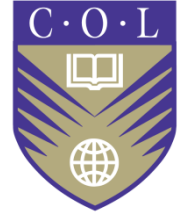


Value of Partnerships in Building an Education System



*BOCODOL Seminar
Gaborone, Botswana
26 November 2012*

Presented by Vis Naidoo

*Co-written with
John Lesperance, Abdurrahman Umar and Frances Ferreira
Commonwealth of Learning*

What is a partnership?

‘Partnership is an arrangement where parties agree to cooperate to advance their mutual interests’.

This sentence, although from Wikipedia, captures the essence of partnerships and notes the following:

- It is an arrangement, something that is constructed between parties.
- There are parties involved and most often this is based on common values, interests and agendas.
- Agreement is the key – the parties agree to do something.
- Working together is the essence of the partnership.
- Advance provides the value to the partnership – how to move forward to something better.
- Mutual interest is crucial to partnerships that offer all parties a win scenario or at least agreeing on what each will gain from it.

As social beings, constructing partnerships has been the platform for social and economic development. It has enabled individuals, businesses, organisations, governments, etc. to become owners (or partners) to achieve an agreed set of goals/outcomes/end points that all parties want to achieve. This mode of operation to achieve an end is common across various parts of our society. Partnerships also occur at the personal level and can also be private or made known in the public domain.

However, partnerships also present challenges to the parties involved. There is often important negotiations that need to take place to ensure there is agreement in term of goals to be reached, who has

responsibility for different actions, who has authority, what and who determines success and how is this evaluated. Once agreement is reached, the partnership is typically enforceable by civil law. There is a host of legal and regularity tools that have been developed to craft and manage partnership.

What Does Partnerships Mean for COL

For a small specialist organisation like COL, partnerships represent both a vital strategy and an important asset. In its Three-Year Plan (2012-2015) COL identified five core strategies in order to achieve its outcome and impact and partnership in one of these strategies. The other core strategies include capacity, materials, models and policy.

Partnership refers to a dynamic relationship between organisations and institutions based on mutually agreed goals with clearly defined roles and responsibilities. COL leverages its modest resources through partnerships in virtually everything that it does.

COL has two main types of partnerships:

1) Upstream partnerships (that is, strategic partnerships) enable COL to broaden its vision and complement its resources. Such partnerships can be with multilateral organisations (e.g., UNESCO), regional bodies (e.g., the Economic Community of West African States), national governments or commercial organisations (e.g., Microsoft).

2) Downstream partnerships come into play at the implementation level. COL partners with government agencies, public institutions, civil society and other organisations to improve and extend teaching and learning services to people in the developing Commonwealth countries.

Both kinds of partnerships are based on collaboration and shared values and goals.

During this Three-Year Plan, COL will leverage existing networks, act as the catalyst for bilateral linkages, and expand its circle of partners by promoting:

- both south-south and north-south collaboration
- public-private partnerships, and
- regional and international co-operation.

How are partnerships contributing to the development of education systems?

I want to illustrate my response to this question by focusing on Botswana.

In Botswana, COL has a long history of partnerships with both the government of Botswana (through the Ministry of Education), Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning (BOCODOL), Southern African Development Community-Centre for Distance Education (SADC-CDE), through the Child

Friendly Schools Project (a partnership between COL, UNICEF and participating countries) and through the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC).

Let me take a few moments to highlight some of these partnerships to show how these have followed my opening sentence.

BOCODOL & Open Schooling (OS)

BOCODOL was one of the partners in the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation/Commonwealth of Learning-Open Education Resources for Open Schools Project. This project aimed at broadening access to secondary education through the development of high quality Open Distance Learning (ODL). BOCODOL contributed 2 subjects ([Human & Social Biology and Geography](#)) to this project.

BOCODOL played a major role in building this partnership through its own in-country Management Committee as well as an important role in the Open Schools Project Steering Committee, which also enabled it to expand its network to 5 countries.

COL played a role in the development, strengthening and positioning of BOCODOL as one of the successful open schools in Africa. This is evident through BOCODOL's engagement in different capacity building activities in areas which are important for sustainability of ODL institutions. This role cannot be over-emphasised to illustrate how a well-run institution can enable increased access to learning.

In the area of Quality Assurance, BOCODOL participated in a week-long workshop which promoted the understanding of the salient quality assurance issues and concepts. It also provided the delegates an opportunity to participate in the initial stages of the development of a quality assurance toolkit that is relevant and adaptable to open schools in different contexts within Commonwealth countries. This participatory approach was deemed to be important as it did not only enrich the toolkit through the sharing of ideas on open schooling and quality assurance, it also enhanced the ownership of the end product by the participants who are the end users of the toolkit.

We can also see an increasing set of international partnership that have enable BOCODOL to support ODL for open schools. For example, in June 2011, BOCODOL hosted a workshop entitled 'Integrating Vocational Education with Academic Education' for 10 countries to explore the context, potential challenges and implementation of integrating vocational and academic education. The value of having a partnership with COL enabled this kind of global partnerships and engagements to take place.

BOCODOL participated in the capacity building workshop in Mozambique in 2011 where participants were given the opportunity to share their experiences on the role of gender in broadening ICT based education, and developed a common understanding and appreciation for open schools to have a gender sensitive ICT policy. This workshop was one of the activities which lead to the [gender sensitive ICT Strategy for open schools](#).

There are a range of other engagements between COL and BOCODOL that has exemplified the partnership agreement between both organisations and between COL and the Government of Botswana. Some of these include the Women and ICTs training workshop, Open Educational Resources (OER) and Copyright workshop (including a face-to-face and online component), Cost and Financing of Open

Schools workshop with 14 other countries, contribution to the revised publication of the Learner Support guide for Open Schools which was published by COL.

I can go on to name a few more partnerships that we have had with BOCODOL. However, let me talk briefly of other kinds of partnerships that have been constructed between Botswana and COL.

SADC-Centre for Distance Education (SADC-CDE)

Botswana is an integral partner in the region. In this context, your hosting of the Southern African Distance Education Centre is one illustration of this regional partnership. In March 2006, the SADC Ministers of Education and Training approved the establishment of the SADC-CDE which is a UNIT of the Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning. COL and the Ministry of Education and Skills development signed a series of (3) MOU coinciding with COL's Three-Year Plan cycle in which COL agreed to make a financial contribution to the Centre's activities. The key objective of the center is to coordinate SADC wide capacity building activities to achieve excellence in ODL delivery in the region. Over the past 6 years the Centre has contributed to the formulation of ODL policies in Botswana , Lesotho and Swaziland, professional development of ODL practitioners in the area of Gender, Research and Post Graduate Diploma in Distance Education, Masters in Distance Education, Online tutor support, Quality assurance and various publications.

In 2010 the SADC Secretariat Advisory Board agreed to draft a constitution for the SADC-CDE in an effort to establish a subsidiarity relationship between SADC CDE and SADC Secretariat. The SADC-CDE is a very important vehicle through which COL is positioned in the Region.

Child friendly schools project

In October 2008, COL and UNICEF formally agreed to collaborate on a project that aims at mainstreaming the CFS models and approaches into Pre-service and In-service Teacher Education Programmes of partner countries. The project covers ten countries: Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Swaziland, Mozambique (now replaced by Trinidad and Tobago), and Zambia on a two-year capacity development partnership with COL. The overall goal of the CFS Project is to integrate the principles, modes and methods of the Child Friendly School into all aspects of children's education and learning. The project aims to promote changes in educational practice that will create a friendly, rich and more qualitative learning environment in terms of its safety and security, sanitation, care and inclusiveness.

In addition, the ongoing cascading of the CFS training to cover hundreds of other stakeholders, especially head teachers and teachers in the four countries will be crucial to the sustainability of the Projects and to the future professional training of all teachers on the CFS principles and approaches. Continued investment in high quality professional development for classroom teachers and Head Teachers will be required.

The work of COL and UNICEF in bringing considerable technical expertise and financial support to the project teams in the countries that participated in the project and had contributed in very important ways to developing the capacity of the project officers. This enabled the participating countries to work effectively with the consultants to develop relevant training materials. The maintenance of these levels of support was important for the success of the CFS projects and enabling possible further partnership.

Again, another example of the value that this kind of global partnership has realised for Botswana.

VUSSC

Perhaps one of the most important initiatives of COL has been the development of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (called VUSSC). When Ministers of Education met in Halifax, Canada in 2000 for their 14th Commonwealth Conference for Education Ministers (CEEM) they came up with the idea for having a Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC). Faced with the problems of the internet revolution in education and UN's Millennium Declaration and the Dakar World Forum on Education for All, they felt that they needed to do something for the small states if they do not want to be left behind.

Subsequent to their 15th CCEM which was held in Edinburgh the model they approved emerged as one of a consortium of governments, namely ministries of education and institutions, which continues to capture the attention of the worldwide community until today. The VUSSC has developed a very powerful partnership and collaboration model and Botswana is a living testimony of this partnership. BOCODOL and VUSSC are collaborating in various ways, including building capacity on the use of technology and developing eLearning course in different subjects.

An important aspect of the VUSSC is the development of the web portal to share information and empower learners and educators with free educational resources including a repository of OER, information on accreditation and a learning management system. Researchers and Educators from Botswana and in particular BOCODOL have published a series of articles and books in collaboration with VUSSC. This engagement with 32 other small states of the Commonwealth also supported the global strategy to increase access to post-secondary education – an important development as many countries seek to have skilled people that can enter the world of work and contribute to its economic development.

This partnership has also impacted on another important aspect of the Botswana Education system, viz. the qualifications framework. In this regard, VUSSC worked with the Botswana Training Authority to develop the Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF) that is today being seen as one of the most remarkable achievements of promoting learners mobility, the transfer of courses and an accreditation system among small states.

In providing you with background information and a brief summary of some of our partnerships that have been constructed in Botswana, I have illustrated the value that has been added to the education sector in the country and to the students. There is, however, an additional value that is often not considered and I would argue is equally important and valuable to the partnership that we have engineered together.

What additional value can partnerships offer?

- Often partnerships enable one or all parties involved to extend their network to become truly global. This is very prevalent in the examples that I have cited earlier.
- Another example of this global network and its value is the development of OER. This movement has been initiated and led by individuals, universities, international agencies, donor organisations and a few governments. Perhaps one of the earliest examples of OER is when the Massachusetts

Institute of Technology (MIT) decided to make its courseware syllabi, materials, videos, test, available on its MIT's OpenCourseWare (OCW) site. This became freely available online and is one of the most popular sites.

Other universities soon identified with this approach and the Open University UK and others began to identify the value of this approach (i.e. improved visibility, increased profile, partnerships and renewed attraction to students) and created policies, systems and other requirements to ensure this becomes an integral part of their teaching.

COL and UNESCO, as the two leading international governmental agencies, focused on OER and ensured that at the 2009 World Conference on Higher Education, there was a strong reference to OER in the communique. I quote:

‘At the 2009 World Conference on Higher Education: The New Dynamics of Higher Education and Research for Societal Change and Development (UNESCO, Paris, 508 July 2009), it was communicated that ODL (open and distance learning) approaches and ICTs (information and communication technologies) present opportunities to widen access to quality education, particularly when Open Educational Resources are readily shared among by many countries and higher education institutions’.
(Glennie, Harley, Butcher and van Wyk [Ed], 2012: 3)

This important declaration laid the basis for the historic COL-UNESCO 2012 World OER Congress held in Paris on 20-22 June. The Paris Declaration on OER, as this Congress became known, identified three key actions:

- Foster awareness and use of OER
- Encourage the development and adaptation of OER in a variety of languages and cultural contexts
- Encourage the open licensing of educational materials produced with public funds

This in turn enabled the 18th CCEM, held in Mauritius in September 2012 to include OER into their official communique. Ministers emphasised the need:

- ‘to set up a common platform for OER materials for...ease of access’
- ‘for the development and use of OER in providing quality teaching and learning for all.

So the OER movement is growing, gathering pace and new issues are emerging. Some of these include:

- Increasing the production of OER for all sectors of the education system
- Ensuring capacity of educators to use and re-use OER
- Identifying ways to enable students to use OER towards their education, training and certification
- Critical research
- National and institutional policy requirements

- Understanding context, culture and languages when developing and using OER.

For education institutions and for the education Ministry, the issue of OER is likely to an important global development that could support the learning and teaching processes in Botswana. As more and more people in Botswana gain access to technology and the Internet, there is likely to be greater opportunity for all citizens to become learners, to improve their own knowledge and skills and be able to make a greater contribution to both society and the economy. OER have the potential to drive down the costs of education, in particular the costs of education resources for teaching and learning. This also supports increased access to learning opportunities.

The global OER movement enables a country like Botswana to fully participate with other partner countries and institutions, both contribute to and benefit from it and enable a truly cost effective way to increase access to education.

Conclusion

Botswana – taking the step to change BOCODOL into an open university can lever of the partnership with COL, benefit from its global set of partners that it has, use the developments of OER, technology, quality courses and course materials and research to enable the transition from BOCODOL to an Open University to be smooth. This will be an important component of the partnerships that exist. I believe that an equally important contribution that Botswana can make in this process is to illustrate to other Africa countries and to the world how one can develop an open university using all the global expertise, experience and resources to deliver world class education. The research that will be done as you make this transition and your contribution to the body of knowledge in ODL and technology will also become another key outcome of your partnerships that you have developed over the years.

This is the true value of partnerships – ensuring the social and economic development of our people to participate fully in their country of birth and to contribute to the wellbeing of the world.