INNOVATIVE NORTH-SOUTH PARTNERSHIPS

Synthesis of findings
Case studies

Established in 1911, the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada is the voice of Canada's Universities. AUCC represents 97 Canadian public and private not-for-profit universities and university-degree level colleges.

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1. Introduction: Context

This short document presents a synthesis of the main findings emerging from the six case studies aimed at identifying the characteristics of innovative North-South university partnerships conducted by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) in 2012. It includes an overview of the purpose of the study and details on how it was conducted, including a refresher on the analytical framework utilized to design the data collection and analysis tools. The last section presents a summary of the findings emerging from the study and some recommendations addressed to the funders of these partnerships, participating universities and faculty members as well as possible next steps.

AUCC has received a series of grants from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) to undertake research, communications and policy dialogue activities to enhance the knowledge base of Canadian universities of the key issues, benefits, and challenges of international research collaboration for development and to increase Canadian university engagement with partners in developing countries and emerging economies.

Prior work under the partnership has included research and symposia that examined:

- *the international dimension of strategic research plans developed by Canadian universities in the context of applications to the Canada Research Chairs program*

- *faculty reward and recognition policies and practices*

- *engaging diaspora faculty in North-South collaborations*

- *how North-South partnerships support internationalization strategies*

2. Purpose of the Study

The main interest in studying innovative partnerships was to deepen knowledge and understanding about a new type of collaborative approach that constitutes a departure from the traditional, hierarchical model of North-South partnership focused on knowledge transfer from the North to the South. In his presentation at the June 2012 Symposium[1], Dr. John Gaventa, Director of the Coady Institute, presented some of the features of these new partnerships:

- they incorporate the unique contribution of various types of knowledge and foster a culture of mutual learning;

- the northern partners are not always in the driver's seat and shared-decision making is the preferred mode of operation;

- the partners adopt a multinational, transnational approach to knowledge networks that can include North-North, South-South and North-South exchanges.

By contrasting these new ways of working within partnerships with what he referred to as the "received model of North-South partnerships", he was referring to a form of social innovation, that others have defined as «[...] new organizational and institutional forms, new ways of doing things, new social practices, new mechanisms, new approaches and new concepts that give rise to concrete achievements and improvements."[2]

Broadly speaking, these new ways of working are what the AUCC-IDRC partnership wanted to study through the in-depth case studies. More concretely, the partners wanted to identify how social innovation manifests itself within the context of North-South university partnerships. The case studies were aimed at answering the following questions:

- What are the factors driving the success of these partnerships?

- How are key decisions made by the partners?

- What results are they achieving?

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IDRC Photo: Anna Lartey

- How do these partnerships contribute to the national development objectives of the host countries? (It could be knowledge exchange, strengthened research outcomes, increased capacity of university and non-university organizations to take part in research and knowledge sharing.)

- What makes these partnerships innovative? What are the sources of innovation?

- What are their strengths and challenges? What difference does innovation bring to the results achieved?

- What do these partnerships have in common?

This was an exploratory type of study. The selection of the cases needed to be conducted in a way that maximized the opportunity of highlighting various dimensions of innovation, thus allowing for a richer sample of innovative practices. Guided by the input of an ad-hoc advisory group of International Liaison Officers and with this broad criterion, AUCC selected six partnerships to be studied. The following selection criteria were utilized:

- **Preliminary evidence available** that indicates that innovative practices contributed to the success of the partnership, either through project documents, publications or materials distributed through public presentations;

- **Diversity** in the sectors targeted by the partnerships;

- **Outreach beyond the university partners** to various organizations who are engaged with the Canadian university and its Southern university counterpart(s): industry representatives, local and national governance structures, international and local NGOs, community-based organizations, ordinary citizens etc.

The table on the following page presents an overview of the six partnerships selected for the study.

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[2] Goldenberg, M. et al. (2009). Social Innovation in Canada: an Update. Ottawa: Canadian Policy Research Networks.

Overview of the Six Partnerships Studied

PARTNERSHIP AND MAIN PARTNERS	PURPOSE	ACTIVITIES					
		Development projects	Community outreach	Curriculum development	Collaborative research	Faculty exchanges	Student exchanges
1. **Asset-based Community Development (ABCD) in Ethiopia**. Coady Institute, Oxfam Canada, Comart Foundation and three Ethiopian NGOs. The 24 participating Ethiopian communities.	To support citizen-led development within Ethiopian rural communities through the implementation and documentation of the ABCD approach.	✔	✔	✔	✔		
2. **Course on Gender- based Violence in Higher Education.** Carleton University, University of Sierra Leone and University of Tanzania	To facilitate the development, by the students from the three countries, of an in-depth and transnational perspective on gender-based violence in higher education.			✔	✔		
3. **Building Environmental Governance Capacity in Bangladesh** University of Manitoba, North South University in Bangladesh, BRAC University, Central for Natural Resources Studies (NGO in Bangladesh). The 10 participating Bangladesh communities.	To support the strengthening of environmental governance capacity in Bangladesh through the development of university-level programs, support to small "green" business projects and the creation of a national policy network.	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
4. **Strengthening Maternal and Child Health in Uganda.** University of Calgary, Dalhousie University and Mbarara University in Uganda. Local health authorities.	To reduce child mortality and morbidity through the development and implementation of an effective model of community-integrated management of childhood illness.	✔	✔	✔	✔		
5. **Wood Processing.** Education University of British Columbia, Stellenbosch University, South Africa and Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Western Cape, South Africa. South African Department of Trade and Industry FIETA.	To improve the relevance of university education in the wood processing sector through the development and implementation, in close collaboration with the industry, of a new curriculum for secondary wood processing training.			✔	✔	✔	✔
6. **Ecominga Amazónica – Community ecodevelopment and environmental health in Bolivia.** Université du Québec à Montréal, Universidad Autónoma Gabriel René Moreno, Universidad Autónoma del Beni José Ballivián and Universidad Amazónica de Pando. Environmental NGOs, participating communities and municipalities.	To develop and institutionalize a new academic field — community ecodevelopment, through close cooperation between the participating universities and Bolivian communities.	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	

The data were collected primarily through the consultation of project documents, internet research and interviews with Canadian project representatives and some of their counterparts in partner institutions.

IDRC Photo: Nellie Drozd

3. Analytical Framework

A brief literature review of research conducted on partnerships led to the identification of three sets of characteristics of effective and innovative partnerships: foundational principles, sustaining processes and results achieved. These three characteristics were used to guide data collection and analysis.

1. **Foundational principles:** principles guiding the establishment of a healthy and solid partnership. These include: shared vision, strong leadership, power equity, interdependency and complementarity, mutuality manifested through shared decision-making on project design, shared resources and recognition of the importance of all partners' contributions and of the validity of the various types of knowledge. A commitment to different goals (and to each other's goals) and not necessarily to shared goals can also be a strong factor of effectiveness.

2. **Sustaining processes:** processes that maintain the commitment and energy levels during the course of the partnership. These include: explicit rules on decision-making processes, transparent communication, clarity of partners' roles, openness to discuss cross-cultural issues

and the impact of different communication styles, trust, commitment, equitable rules for accessing resources and recognition of all contributions.

3. **Results and Activities:** What is being achieved? What is the added value of the partnership over what partners can achieve individually? What is the unique contribution of the university in achieving those results? How does the partnership contribute to each partner's strategic vision? Results can include: improved capacities, multiplier effects on policies, organizations and communities, enhanced performance of partners in achieving a specific aspect of their mission, new linkages with other like-minded institutions, improved access to donor funds etc. While studying partnerships we should also look at the range of activities implemented to achieve the results. They may include collaborative research, faculty or student exchanges (two-way exchanges), community outreach, knowledge dissemination to various stakeholders, development projects, funding initiatives for innovation, student training, etc. More specifically the analysis of results and activities should provide information on the added-value of the innovative practices in terms of relevance and sustainability of results.

IDRC Photo: Hector Barrios

4. Findings

The partners in all six initiatives have achieved three broad types of results, the sustainability of which can be considered high. First, there have been many significant improvements at the community level in a wide range of areas: livelihoods diversification, enhanced income levels, improved child health, improvements to the community infrastructure and environmental restoration, to name just a few. Second, the types of capacities developed by all organizations, including the Canadian partners, are key in long term organizational effectiveness: learning to learn, critical analysis, leadership, how to connect universities and communities, effective knowledge sharing and dissemination, collaborative working methods etc. Third, these partnerships have produced useful and relevant empirical and theoretical knowledge on a broad range of problems, issues, challenges that can be accessed by other organizations faced with similar situations. The innovative practices that have supported the achievement of these results are presented below.

4.1 Innovative Practices

Through the analysis of the data collected for the six case studies, it was possible to identify three main innovative practices that the partners of the six case studies have in common: **collaborative decision-making**, **a strong focus on learning** and **iterative management**. These practices and their dimensions are described below.

The Canadians exercised strong leadership in the transmission of these innovative practices to their peers, their students and other participants. By doing so they communicated their values and ensured that the principles guiding their work would be sustainable even in the case of a change of team members.

Collaborative Decision-making

The partners adopted a model of decision-making that was collaborative. It was supported by open dialogue to share mutual understandings and develop a shared vision of what the partnership should achieve and how to achieve it. The partnerships involved a number of activities aimed at implementing collaborative decision-making and, where necessary, activities to enhance the capacity to participate meaningfully in decision-making were also implemented.

Various methods were adopted to ensure transparent decision-making and open communications: regular Skype calls, project review meetings, establishment of committees composed of Canadians and host country members, participatory (internal) evaluations and adoption of clear guidelines about information sharing and decision-making.

One of the key success factors in implementing collaborative decision-making was the fact that the Canadian partners positioned themselves as equals and as facilitators of their partners' initiatives. None of them adopted the position of a knowledge broker tasked with transferring Canadian expertise to the southern partners. Different partners occupied the drivers' seat at different times and the Canadians indicated having learned as much as their partners. This practice was accompanied by a principle of mutual accountability: the partners were accountable to each other.

A Strong Focus on Learning

Each of the six partnerships functioned like a learning organization: the partners were engaged in many types of critical review processes aimed at improving the relevance of their strategies. The new knowledge was incorporated into decision-making, resulting in improvements in the relevance and effectiveness of the initiative. A central element of this learning culture was the value given by the partners to different ways of knowing and different types of knowledge that informed their decisions. It is particularly interesting to note how five[4] partnerships were able to successfully incorporate practice-based, scientific and technical knowledge from the various groups involved (university professors and students, NGO and government representatives, community members). The leaders of these partnerships embodied this learning orientation (they all said how much they learned!),

which became what can be considered a "cultural" feature of the partnerships.

This learning orientation was made more effective through strong linkages between the three aspects of the university's mission (teaching, research and community outreach). This is indicative of a solid capacity to reconcile goals that can sometimes compete with one another and, moreover, make them mutually reinforcing, such as academic goals and community-based results. For example, research findings would be utilized to refine the project strategies while new courses would be developed on the basis of research on community needs. The delivery of these courses would sometimes involve a stay in the community for the students or a specific intervention to help a community address a problem. New knowledge was disseminated through various means and formats to reach academia, policy networks, practitioners and the general population.

IDRC Photo: David Barbour

Iterative- Adaptive[5] Management

The adoption of a broad results framework at the onset of the project, followed by adaptations to the implementation approach on the basis of ongoing learning, was a widespread practice among all partnerships studied. The partners were able to incorporate flexibility into their plans, even in what could be considered somewhat rigid results-based management frameworks. In the views of those who took part in this study, an RBM-type theory of change could be utilized as a flexible tool to guide project implementation and record lessons to support decision-making. This finding shows that it is possible to create some measure of flexibility, even within more rigid funding arrangements that are guided by predefined results and indicators. At a more practical level, the partners have integrated flexibility in the activities, outputs and short term results very often choosing to change the course of their activities in order to opt for more relevant and appropriate solutions on the basis of the learning that had occurred during the project.

This practice of iterative management is consistent with the spirit of Results-based Management. For example, CIDA's RBM policy states that "CIDA will implement RBM on an iterative basis, refining approaches as it learns from experience, and adapting realistically to circumstances (including necessary capacity building in some developing-country partners)."[6]

Amongst the six partnerships studied, the Coady-Oxfam partnership is the only one that was implemented within what can be considered a truly flexible funding framework: the Comart Foundation funded their process and not a pre-established results framework. But a flexible framework does not mean lower funders' expectations: the Foundation was expecting results in the form of tangible improvements in the lives of Ethiopian farmers. It decided to renew its funding for another five years (2011-2016) only after being presented evaluation evidence that showed the improvements in the lives of the Ethiopian participants.

4.2 Innovative Practices and the Characteristics of Successful Partnerships

As the innovative practices identified are concrete illustrations of the (abstract) concepts presented in the analytical framework, the table below shows how each contributes to the operationalization of the three characteristics of successful partnerships presented above.

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4   The only partnership that did not incorporate practice-based knowledge was the trilateral partnership (Carleton University in partnership with a Tanzanian and a Sierra Leonean university) mainly because the partnership focused on the design and delivery of a course.

5   The team of the University of Manitoba- Bangladesh partnership referred to this practice as "adaptive management".

6   CIDA, Results-based Management Policy Statement, 2008. Cited here because CIDA was one of the first development agencies that has adopted RBM as it main management framework.

INNOVATIVE PRACTICES	CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIPS		
	FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES	SUSTAINING PROCESSES	SUSTAINABLE RESULTS
Collaborative Decision-Making	Open and participatory discussions on the principles that will guide the partnership.	■ Regular exchanges between partners, using various means of communication. ■ Various types of processes to foster open dialogue and transparent decision-making: regular project reviews, mutual accountability, committees composed of members of all partner organizations make key technical and management decisions, clear guidelines about information sharing and decision-making are disseminated.	■ Collaborative decision-making increases ownership of all towards the outcomes. ■ The results are more relevant to the needs and capacities of partner organizations, which is likely to translate into more appropriate solutions and sustainable results.
Strong Learning Orientation	Principles of a learning culture made explicit: failure is a source of learning, value is given to various types of knowledge and ways of knowing, knowledge production contributes to the development agenda of the host country, mainly but not exclusively through a focus on utilization.	■ Regular project reviews provide opportunities for learning and the sharing of understandings. ■ New knowledge is widely disseminated. ■ All members of the team, including the most senior, are learning. ■ Participants are encouraged to be critical and to question received ideas.	Learning benefits the current project instead of remaining at the level of lessons learned to benefit future projects
Iterative-Adaptive Management	Partners agree on a broad results framework describing the results to be achieved and on the fact that activities and outputs are not "set in stone".	The theory of change is actively tested and documented and changes acted upon during project implementation.	■ Project strategies become more relevant to the situation and more context- appropriate results can be achieved. ■ Improved resource utilization. ■ Fosters timely action.

4.3 Challenges in Implementing Innovations in North-South Partnerships

The partners were able to identify a number of challenges posed by these innovative partnerships. These challenges relate to the utilization of resources and to the place of the international cooperation initiatives within the universities' internationalization strategies.

The High Transaction Costs of Collaborative Approaches

A collaborative approach requires ongoing communication, lots of discussions and exchanges which take time. In all the partnerships studied the partners indicated that the amount of time required to exchange with their partners was not fully reflected in their budgets and that the additional time needed was often provided from the participants' personal time. However, they all agreed that this type of collaborative approach was a main contributor in achieving sustainable results.

The Cultural Change Involved in Working in Collaboration

The six partnerships reviewed adopted a collaborative way of working whereby all partners work as equals. This principle of equality can represent a deep change in the "culture" of international cooperation. Participants in one of the six partnerships mentioned the need to deconstruct a culture whereby the Northern organization is in the drivers' seat before they could work as equals with their partners. It is an important finding because development cooperation initiatives with the Northern partners in the driver's seat

are still prevalent. Even though it was mentioned in the case of only one of the six partnerships studied, this finding is likely to have broad applicability.

The Many Challenges Posed by Resource Utilization

- The true costs of these initiatives are not thoroughly reflected in their budgets: significant additional costs were incurred through the use of the universities' technological infrastructures and the time put in by all participants for what was often a project that came in addition to their full time workload.

- Some of the funding arrangements did not allow for the funding of partner faculty salaries, which was seen as a hurdle by the participants.

- The management structure of universities is often very slow to respond to the resource needs of these international partnerships: disbursements often take a lot of time.

- Some Canadians also indicated that the management of their university did not consider these types of international partnerships to be very beneficial for their institutions. But there were cases where the university clearly benefitted from the partnership: enhanced visibility of a program or research centre, new research funding, new programs created, larger number of foreign students who want to come and study in a specific program etc.

The Place of the Partnerships within University Internationalization Strategies

There is variance in how the initiatives reviewed here are placed within their university's internationalization strategy. In some cases the partnership was an integral component of such a strategy and the team received support and visibility within the institution. In other cases the faculty members and researchers received less support from their university's international office and sharing of information on the activities of the project was a challenge. This leads to difficulties such as the coordination with parallel activities in the same country of work and missed opportunities for leveraging partnerships and even funding.

There remain different conceptualizations of university internationalization by the institutions involved and therefore a variety of approaches to their international strategies. Concerns in recent years around resource availability has led some institutions to develop more streamlined and targeted

IDRC Photo: Daniel Buckles

strategies that in some cases do not integrate North-South partnerships in to the operations as much as previously done.

Many universities nevertheless, do have these projects well integrated into their strategies, recognizing their value to the overall mission of universities and also for enhancing the profile and reach of the institution. It also helps set the stage for additional activities in the sphere of international education and positions the institutions well for greater two-way links in particular in the larger, emerging countries in the global South.

If, however, universities overemphasize this aspect of North-South partnerships as outreach programs rather than research or educational programs, there is a risk of reducing their value for the Canadian researchers and faculty members. Researchers naturally still place a high value on the production of research outputs and look to achieve these goals through the partnership. This is particularly true in the case of junior faculty members who are often unable to take part in such partnership initiatives because outreach programs do not provide sufficient publishing opportunities to help them fulfill tenure track requirements. If the research is well recognized and rewarded, it can have more impact and be better integrated into the institution's work and therefore help with leveraging for other partnering purposes.

Photo: University of Manitoba

5. Recommendations and Next Steps

Below are recommendations to be considered for funders of these partnerships, to the universities and their participating faculties and possible next steps.

Recommendations for Funders

1. Find ways to be more flexible: within a results-based framework, flexibility is needed at the level of immediate outcomes and outputs to make the most of learning during the project. This is possible without changing the purpose of a project.

2. Revise funding requirements to allow participating universities to operate within a funding framework that would recognize the financial value of the host country partner's contribution through appropriate funding allocations.

3. Get to know the projects funded by your organization, engage in collaborative learning with the organizations that your programs are supporting: it will inform your other programs and your investment in one given initiative will have multiplier effects.

4. Dedicate a small portion of the program funds to innovation.

Recommendations for Universities and Participating Faculties

1. Clearly articulate the multiple ways that these international cooperation initiatives contribute to your university's internationalization strategy and to its domestic strategy.

2. Feature these outstanding achievements in your internal and external communications: your engagement in international cooperation activities is likely to be seen very positively by prospective students and partners.

3. Participating faculty members and their university's international office should collaborate to identify and communicate the contribution of these North-South partnerships to each of the three aspects of the university's mission.

4. Universities should find ways to reward and formally recognize faculty's involvement into this type of partnership.

Possible Next Steps

1. Organize a small dialogue group including international liaison officers (ILOs) and other relevant university representatives. This would be an opportunity to present the results of this study and discuss how they can highlight the benefits of this type of partnership for their institution.

2. Organize a seminar or a symposium with IDRC to engage in discussions on taking stock of these initiatives and on where to go from there. There might be other opportunities to engage some of the AUCC members in various forms of dialogue. For example, there is an interest on the part of some Canadian faculty members that were interviewed (for this study) to engage in a dialogue with IDRC and CIDA (and, in one case, with the Canadian Society for International Health) on how funding arrangements could be made more conducive to innovation. It could be a very interesting and fruitful dialogue to engage in and AUCC could possibly facilitate such an exchange.