is problematic given that capacity building is a cumulative long-term process. In some cases, funding schemes may revitalise a specific area or give an institution a strong boost, yet they are not sustainable.
- **Monitoring and evaluation also presents another major challenge facing UK-Africa partnerships.** Many funding schemes do not provide funding to assess the outcome of projects. Monitoring and evaluation is therefore done informally, as in many cases there are no formal monitoring or evaluation processes. Without proper and systematic monitoring and evaluation it is difficult to assess whether and how these many different kinds of partnerships are effective.

Carbonnier and Kontinen (2014, p.4-5) have pointed out that “implementing equitable partnerships is difficult, money flows tend to determine decision making and actual division of labour.” They argue that unidirectional funding flows undermine genuine collaborations and partnerships. Although northern donors and academics often affirm that North– South research partnerships have the potential to revitalise African knowledge systems and reinvigorate research capacity in African universities, as Ishengoma (2016) states, there is little empirical evidence to support this. The persistent deterioration of Africa’s fragile higher education infrastructure is severely undermining any remaining capacity for research and knowledge production.

However, in the context of Colombia, Ordonez-Matamoros et al. (2011) are more optimistic. They argue that research partnerships are commonly associated with increased creativity and scientific productivity, research quality, innovative capacity, and the creation of science and technology human capital, the consolidation of research agendas, the expansion of research areas and disciplines, and ultimately, the development of new or better research processes and services. Ordonez-Matamoros et al. (2011) further conclude that international research partnerships can be positively correlated with a research team's productive capacity and their ability to contribute to local knowledge. Whether these findings apply in the African context is debatable.

Also Dean et al. (2015) is more optimistic regarding UK-LMIC higher education partnerships, although mentioning some factors which may hinder development of long term partnerships, such as financial control or differing expectations of partners. In their study, the majority of UK and African award holders of funds stated they would like to pursue future collaborations together. Key aspects within partnerships that appeared to influence this were, according to Dean et al. (2015):

- The perceived benefits of the partnership at the individual and institutional level such as publication of papers or collaborative grants;
- The ability to influence 'research culture' and instigate critical thinking among mid-career researchers;
- Previous working relationships, for example supervisor-student relationships;
- Equity within partnerships linked to partnership formation and experience of United Kingdom partners within LMICs.

Sewankambo et al. (2015) looked at the partnership between the Karolinska Institutet in Sweden and Makerere University in Uganda that includes a joint PhD degree programme and sharing of scientific ideas and resources. Institutional capacity strengthening is one of the aims of this partnership. They show that the peer-to-peer partnership has been an effective way along with other ODA support for institutional change in higher education in LMICs. Although it is difficult to measure the impact of these partnerships, while often going hand in hand with other ODA funding. To cite Sewankambo et al. (2015, p.6):

"In our experience, institutional strengthening through mutually beneficial partnerships may create effective and efficient research networks between HICs and LICs, which in turn offer the potential to attract substantial research funding."

Explanatory success factors include a shared vision, trust, clear objectives, and continued funding over more than 10 years, as well as strong leadership on both sides, collaborative processes for prioritising research topics, and selecting students to address Ugandan health and health system priorities (Sewankambo, 2015). Such a long-term collaborative research environment is addressing Ugandan health and health system priorities, in several cases resulting in policy and practice reforms, according to the study.

Musoke and Landøy (2016) look to the partnership between Makerere University in Uganda and the University of Bergen in Norway that began in 1999. The partnership is based on research collaboration, scientific competence-building, student and staff exchanges, and institutional development. Musoke and Landøy (2016) look mainly at the collaboration between the two universities libraries that includes training library staff, helping to manage interlibrary loans and

document delivery services, supporting catalogue conversion, and establishing Makerere University's institutional repository – MAKIR. Digitalisation is one of the main challenges (problem-solving) on which this capacity building and best practise collaboration is built. For example, the University of Bergen has also supported the Makerere University library (Maklib) in introducing LATINA (Learning and Teaching in a Digital Era). Skills acquired by Maklib librarians who attended the initial LATINA training in Oslo have been applied in library activities and programmes. The course has introduced participants to new ways of approaching teaching, learning and digital librarianship. Musoke and Landøy (2016) mention important lessons learned:

“Rapid advances in IT mean that automation is never complete. Librarians have to update their knowledge and skills constantly. Capacity building among librarians is therefore not only important to the implementation of IT library projects and activities, but also to the sustainability of entire institutions when the skills and knowledge acquired not only enhance access to knowledge, but are shared with others in the region.”

The long-term partnership shows that exchange visits are an important part of the collaboration and the collaboration continues to support joint research, publications and presentation of papers at conferences. To sustain such activities, grant-proposals are written jointly.

Kot (2016) is among few researchers that actually measured the impact of international partnerships for two public universities in Democratic Republic of Congo and Tanzania. The study found that partnerships resulted in institutional and personal benefits. Institutional benefits that accrue to the institution, included: institutional capacity, academic effectiveness, and internationalisation.

- Partnerships enhanced institutional capacity by making institutions more responsive to social needs, improving institutional infrastructure, increasing revenues, improving management, attracting academic staff, and diversifying academic programs.
- Partnerships enhanced academic effectiveness by strengthening research, improving the quality of higher education, introducing innovative teaching methods, and bringing innovation into the curriculum.
- Partnerships fostered internationalisation by making students and academic staff more international-oriented, attracting foreign students, and increasing institutional prestige.

Personal benefits — benefits that African stakeholders gained by participating in international partnership activities — were academic, cultural, economic, and strategic.

- The academic benefit consisted in partnership participants developing new ways of teaching, new ways of learning, and creative ways of solving problems, as well as improving research skills.
- The cultural benefit consisted in improving communication in foreign languages, learning new languages, understanding other people's as well as one's own culture, and socializing with people from different cultures.
- The economic benefit consisted in acquiring educational resources and earning extra financial resources.
- The strategic benefit consisted in networking and developing consultancy skills.

Partnership activities that focused on collaborative research, staff professional development, or socio-economic development were associated with greater strategic benefit, compared with

activities that focused on exchanges of academic staff. Furthermore, the study found that the duration of participation in partnership activities was associated with economic and strategic benefits, but not with academic or cultural benefits. Individuals who participated in partnership activities for longer terms (3 years or more) had greater economic and strategic benefit compared to those who participated for shorter terms. These findings suggest that economic resources and strategic connections/skills take time to be accumulated. In contrast, academic and cultural growth can occur over shorter periods of time.

Lessons learned

In general, some conclusions can be shaped from the discussions at the London conference (DFID et al., 2018), where three key messages emerged:

- **It is important to focus on individuals and relationships.** This means starting small and understanding the contextual politics that the partner is working within. While there is undoubtedly a need for larger scale development projects, they often miss the detail and frequently misinterpret how change happens.
- **Partners should take the time to build genuine trust between partners with a view to sharing problems and jointly find solutions.** Establishing trust is a hugely challenging task and will often take a long time. It also involves sending people who not only have the right technical skills, expertise and experience, but perhaps more importantly, people with strong soft skills of emotional intelligence, contextual analysis, diplomacy and integrity.
- **The importance of embedding the monitoring, evaluation and learning through ongoing real-time data analysis and adaptation of the support provided.** Assumptions around linear and predictable pathways to impact do not apply when working on institutional reform. However, there has been experimentation in more flexible and adaptive approaches.

From the literature that mentioned peer-to-peer partnerships, it can be further concluded that long-term partnerships that engage with other stakeholders, like policy makers or practitioners are more successful in generating impacts and some institutional change. Short-term and pure peer-to-peer partnerships could be successful as well, but mainly on the individual level. This means for partnerships as a soft power tool, that it is important to take time to build the relationships and trust.

4. Public Private Partnerships

Partnerships can also be built around a business case, which mostly result in a Public Private Partnership (PPP). Such partnerships between multiple stakeholders, including private sector actors, are often focussing on a specific innovative solution to solve a local problem. There are many examples of PPPs in education and health care, but they do not always incorporate partners from the North. Also, many PPPs are initiated and funded by mostly Northern partners (businesses, NGOs, research institutes, governmental organisations) that cooperate around a common issue, even when situated in LMICs. Often, local partners are involved, but do not always play an equal role (Languille, 2017). Languille (2017) shows for PPPs in education and health in LMICs that:

“[T]he heterogeneity of the category within and across sectors and shows that the key predictions of the PPP doctrine – cost-efficiency for improved social service delivery to the poor – are hardly fulfilled in practice. Moreover, PPPs – both as policy model and practical arrangements – are underpinned by a narrow conception of education and health, which denies their broader embeddedness within the economy and society.”

From 2014, the PPPLab Food & Water (an initiative funded by the Dutch government) has undertaken action research and joint learning to explore the relevance, effectiveness, and quality of Dutch-supported PPPs. PPPLab has worked with many PPPs funded by the Sustainable Water Fund (FDW) and the Facility for Sustainable Entrepreneurship and Food Security (FDOV). They concluded that these PPPs “do rather well when it comes to pioneering innovative approaches, aligning interests, influencing the rules of the game, leveraging actors’ strengths and developing inclusive partnerships” (PPPLab, 2018, p.3).

However, according to the PPPLab strategy paper (2018), PPPs have to deal with high expectations from all sides, and in particular from donors, to deliver quickly on various policy goals. To cite the PPPLab (2018, p.4):

“While system change usually takes over a decade, PPPs are expected to deliver short-term and easily quantifiable results. PPPs are still being held accountable to guarantee outputs based on ambitious spending targets, and are regarded as ‘grantees’ just like other project implementers. In addition, the high expectations translate into a number of sometimes contradictory policy goals that are piled on the PPP instruments. For instance, PPPs are unclear whether they should prioritize public values, such as safe water for the poor, or to serve as a vehicle to help Dutch companies succeed abroad. The ambiguous hierarchy of different policy goals creates tensions within PPPs. Struggling to meet these expectations, few PPPs have the time to develop a strategy to engage and partner with governments. Many think about scaling and systemic change, but lack a strategy on this; and while they have government funding, most PPPs do not have a strategy for blending finance³ and evolving towards a sustainable finance mix.”

Evidence from the Dutch PPPs shows that multi-stakeholder PPPs that have a common long-term commitment with strong embedment and ownership of Southern partners, have the best potential to succeed and bring structural changes. One example is the SEVIA (Seeds of Expertise for the Vegetable Sector of Africa) horticulture PPP in Tanzania that received funding for their transition from a pilot phase to maturity.⁷ According to the PPPLab strategy paper (2018) the SEVIA horticulture project in Tanzania managed to deliver extension at scale by combining private technical capacities from the North with large-scale agricultural national extension services in the South. The East West Seed and Rijk Zwaan companies in the Netherlands partnered with the national extension services to breed improved African vegetable varieties for the farmers and disseminate adapted technical innovations in order to enhance productivity and increase farmers’ income. The PPP has a long-term focus to contribute to the development of the vegetable industry in Tanzania and to food security, which is beneficial for all partners involved.

Another example from the PPPLab, is Wienco, a Dutch–Ghanaian company, that received funding for its PPP to foster smallholder and private sector-led growth through the promotion of integrated water management practices and the development of irrigation in the north of Ghana

⁷ See also <http://www.sevia.biz/>

with the emphasis on investment, capacity development, profitable crop value chains, and accountability. The partnership, mentioned in the PPPLab case study publication in 2017, has introduced large-scale modernised irrigation farming practices involving hundreds of smallholders, promoting commercial irrigation practices and food security, and creating local employment. Important partners are the Savannah Accelerated Development Authority (Government of Ghana; SADA), Alterra (a knowledge institute, now called Wageningen Environmental Research), Rebel Group International BV (private sector), Wienco Ghana Ltd. (private sector), and IWAD Ghana Ltd. (private sector). Prior to the project, Wienco had undertaken a mapping of the customary ownership structure of land in North Ghana and identified a number of local chiefs to work with, though not as formal partners in the partnership. During the partnership, decentralised structures were established, local elections were organised and, in the area of operation, Yagaba, a district assembly was elected (PPPLab, 2017). The Dutch embassy played an important facilitating and brokering role between the lead partners and the Ghanaian government at the initiating stage of the partnership. During implementation, it provided a trust factor for the partnership, to ensure that all partners meet their commitments. PPPs are a key element in Dutch policy in Ghana – especially in the two sectors of food and water management (PPPLab, 2017).

The PPP managed to invest in the agricultural sector in Northern Ghana – a region lagging behind due to its harsh climate and limited private and public investments. The unique element of this partnership is the deep involvement of the Government of Ghana through SADA. The PPPLab case study (2017, p.2) states: “Its contribution is manifold and its role developed: not only co-financing, but also contributing to a conducive enabling environment in this region, which is also called the Savannah Agro Ecological Zone. This is strategically interesting for the lead partner’s scaling plans”. Another crucial element of this partnership, and one that goes beyond formal structures, is with local chiefs, who are in charge of local land and water issues. Agreements with these traditional authorities are indispensable for the PPP activities in the area.

The Strategy paper of the PPPLab (2018) mentions some key messages for donors who embrace PPPs to enforce structural impacts:

- **Nurture system players:** PPPs are best served by focused support, so efforts can be concentrated in specific sectors and on issues that matter to the context, in order to effectuate change. Within those, it is important to be very selective and strategically pick those that can potentially change the system. PPPs that effectively contribute to the collective response required for achieving the SDGs should be selected by donors.
- **Promote locally embedded partnerships:** PPPs that could help change the system should be locally embedded - and the sooner the better. Embassies can broker initial contacts, but PPPs themselves should take full responsibility for adequate and strong local embedding. This is important to avoid parallel institutions created by PPPs that end as soon as the projects finish and the development partners pull out. The PPPs that are best at facilitating local actors to assume leadership should be prioritised by donors.
- **Grants should exit responsibly:** Getting partnerships on the path towards sustainable commercial finance is key for their scaling and success. This may include matching and linking them to investors, market finance, or other sustainable sources, such as user payments and in-country (government) finance. The Dutch government is making headway in this, but it tends to employ a hands-off approach to a PPP the moment risk comes into play. All those financing a PPP should make a joint effort to keep the business case around the intervention sound and healthy. Development partners should

have an exit strategy for their intervention before starting it. If they want their return on investment, they should have an interest in sustaining the result. Instead of acting as a traditional grant maker for PPPs, development partners should take responsibility for future investments into the partnership.

In this regard, PPPs have the potential as soft power tool to shape new business relations, link them with local partners by including local governments, NGOs and businesses. Although funding for PPP projects are often short-term, the partnership itself is based on long-term cooperation and donors can support in other ways than grants the further development, effectiveness and impact of PPPs. The Dutch PPP cases show further that the combination of Dutch 'branding' and interest for water and food sectors, is the vehicle to stimulate opportunities in LMICs for local business partners and Dutch partners. In the case of Ghana, it shows that the PPP is able to push for irrigation investments in an underinvested region.

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Suggested citation

Quak, E. (2019). *How to build effective partnerships as a soft power tool?* K4D Helpdesk Report No 650. Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies.

About this report

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K4D services are provided by a consortium of leading organisations working in international development, led by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), with Education Development Trust, Itad, University of Leeds Nuffield Centre for International Health and Development, Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine (LSTM), University of Birmingham International Development Department (IDD) and the University of Manchester Humanitarian and Conflict Response Institute (HCRI).

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