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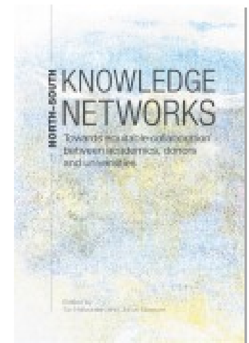

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CHAPTER 11

Into the great wide open: Trends and tendencies in university collaboration for development

Jorun Nossum

I am a development worker in the field of higher education and research. I look at competing and future priorities for development aid. In particular, I focus on the arguments for and against supporting higher education and research. In my work, numerous dilemmas arise in relation to priorities, principles and models of development co-operation. In this chapter, I present some stories, examples and experiences gathered from encounters with university partners and colleagues. I reflect on the recent history of Norwegian support to higher education and research, and build on some of the ideas put forward by Göran Hydén in his chapter.

Hydén's typology of academic collaboration, mostly funded by donors, captures much of what has happened in the past. His chapter also clearly illustrates the contrast between norms that have dominated the higher education sector and what I see as new ways of designing programmes and interventions that aim to support the sector. I explain why the Norwegian Programme for Capacity Development in Higher Education and Research for Development (NORHED), which I discuss in some detail, can be seen as an example of this new way of doing things.[1]

Individual academics, departments, faculties and universities support a multitude of academic networking arrangements across the North–South divide, in ways that tie in with their own strategic priorities. When donors enter this arena to offer support, they often choose to support 'capacity development' programmes. Here, too, a range of different approaches and models apply, depending on whether the programmes aim to strengthen individual, organisational and/or institutional capacities.

The notion of capacity development is widely used, and has been defined as

> the process by which individuals, groups and organisations, institutions and countries develop, enhance and organise their systems, resources and knowledge; all reflected in their abilities, individually and collectively, to perform functions, solve problems and achieve objectives. (OECD 2006: 83)

Today, initiatives and programmes for capacity development in higher education and development-related research projects are included in the priorities of many Northern donors (see Adriansen et al. 2016). Donor support for the higher education sector often relies on the existence or establishment of partnerships between universities in the respective donor and recipient countries. This is certainly how support from Norway to the higher education and research sector has been channelled over the last few decades.

Support for university collaborations, *for the sake of* 'capacity development', takes various forms and, while there is some agreement on what research capacity is, there is little consensus on how it can be improved. Different pathways include supporting scholarships and infrastructure development, establishing centres of excellence, and training senior staff. Initiatives involving scholarly networks and/or academics in the diaspora in processes that aim to improve the quality of research and teaching offer another route with the same goal.

How 'capacity' is conceived often depends on the partners involved, and on the political contexts in which they work. For this reason, I offer

a brief reflection on the broader contexts that shape contemporary ideas about capacity development.

Ideals, experience and knowledge: Essential or elitist?

In 2000, the World Bank (in collaboration with UNESCO) published its report, *Higher Education in Developing Countries: Peril and Promise*, stating that: 'Higher Education is no longer a luxury: it is essential to national social and economic development'. Nevertheless, higher education and research in Africa is often still perceived as a luxury, an elitist project for a privileged few. Thus, what is seen as essential for wealthier societies is viewed as elitist for others.

A story often told about Norway is how investment in knowledge and technology was key to the development of the country's oil and gas sector. When oil was first discovered off the country's coast in the late 1950s, the technical expertise needed to exploit oil and gas deposits was lacking. State policies and priorities were then deliberately developed to ensure that, rather than simply selling fossil fuels to the big oil companies, Norway remained in the driving seat in terms of both ownership and knowledge. An independent oil industry gradually emerged, so one of the world's smaller countries has retained control over its own resources in a sector that is controlled almost everywhere else by huge multinationals.

This illustrates the value of knowledge in the development of natural resources of all kinds. Obtaining knowledge and competence can be about gaining the means to independently define, describe and develop. Why should this be different for poorer countries? Shouldn't every country have opportunities to harness their own natural resources and potentials, and to take ownership of their own development?

Africa's long history of exploitation also makes knowledge development crucial for social, cultural and political change. As the African Union's chairperson, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, stated in her address to the Higher Education Summit in Dakar in 2015: 'Africa needs to develop its own knowledge. Only then can we be completely free.' In my view, this kind of freedom involves countries owning their own

histories, defining their own challenges and deploying their own resources and energy for their own development.

Higher education and development

Since the mid 1990s, Norway's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (working with the country's Ministry of Education and Research) has considered support for higher education and research crucial for development. More recently, higher education and research have regained prominence in the wider development agenda. They are increasingly seen as key drivers of social and economic change, and therefore feature in the list of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted in 2015.[2] In fact, many of the SDGs will be achievable only if the higher education and research sector contributes to their realisation, and is transformed by them. That is, curriculum content and research priorities must change, while postgraduate throughput rates must improve so that more people can contribute to knowledge production and innovation.

In 2016, NORAD commissioned a review of the literature on the relationship between higher education and development. The study underlined a key shift in understandings of the sector that occurred in the 1990s:

> The 1990s signalled the start of a big change in the focus of external financing for education. The donors were adopting an economic lens through which they looked at the value of providing financial support to different education sub-sectors. This was influenced by a journal article by a leading World Bank staff member on rates of return to education (Psacharopoulos, 1985) which stated that the economic rates of return to primary education were much higher than those for higher education. (Ndaruhutse and Thompson 2016: 5)

Combined with a strong focus on primary education, and inspired by UNESCO's Jomtien Conference in 1990 where the declaration on Education for All was adopted, the World Bank's rate-of-return analysis

influenced both the policies and the budget allocations of donors and governments in many parts of the world. For a decade or more, support for higher education and universities was drastically curtailed. Academics and university leaders have shared experiences and research findings on how cost-benefit thinking shaped education policies at a national level and donor interests internationally, shifting support towards primary education and neglecting higher education and research (see Mahmood Mamdani's chapter in this volume, for example).

This imbalance was also influenced by an atomistic view of education. Competing priorities overshadowed the understanding that the different educational levels depend on and relate to one another in complex ways. As Mamdani noted in a keynote speech made to NORHED's 2016 conference in Oslo:

> In the process, the World Bank lost sight of the big picture: that primary, secondary and higher education are not isolated islands. Key to understanding the significance of each is the relations between them. If you ask the right questions, you will understand that the pivotal link in this three-way relationship is university education: Who will train teachers? Who will produce the curriculum, one that will respond to the needs of society, the demand for citizenship, the need to think of a future in a rapidly changing world?

In the literature review mentioned above, Ndaruhutse and Thompson (2016) described the broader dimensions and impacts of higher education beyond merely its capacity to stimulate economic growth and provide a decent return on investments. Quoting Oketch, McCowan and Schendel's rigorous 2014 report, Ndaruhutse and Thompson (2016: 9) noted that:

> Tertiary education was found to have an important impact on development in low- and middle-income countries. Higher education provides measurable benefits to graduates, relating to health, gender equality and democracy. It contributes

> to the strengthening of institutions, and the forming of professionals who are vital for sectors such as education and health. Universities should be acknowledged and supported for the diverse range of functions they offer in addition to contributing directly to economic growth.

Mamdani also highlighted the role of universities in his 2016 speech, when he explained:

> The basic challenge lies in our conception of the university. Let me begin with those who would like to think of the university as an economic unit. A university is less like a business enterprise, more like a road, a power station. You do not measure the returns on a power station by dividing the investment made with the numbers employed at the station. Or the returns on a road or a bridge by dividing the investment with numbers employed. The returns are also social, sometimes mainly social – say if the region in question had been economically marginal and socially isolated. That the university is not just an economic unit means that its returns are not just economic, quantitative, measurable – they are also social, qualitative, not always available for measurement … And, the returns are not just social, they are also in the realm of ideas, thought – ideological, philosophical, spiritual.

To sum up, priorities and funding for higher education and universities have shifted since the 1990s. The shifts have been influenced by different ways of thinking about universities and of measuring their impact on society and on other development goals and priorities. Some of these debates are ongoing, some should perhaps be over by now. However, as concluded by the Education Development Trust, ‘Nowadays there is little doubt that research and tertiary education are main drivers of economic development’ (Ndaruhutse and Thompson 2016: 15).

Norway's support for capacity building in higher education and research

The three main programmes in this sector run by Norway and funded by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) are the Norwegian Programme for Development, Research and Education (NUFU), the Programme for Masters Studies (NOMA), and the Norwegian Programme for Capacity Development in Higher Education and Research for Development (NORHED).

- Established in 1991, the NUFU programme represented a major effort by Norway to build sustainable capacity and competence in research and research-based higher education institutions in low- and middle-income countries. The aim was to establish close and mutually beneficial partnerships between academic institutions in the South and those in Norway. In its fourth and final funding period (from 2007 to 2012), NUFU supported 69 projects in 19 countries in Africa and Asia. These involved research collaborations, the training of masters and PhD students, the development of study programmes and courses, and the training of technical and administrative staff.
- NOMA was set up in 2006, and provides financial support for the development and running of masters programmes at Southern institutions via collaborative relationships with higher education institutions in Norway. The overall aim is to enhance staff training in all sectors of partner countries, through a focus on improving masters-level programmes at higher education institutions in the South.
- NORHED was launched in 2012. Its aim is to strengthen the capacity of higher education institutions in low-and middle-income countries to better educate more postgraduates, and to enhance the quality and quantity of their research. The theory of change adopted by NORHED is that stronger higher education institutions will help to enrich their countries' intellectual resources, the competence of their workforces, the quality of their leaders, while increasing gender equality and respect for human rights. In the longer term, NORHED aims to contribute to

evidence-based policy and decision-making that enhances sustainable economic, social and environmental development. In 2016, NORAD was supporting 46 university partnerships through NORHED, which was involved in 60 universities in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and 12 in Norway. More than 300 academics are involved in these partnerships.

Capacity building and Norway's track record

For those involved in NORHED, it is important that the overall objective of capacity development for the university sector is based on an understanding that capacity development is not a goal in itself, but a means towards a higher goal – outlined in the theory of change mentioned above. This theory of change was discussed in the first evaluation of the NORHED programme, albeit in more technical terms (see DPMG 2014). The evaluators questioned whether NORHED's theory of change was in line with the existing theory and literature on capacity development in higher education institutions. In analysing the presuppositions built into the NORHED programme, the evaluators took the following levels at which capacity development occurs as their point of departure:

- The individual level (knowledge, technical skills, motivation, etc.);
- The organisational level (policies, processes, systems, structures, incentives, resources, practices);
- The environmental level (enabling policies, legislation, social and economic contexts, and other external factors).

Further, they considered how these different levels are related to one another, and how substantial and sustainable capacity can be developed. They argued that:

> While capacity development efforts may sometimes focus on only one of these levels, in most cases they involve activity at multiple levels. For example, while building individual's knowledge and skills on a particular technical issue may be

> necessary to improve capacity, steps may also need to be taken to change how the wider organisation functions to enable these skills to be put into practice. Likewise, changes in the organisation may only be possible with shifts in the wider enabling environment. Sustainable capacity development often requires working simultaneously across these levels. (DPMG 2014)

As the evaluators suggested, when looking at capacity as a means to other ends (namely, societal development), all the social spaces within which academic work occurs – from individual capabilities to organisational support to socially 'enabling environments' – as well as factors influencing these spaces, have to be considered.

In higher education and research, it is reasonably easy to see results at the level of individuals. However, success at an institutional level is more difficult to measure, and even more so at a social level. The relationships between individuals and institutions – that is, how individuals affect institutions and how institutions shape individuals – is worth exploring further.

The evaluators concluded that the NORHED programme is largely in line with recommendations made in the existing literature, but that its work addresses the wider environment in which the universities operate to a limited extent. The authors of the report defined an 'enabling environment' as one that has adequate funding and supports good governance, as well as meritocratic, transparent and fair staffing practices (DPMG 2014: 24).

Scholarship programmes have long been a major part of global efforts to widen access to higher education and research (again, indicating a belief in developing capacity at the individual level). Numerous challenges and dilemmas related to such initiatives have been identified, including the brain-drain effect, and the relevance, usefulness and cost-effectiveness of non-localised education and qualifications. How investing in individuals might impact on the expansion of enabling environments, beyond enhancing an individual's own career and productivity, also merits further consideration.

A 2016 study of a large scholarship programme focusing on alumni of international fellowship programmes, is one example of research that is being done on individual versus institutional impacts (see Martel 2016). Martel's study looked at people who have accepted scholarships, and examined the effects of this on their communities and society at large. Martel concluded that programmes that target individuals can have significant multiplier effects for communities, societies, and organizations (Martel 2016).

This is highly relevant for NORHED, and other similar initiatives. Exploring the effects that individuals have on their workplaces, communities, and society at large might be one way to assess their impact, but we also want to know how the institutions individuals work for and with are shaped by their employees' conceptions of themselves and the value of their work. We want to know how individuals see their work as contributing to changing institutions.

The Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Education (SIU) conducted a tracer study in 2015. It's main objective was to assess whether, where and how masters graduates who had been supported by NOMA and NUFU were able to apply the skills they had acquired within the remit of national or regional workforces in the South. Their main finding was that:

> Graduates from both the NOMA programme and the NUFU programme have been highly successful in obtaining employment within the first 12 months following graduation, and close to 70% of the NOMA graduates and approximately 90% of the NUFU graduates have obtained employment relevant to their masters degrees. The majority of the graduates are employed in their country or region of origin, with the public sector and higher education institutions being the sectors employing the highest share of graduates. (SIU 2015: 83)

Additional information on issues like this, which are related to capacity building at different levels, and to the impact that individuals have on the institutions they work for, will be crucial for informing future programmes and initiatives. In this respect, NORHED aims to be a

laboratory from which new knowledge about what works in capacity development can emerge.

Questionable motives

Models of capacity development differ depending on their motives – from imperialist to altruist – and they tend to foster either economic exploitation or knowledge production accordingly. Clearly, different development agendas create a variety of consequences for universities and research. Justifications of support for higher education and research vary from idealism to utilitarianism, from development aid to meeting the needs of business and industry. These justifications have also shifted over time. Historical mapping of how higher education and scholarships were used by the former colonial powers, as well as by the old and emerging superpowers, and by the Scandinavian countries, shows that support for universities has served many purposes.

The NORHED programme is attempting to walk a new path. For decades, the support offered to individuals through scholarships meant they had to travel to a foreign country and enrol in full-time study at one of their universities. The most talented or privileged (or both) few were selected and educated in the North. Many never returned. The differences between what they were offered abroad, and what they could return home to, were often overwhelming. Some returned home and succeeded as academics, or government and business leaders. Others returned, but did not succeed. Although they had obtained a good education from reputable universities, their knowledge was not what was needed in their countries; the solutions they offered or their ways of working were inappropriate. Often, this inability to fit in carried political overtones, particularly within the politics of knowledge, and the variety of factors related to 'not fitting in' again highlights the importance of understanding the institutional preconditions for capacity development; that is, how institutions and individuals interact.

Mahmood Mamdani was among the first group of 12 students who left to study abroad after Uganda achieved independence. Now director of Uganda's Makerere Institute for Social Research, he is also

co-ordinating a NORHED programme in the region. When I interviewed him in Kampala in February 2015 about his own education experience, he observed: 'Half of us never returned. The other half of us became misfits within our societies.'

The issue of what we learn and how adaptable our knowledge is to where we work remains critically important. Internationalisation is now higher on the agenda than ever before, and stories about the brain drain abound: about the number of African doctors in Britain and France outnumbering doctors in the countries they come from; about graduates who went home full of hope and enthusiasm to find that their knowledge was irrelevant to their country's needs. Nevertheless, the extent to which internationalisation and education across borders have provided individuals with opportunities and experiences that they would never have had otherwise should not be underestimated.

Leben Moro at the University of Juba is a living example of this. He shared his story with me during an interview I had with him in Juba in November 2016. Leben was a refugee for much of his youth. In primary school, he fled from South Sudan and became a refugee in Uganda. From there he went to high school in Khartoum and then to university in Cairo. Eventually, this young man from a poor background in war-torn South Sudan, obtained a doctorate from Oxford University. With his certificate in hand, plenty of opportunities opened up for him, but he wanted to go home. He explained:

> I have been given so many opportunities, in Cairo, England and Canada. I needed them, but I never felt that they needed me. There, I am only one of many, I wouldn't make much of a difference. But here in South Sudan they need me, here I can make a difference.

Moro is not unusual. Many African academics choose to stay at their own institutions, in their own countries, despite having fewer publication opportunities, poorly equipped laboratories and difficult environments in which to conduct critical or independent research. Many have returned, and continue to return, thus changing the institutions within which they work. Yet more returns are hoped for and

expected. In his keynote speech at the African Higher Education Summit in Dakar in 2015, Kofi Annan expressed this fairly unambiguously, noting: 'Africa has exported some of its brightest minds. I am waiting for them to return.'

Moro returned, and so did Mamdani. Mamdani has had an impressive academic career in a number of countries. He shares the ideal of building strong academic communities in his homeland, Uganda. The number of people who have PhDs from the US and other Western countries is rising in Uganda and elsewhere in Africa, and the number of students studying abroad is higher than ever. Their experience is, however, still varied, both internationally and at home. We therefore have to question the value of current models promoting the 'internationalisation' of knowledge.

Adriansen et al. (2016) comprehensively addressed the debates around the politics and geography of knowledge. As they explain, although higher education institutions in the North look to expanding their recruitment in Africa and elsewhere, it is important to note that opportunities abroad will never be a solution for more than a few. And, as the experiences of Mamdani and others indicate, there is a growing realisation that study programmes in the South need to be developed to a level and quality that enables them to meet and engage with international standards. Externally obtained PhDs should be less of a necessity for individuals to achieve academic status. For all cultures, going abroad always has value, but this should not be forced on aspiring academics for lack of local alternatives. Nor should international study opportunities be available only to the well-resourced or well-connected.

Establishing study programmes is thus not only about offering programmes for students, it is about developing the knowledge base within countries in ways that make knowledge emerge from, and remain connected with, local cultures, so that while study programmes take into account global debates, their priorities remain relevant and responsive to local needs.

To some extent, however, this creates a conflict of interest between the aid community and the education sector in the North. Supporting in-country education programmes makes perfect sense for donors that

are inspired by principles of ownership, involvement and Southern-based initiatives. However, this does not help prestigious higher education institutions that are being encouraged to recruit the world's most talented students and draw them into their universities in accordance with their own internationalisation agendas. When universities become 'talent catching machines', and act primarily to enhance their own reputations and better serve the economies they sustain, it is difficult to see how aid money provided to facilitate student mobility is serving its real purpose. It should be noted, however, that many academics and higher education institutions have strongly altruistic motives for their engagement in international academic collaboration and student exchanges.

University partnerships: Focusing on institutions

Norwegian programmes that aim to support the development of higher education and research in the South have gradually shifted their focus away from the Norwegian universities. Instead, they focus on supporting partner institutions in Africa, Asia or Latin America. A key issue is, however, not only about where education and research takes place. More importantly, the shift aims to influence who has the initiative, the power and the ideas to define curriculum content and shape joint research projects.

Much research and debate has focused on the inherent asymmetries in the partnership models that so far have prevented Southern universities from 'truly owning' the research that donor aid has supported (see Ishengoma, this volume). This 'non-ownership' is clearly undermining the sustainability of such research, and preventing the formation of independent academics who are empowered to shape curricula and research agendas.

The model of partnership that lies at the core of the NORHED programme means that each project has to build a collaborative partnership between higher education institutions in Norway and institutions in Africa, Asia and Latin America. In addition, regional collaboration

within or between countries in the South is strongly encouraged. Wanni et al. (2010: 18) defined effective educational partnerships as:

> A dynamic collaborative process between educational institutions that brings mutual though not necessarily symmetrical benefits to the parties engaged in the partnership. Partners share ownership of the projects. Their relationship is based on respect, trust, transparency and reciprocity. They understand each other's cultural and working environment. Decisions are taken jointly after real negotiations take place between the partners. Each partner is open and clear about what they are bringing to the partnership and what their expectations are from it. Successful partnerships tend to change and evolve over time. (quoted in Ndaruhutse and Thompson 2016: 8)

Indicators, such as improved curricula, increased publication rates and additional research projects are often used to establish the effectiveness of a higher education partnership. These are in line with the indicators developed for the NORHED programme. However, as highlighted in the study by Ndaruhutse and Thompson (2016: 8), we also need to be aware of the institutional contexts within which these numbers are produced:

> Evidence exists that shows the effectiveness of partnerships through quantifiable outcomes. However, such evidence does not always reflect the complex, ongoing processes that underpin effective partnerships. The design and implementation of a partnership must be analysed to understand the conditions that support mutuality, ownership and sustainability.

In NOMA and NUFU's standard programme documents, the idea of equal partnership was set out as follows: 'The cooperation shall be based in the principle of equality between the partners and should be characterized by transparency at all levels.' In practice, however, the

model proved to be asymmetrical, from the formal administrative requirements to limitations placed on programme scope and focus. As long as such projects are required to include a Norwegian partner, they will also be limited by what expertise the partner can offer or has an interest in developing. This can conflict with the principle that development projects should be based on the needs of the country being supported. An evaluation of NOMA and NUFU conducted in 2009 pointed to this when recommending stronger 'emphasis on demand-driven forms of collaboration, rather than the prevalent supply-driven nature of cooperation' (COWI AS 2009: 16).

Interestingly, this viewpoint was shared by both the Norwegian partners and the partner institutions in the South. According to the same NOMA/NUFU evaluation:

> Although most partners in the South were reluctant to express sharp standpoints or requests for change, they nevertheless often gave the impression that the asymmetries in programmes were in need of revision. Some would like to see more decentralized administrative and decision-making structures, with much greater influence given to the partners in the South … Partners in the North generally agree with the view from the South that the existing asymmetries within the NOMA and NUFU programmes are counterproductive and run against overall objectives of creating capacities in the South which are sustainable and carried forward by competent local ownership. Further, it is recognized by Northern partners that the programmes should be demand driven, and less supply driven'. (COWI AS 2009: 47, 48)

The authors of the NOMA/NUFU evaluation point out that asymmetry is present from the outset of a project, in the sense that partnerships seldom originate from the South. This, of course, presents a challenge for any Southern partner who might wish to take real ownership, responsibility and sustainability:

> Several Southern partners are concerned about the situation and feel that the established partnerships are too unsymmetrical and that this may be caused by lack of trust. There is little doubt that a further delegation of responsibility to partners in the South may help foster an important feeling of ownership. It should not be overlooked that a feeling of responsibility is among the strongest motivating factors for hard and efficient work. (COWI AS 2009: 40)

The NOMA/NUFU evaluation was quite vehement about the negative impacts that inbuilt asymmetry can have on programmes. Its authors noted that some donors, such as the Dutch and the Swedish, are already redesigning programmes to transfer greater responsibilities to the Southern partners. Their conclusion was that 'maintaining asymmetric relations North–South is counterproductive and a thing of the past' (COWI AS 2009: 65). They also pointed out that a stronger focus on demands and ownership in the South is also more in line with the intentions of the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the subsequent Accra Agenda for Action of 2008.

At the same time, and despite the pervasiveness of asymmetric models, long-term relationships built on mutual respect and interest, and based on personal and professional relationships, do exist. Visitors to any of the key partner institutions with which Norwegian universities have worked over the years, inevitably gather multiple stories of profound encounters shaped by North–South collaborations that have engendered lasting mutual respect and ongoing friendships. The value and impact of these long-standing relations, and what they lead to in terms of knowledge, understanding and knowledge diplomacy, is worth exploring further.

Several Norwegian universities have been in partnerships with Ethiopian higher education institutions for decades. Based on their mutual interests in agriculture, drought mitigation, forestry, etc. strong relationships have been built. In January 2016, this collaboration celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary. The Norwegian ambassador to Ethiopia summarised the partnership as follows:

> Many are the Ethiopian scholars that have been trained in different universities in Norway – for them to return to Ethiopia and set their competence to the best use for the development of their country. This was the aim – and it has been a major success. And many are the professors and teachers and doctors from Norway that have contributed their expertise to the higher education sector in Ethiopia.

Clarifying why the Norwegian approach has been particularly appreciated, a former university vice-chancellor from Ethiopia said, 'The Norwegians came to collaborate. The others came to dominate.'

Gradual shifts

Norway's approach to capacity development in higher education and research changed gradually throughout the years in which NOMA and NUFU operated. More drastic shifts coincided with the establishment of NORHED. One major change was a shift in the partnership model away from one in which the Norwegian university was the main agreement holder, received all the funding, and was responsible for programme delivery, budgeting, reporting and the publishing of results. The opposite now applies. The Southern university signs the agreement with NORAD and takes responsibility for the whole project, including any aspects that may happen in Norway.

Such shifts are in line with the key principles of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, the Accra Agenda for Action and the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation. These changes add new dimensions that will be of interest to researchers in this field – new power structures, different negotiating positions and different dynamics. This is true not only of Southern and Norwegian partners, but also between partners within the same region. NORHED has a strong regional focus, with numerous programmes that involve partners in neighbouring countries, such as Ethiopa, South Sudan and Tanzania, or Nepal, Bangladesh and Pakistan. Discussions around the table when it comes to budget allocations, research agendas, curriculum development and supervision arrangements are numerous, and

the potential for conflict is clear. Debates about whose initiatives and priorities are given weight, and who carries the responsibility for budgets, are key. In the arrangement between Uganda and South Sudan, for example, Uganda has so far taken the lead in projects that aim to strengthen capacity at universities in South Sudan.

In general, this shift has received positive responses, both within and beyond NORHED's partner institutions. As highlighted by Damtew Teferra (2016), a professor of higher education and a leader in training and development at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa:

> It is refreshing that Norway has made a decision that explicitly and directly encourages Southern institutions to lead and manage joint international projects. It also encourages multi-institutional and multi-country partnerships, South–South–North. This indeed is a progressive policy in the North–South partnerships in which the South is encouraged to lead the partnerships as well as utilize the majority of the joint resources.

Another professor I interviewed, who has been involved in North–South projects for years, commented: 'I was very sceptical to changing the main partner to a Southern-based university, but I have completely changed my mind. This is about time, and it goes in the right direction.'

Denmark took a new direction in their Building Stronger Universities programme, which ran from January 2014 to November 2016, and was worth DKK 100 million (approximately US$12 million). In the programme, needs and priorities identified by Southern partners in terms of developing their institutional and research capacity were addressed by matching them with Danish universities, which had the skills and capacities to meet their needs in the areas identified. The latter were selected through a match-making process where consortia of Danish universities were invited to express interest in particular programmes.

Finland's Higher Education Institution adopted a similar approach in its Institutional Co-operation Instrument. To obtain support, all projects are designed to reflect each individual country's specific

development aims, and must be based on the needs identified by the local higher education institutions.

With the focus on building stronger universities that are more adapted to local contexts and needs, there is another important dimension that must not be neglected. Universities in Africa are not only African; they are also international. Africa's universities are debating Africanisation versus universalism, which might be linked to demands for internationalisation versus demands for local relevance. In response to a question about this, Mamdani made the following comment, 'We cannot become chauvinist, and contribute to 'us and them'. Then we will have failed' (interview, February 2016).

Conflicting ideologies

How will the ideas, motives and results of inter-university collaborations change when they are managed from the South? And how will small versus large countries, well-established universities versus smaller or less prestigious institutions, influence this process?

Meanwhile, Norwegian academics also face pressure from the global system and are often offered incentives that do not favour collaborations with universities in Africa, no matter how strong their partnerships with these institutions may be. Collaborations with institutions in low-income countries do not always have a place in the reward system, and tend to fit poorly within university strategies that focus on becoming bigger and better in terms of what the Western world sees as worthwhile knowledge. As one professor at the University of Bergen observed in an interview, 'The whole system is built on the idea that we should aim at partnering with the so-called strongest.' And the internationally accepted indicators for 'the strongest' seldom point towards any of the African countries. This means that researchers will struggle to achieve high visibility in prestigious journals or academic networks. In this context, it can be helpful to remember that these indicators seldom point towards Norway either. The kinds of knowledge that are emerging from NORHED's programmes and networks, therefore, need to find a place despite, and sometimes in contradiction

to, the existing system's 'politics of knowledge'. Different attitudes and interests motivate these collaborations and, as emphasised in the SDGs communication across academic and spatial divides is crucial if humanity is to address the challenges we all face.

No low-hanging fruit

Development co-operation initiatives have always needed to balance competing priorities: dealing with humanitarian crises versus the pressure to deliver longer-term economic development, for example. Too often, development workers are encouraged to grab the 'low-hanging fruit' and push ahead with what are seen as the 'sexy' projects. It is difficult to see university collaborations as either of those things. As noted by one of the participants at a NORAD seminar in 2013, 'Supporting higher education is not for sprinters, it is for stayers.' And, as Göran Hydén notes in his chapter in this book, 'Higher education is not for those who are fans of measuring results'. Of course, university collaboration is difficult to defend in the face of children dying, streams of refugees or sudden humanitarian crises. Against these competing priorities, higher education can only lose. The challenge, therefore, is to identify, document and communicate the real value of higher education and research. In so doing, to echo the words of Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma quoted at the start of this chapter, it is about time Africa developed its own knowledge, 'only then can Africa be completely free'.

Notes

1 Opinions expressed in this chapter are those of the author, and do not necessarily represent the views or policies of NORAD.

2 Higher education is directly linked to SDG 4, which is about education, but the expansion of this sector is also acknowledged as crucial to the realisation of several of the other SDGs.

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