Partnership Experiences by the University of Swaziland: Implications for Globalization Efforts

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Abstract

The partnership experiences by the University of Swaziland with other institutions and/or agencies at the international, regional and national levels during the past twenty years have provided some very useful lessons and guidelines to the university to face the challenges in this new millennium. Public and private sectors and civic society are crucial to the university not only to attain its mission to develop common visions, goals and objectives, shared responsibility and accountability but more important, to sustain its dynamism to improve the quality of academic excellence and professional development. The findings of this study recognize the need to establish linkages between the university and relevant institutions at various levels to pursue its globalization efforts to gain recognition and credibility. The implications of these partnerships ensure the sustained ability of development of the university’s human resources, physical facilities and an environment that is conducive for the continued improvements of the quality of teaching/training and research agenda.

Introduction

The study examines more than two decades of partnership experiences of the University of Swaziland (UNISWA). The main reason to analyze the partnership experiences was to ensure that training of graduates was diversified and made more relevant to the needs of the wider society, public and private sectors and civil society. It was also to ensure that there was the development of common visions, goals and objectives, shared responsibility and accountability. The experiences studied included internship programs, partnerships between developed and developing countries, professional development of staff and students, student scholarships, infrastructure development, improvement of teaching facilities, research activities, and management. The study argues that partnerships are the key elements for the success of the university in its globalization efforts to gain recognition and establish reputation and credibility in the region as well as internationally.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

1. Describe the partnerships undertaken by the University of Swaziland in the last two decades and draw lessons from the experiences to improve the quality of training and professional development in the university; and

2. Discuss the implications of the various partnership activities to promote the university’s globalization efforts to gain better recognition and establish its reputation as a credible institution in the region as well as internationally.

Methods and Data Sources

Data and information for this study were obtained from records and reports of the University of Swaziland partnership files, project reports, and survey reports on internship programs. These data and information utilized content analysis procedures and inductive categorization of issues. This type of analysis was used to facilitate interpretation, derive trends, formulate guidelines and draw implications of these partnerships.
Findings on Partnerships/Links and Their Achievements

The partnerships undertaken by the University of Swaziland included universities from the developed nations, funding agencies, the private sectors, foreign missions, the Swaziland government and non-governmental organizations. The partnerships addressed the provision of infrastructure and services such as vocational and practical training (including field attachment or internship programs), award of fellowships and grants, supply of equipment and physical facilities, research activities and management improvement. The exchange of staff and students, library holdings, research collaborations, etc. was also part of the partnership activities.

Partnership at the International Level

Table 1 indicates the institutions that had linked programs with UNISWA and donors that supported the links. As can be observed, partners were from Canada, the USA and European countries. Links were mostly College (Faculty)-based and few University-wide partnerships.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Name of Link</th>
<th>Faculties/Units</th>
<th>Date Started</th>
<th>Date Completed</th>
<th>Donor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>UNISWA-Brandon</td>
<td>Education (In service)</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>CIDA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>UNISWA-Ohio/Penn</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>Feb. 1989</td>
<td>On-Going</td>
<td>USAID</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>UNISWA-Hull</td>
<td>Social Science</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>BC/ODA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>UNISWA/Birmingham</td>
<td>Humanities (ACS)</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>BC/ODA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>UNISWA-Brandon</td>
<td>Education (In-service)</td>
<td>Dec. 1987</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>CIDA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>UNISWA-Bangor</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>Jul. 1993</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>BC/ODA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Abbreviations Used in Table 1:
CIDA = Canadian International Development Agency; USAID = United States Agency for International Development; NUFFIC = Netherlands University Funds for International Cooperation; BC = British Council; ODA = Overseas Development Agency; EU = European Union; VUA = Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam; VVOB = Flemish Organization for Education Abroad; DTH = Dutch Technical Cooperation.

The UNISWA-Brandon link was to assist UNISWA to become a self-sufficient, viable institution and to build its human resources through institution building. Through this link arrangement, nineteen masters and six doctoral scholars have been trained by 1997 (Halamandaris, 1997), a French Department established and the UNISWA Library was the recipient of 218 boxes of books and instructional materials. In addition, six Brandon University academics visited UNISWA and seven UNISWA short-term visitors to Canada included the Dean of Humanities, the Vice Chancellor and short term training for the Physical Planning Department. The link also assisted in localizing the posts of UNISWA Bursar and Physical Planner. The partnership was considered successful by the linking universities and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). It has contributed a great deal towards
UNISWA’s research activities and materials on ‘Human Resource Development’, and at the same time created an international awareness and involvement of Brandon University in global issues. Research capacity and output at UNISWA have increased significantly in recent years. Staff received more grants; the number of journal articles increased by 40%; seminars, workshops and conference attendees increased by 25%.

The Ohio State University (OSU) and the UNISWA link helped to improve outreach programs which are of value to students, employers and the institution training prospective employees (Miller & Dlamini, 1998). Academic staffs were able to produce high quality lesson plans and notes for their students as well as practical manuals for their laboratory classes. This link facilitated profound personal and professional relationships that continue through frequent communication and that have evolved into other creative and productive relationships. Ohio State University academic staff members, for an example, have served as external examiners. Academics at OSU are sharing joint publications and exchange information in various ways. One of the indirect outcomes of this link program was the initiation of a 6-week ‘Study Abroad Program’ for OSU students who come to UNISWA to enroll for summer courses, seminars and field trips that introduced OSU students to issues of development and the culture in Southern Africa. The Faculty of Agriculture coordinates this program which started in June 1998 with seven graduate and two undergraduate students enrolled. The second program was also successfully implemented in June-July 1999 with two graduates and five undergraduate students enrolled while the third program was conducted during summer of 2001 with an enrollment of seventeen (17) graduate and undergraduate students. The program helps students to become aware of the unique challenges facing Southern Africa, through direct exposure to African development issues.

The UNISWA-Calpoly link (1992) assisted UNISWA in training four staff members to the MS degree level, conducting short-term courses (in country), engaging in curriculum improvement (including outreach programs), focusing on collaborative research and development, and commodity acquisition (mainly computers).

The UNISWA-VUA (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam) link (1992) included the Science and Mathematics Advice and Regional Training (SMART) which followed the Science Teaching Improvement Project (STIP), and the In-school Science and Mathematics Teaching Improvement Project (IMSTIP). The projects aimed at responding to the shortage of science teaching equipment and support materials remoteness of teachers from services and professional advice and stimulation and inexperience in planning and conducting practical-oriented courses and pupil-centered lessons. This link was considered successful as the program continues to run effectively even though the link arrangement came to an end in the late 1990s.

The Training and Development of Information Systems (TRADIS) project was an inter-university cooperation project executed between the UNISWA and the VUA designed to improve the management information system at UNISWA. TRADIS as a computer-related project was preceded by the MICRO project, which ran from 1988-1992. TRADIS was comprised of two components. One component was executed by the Faculty of Commerce (FoC) of UNISWA and aimed to build up training capacity in the field of Information Technology (IT) and Management Information Systems (MIS) in the Faculty. The other component was executed by UNISWA’s Information Systems Development Unit (ISDU), and aimed to reinforce this unit as well as assist UNISWA in expanding its technical infrastructure. The link projects assisted UNISWA in establishing a student information system, training more than 25 UNISWA staff members in computerization, establishment of the Information Communication Technology (ICT) Center with the responsibility of teaching computer foundation course to all first year students. The ICT Center also maintains the e-mail and internet programs, run short courses, trouble shooting in the university, soft and hard ware management and management of information systems for the administration.

Under the Faculty of Commerce component of the UNISWA-TRADIS project link, two
Information Systems courses (IS-I and IS-II) were developed, tested and offered during each academic year covered by the project. A small reference library has also been built up under the project. Two counterpart staff who obtained their MBA degree in Information Systems during the project period assisted a Dutch long-term expert seconded to UNISWA and a computer technician was trained. To provide the necessary teaching infrastructure, two computer labs were equipped and linked to a teaching network. These activities directly linked to IT teaching, a number of workshops and seminars were conducted, links with the private sector were further developed and research into the required IT skills by Swazi organizations carried out.

Under the ISDU component a number of automated modules and systems were developed and/or implemented. These included Student Finances Module, Time Tabling Module, Student Results Module, and UNISWA Personnel Information System. The ISDU programmer obtained his B.Sc. (Hon.) in software engineering; ISDU staff attended a number of computer courses in the region; VUA technical staffs were seconded to ISDU for a number of different periods during the project; and the computer networks in the Administration and Library were extended.

During the project period, parallel to TRADIS activities, UNISWA installed a fiber optics backbone at the Kwaluseni campus, which is linked to the Internet. UNISWA’s activities through the MICRO project, TRADIS project, and other inter-university links, and through its own independent IT initiatives over the past nine years have resulted in an institution where IT is an every-day tool of the administration, and where IT has also found its way in teaching and research. The challenges for the future will be to consolidate the achievements in the administrative area, to include the Luyengo and Mbabane campuses into the University network, and to further expand the use of IT in teaching and research in a coordinated effort.

The SMART Project has resulted in a well-established and balanced program of in-service activities for Swazi science and mathematics teachers. The activities are at the senior secondary level and they include a network of 32 Regional Mentor Teachers, a fully established Mathematics and Science In-service Unit, basic provisions with regard to school laboratory equipment, demonstration apparatus in Swaziland high schools and the establishment of a Science Education Center at UNISWA. These helped to standardize the minimum requirements for teaching mathematics and science at the high school level, provide a resource for the teachers as well as the focal point for UNISWA’s contact with Swazi high schools in these subject areas. In addition, three Swazi national staff through this link has obtained their MS degrees.

Programs that were designed to improve the scholarship of staff members were the UNISWA-Hull link and the UNISWA-York link. The UNISWA-Hull link focused on writing a book on social transformation on Swaziland, while the UNISWA-York link engaged staff members on research and producing more than five journal articles. The British Council funded both links.

UNISWA also engaged in links for professional development in the form of short courses with overseas universities. These included the UNISWA-Brandon (In-Service Education); the UNISWA-VUA and the UNISWA-Bangor links were designed to achieve this objective. In addition, the UNISWA-Bangor and UNISWA-Birmingham links were also helpful in training three staff members up to the Ph.D. level. The SUFA (Strengthening of the University of Swaziland Faculty of Agriculture) project provided teaching materials and curricula improvement in addition to short courses for both technical and academic staff.

However, the UNISWA-Sheffield link did not go a long way beyond few visits to establish the link and the UNISWA-DTH link did not take off due to poor planning by both parties and the universities. The donor, the European Union (EU) funded a few activities but the universities involved did not agree on how to proceed with the link arrangements.
The UNISWA-VVOB link provided the university with professional staff personnel in two areas: to initiate the field attachment (internship) program at the Faculty of Agriculture, and strengthening of the French Department. These personnel provided three such personnel under this link as well as some equipment to facilitate the implementation of activities.

Partnership at the Regional Level

Partnership at the regional level focused mainly on long term and short-term training. The Southern Africa Center for Cooperation in Agricultural Research and Training (SACCAR) conducted research and training on behalf of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC). Short term training were conducted to develop and enhance training capacity. Recognizing the importance of information, a regional information network coordinated by SACCAR was established to ensure sustained sharing of information by agricultural institutions in the region.

Research was also coordinated by SACCAR to ensure that the major staple crops were well researched and improvements for food security advanced. Partnerships with the private sector at a regional level were initiated by SACCAR (Mrema and Woodend, 1995) through a workshop held in Harare, Zimbabwe in 1994. This was attended by Deans of Faculties of Agriculture, Forestry and Veterinary Medicine of universities in the SADC countries and representatives of the private sector specializing in agribusiness and commercial agriculture. The principal objective of this workshop was to deliberate on and recommend ways and means through which the Faculties can offer education training and other services, which are more responsive to the needs of the private sector in the SADC countries. The Faculty of Agriculture, UNISWA, undertook to review the curricula (Dlamini, 1995) in response to the needs of the private sector in Swaziland.

Post-graduate studies including the master degree programs in various areas of specialization on a regional basis were developed in Zambia (agronomy), Malawi (animal production and health), Zimbabwe (agricultural economics) and Tanzania (water management) as a consequence of the regional partnership through SACCAR and SADC. Swaziland is earmarked for a regional masters degree program in agricultural education and extension.

A long standing cooperation of the Universities of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland still exists focusing mainly on training, sporting activities by students, meetings of Vice Chancellors and officers in senior management and professional meetings by academic staff directed toward joint research projects and improvements of teaching and learning.

Partnership at the National Level

The partnership at national level included infrastructure development by the Swaziland Government and the business community. For example, the establishment of the Faculty of Commerce and buildings for the Faculties of Agriculture and Science were undertaken with such partnership. The foreign/diplomatic missions in the country including the Japanese Government, UNESCO, EU and UNDP, etc. have donated equipment and other teaching resources to the university. National organization and companies like the Tibiyo Takangwane, Royal Swazi Sugar Corporation, etc. have also made financial contributions towards the university’s development.

Apart from the financial and materials support, numerous private sector companies also assisted the university on an annual basis to provide opportunities for work experiences in relation to field attachment or internship programs for students training, especially in the field of agriculture, home economics and commerce. An estimated 80 to 90 companies dealing with various enterprises and trade related to these fields is involved on a yearly basis. About 200 students take part in field attachments each year and those very companies often employ those who have graduated.

UNISWA’S partnerships and links with national level private sector institutions and companies have resulted in enriching the field attachment or internship program for students in agriculture, home economics and commerce. The major institutions and agencies (about 90) within the country have provided the opportunities for over
200 students annually to gain work experiences relevant to their areas of interest and specialization and sensitize them to the career options available in the private sector.

The achievements of partnerships at the University of Swaziland improved: (a) the capacity building through long and short term training programs; (b) teaching and learning facilities; and (c) research activities. These included an active advisory board that helped the Dean and Department Heads in the Faculty of Commerce to be more creative and open to opportunities. Also, mobilization of resources for special programs (such as the more than US$2.5 million building for the Faculty of Commerce); and improved field attachment or internship programs by the Faculties of Agriculture and Commerce which are important and valuable to the students, potential employers and the university. Through these partnership programs and activities research outputs have increased significantly, and staff exchange in various areas is more visible than ever before. The university have received better equipment for teaching and research purposes; staffs and students have received fellowships and grants; and linkages and net-working have been established between the university and the firms/agencies to benefit both the prospective employers and students.

Conclusions and Implications

Partnerships with regional organizations and overseas universities assisted the University of Swaziland to support global efforts, such as inter-university student and faculty mobility, curriculum sharing and cross fertilization of thought that has improved with the scale of interactions offered by such partnerships. The curricula in the Faculties of Agriculture and Commerce benefited from the American and European experiences, thus giving a global flavor. The continued improvements on the quality of professional training and development and the pursuit of academic excellence at the University of Swaziland is anchored on its ability to sustain partnerships with external institutions and agencies for mutual benefits. The outputs and achievements of these partnerships in the various areas of academic, professional and technical development expertise are therefore inevitable for the university to accomplish a higher level of performance excellence and standardization of training in the educational process. It is only through effective partnerships that the pursuit of the university’s globalization efforts will be able to achieve its goal.

The implications of the various partnership activities are to promote the university’s globalization efforts and to gain better recognition, and establish its reputation as a credible institution in the region as well as internationally. These implications include (but not limited) to the need to continually improve and sustain the quality of teaching/training and research among academic, professional and technical staff. Further, development of program/curriculum must be based on demand-driven needs and reflect national priorities. Also, keeping abreast with the latest available technological innovations, physical facilities and resources; and capitalize on the improved opportunities and options available for employment and career advancement of graduates in national, regional and multi-national agencies.

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