
➔ TANZANIA: TWINNING INSTITUTIONS WITH TRUST AND EQUITY

In a Nutshell

In Tanzania, a twinning programme between a local research institute and a counterpart Norwegian group developed sustainable organizational capacities around the principle of equitable partnership. Following the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation's (NORAD) policy precept of "recipient responsibility", it was up to Tanzania's Institute for Development Management (IDM) to strike a suitable arrangement with Norway's Agder University College.

The foundations of a collaboration built on trust and common interest slowly grew as the two institutions got to know each other. Both learned from the other's advantages and disadvantages, and the notion of equity was given concrete expression by allowing the weaker partner, in terms of research competence, the stronger hand in control over resources.

The Story

IDM was established in 1972 to meet needs for skilled human resources in public administration, local government and rural development. It has, throughout its history, provided training of a practical rather than an academic nature, receiving considerable amounts of development assistance for investment in physical infrastructure as well as for consolidation and improvement of its training programmes.

Cooperation between IDM and Agder University College grew out of a long-standing relationship between IDM and NORAD, in which various approaches to institutional development have been pursued. These have included traditional technical assistance arrangements, on-the-job training, staff development programmes involving overseas training courses for IDM staff, and a twinning arrangement.

A major premise underlying these efforts has been that IDM's position as a training institution, and its sustainability under new conditions of market competition, can only be safeguarded through high academic quality. This requires not only top-level staff, but also a programme of management research to ensure that the training offered is relevant to Tanzanian realities.

The partnership with Agder University College has focused on research cooperation, even though the college had neither a strong research programme of direct relevance to IDM, nor a well-established graduate programme. The college thus never viewed its relationship to IDM as one of mentor to fledgling. On the contrary, an equitable partnership emerged, in which the comparative strengths and weaknesses, advantages and disadvantages of the two institutions have complemented each other. Research and research training, in contrast to other possible fields of cooperation, involve quite specific activities and benchmarks for progress, and these have guided the collaboration.

The idea of partnership has been strongly supported by NORAD, the main foreign donor supporting IDM. NORAD's policy precept of "recipient responsibility", which prompted IDM to define its own needs, and negotiate the scope and content of the arrangement with Agder University College, was a significant departure from IDM's first experience with a twinning arrangement in the 1980s. In that case, the Norwegian organization quickly became a consultant to NORAD rather than a genuine partner of the institute.

The relationship between IDM and Agder University College took several years to mature, during which it was based mainly on good personal relations (Agder University College staff members had been working at IDM) and growing mutual familiarity after several rounds of exchange visits. The first agreement signed was quite broad in terms of possible areas of cooperation and reflected a cautious approach. An elaborate management structure was adopted, involving yearly meetings between the leadership of the respective institutions, in addition to biannual consultations between project leaders. A rigid format for individual projects, governing time frames as well as expenses for both Norwegian and Tanzanian participants, was also introduced at an early stage.

In the interest of promoting the partnership, Agder University College agreed to an administrative model that did not cover all costs. This gave IDM full financial and administrative control, as well as a good deal in terms of price. The approach may not have been necessary in strictly operational terms, but it contributed significantly to establishing mutual familiarity and trust. Over time, a system evolved that now encompasses joint target and priority setting, as well as the definition of common interests.

On this basis, the second phase of cooperation has concentrated on a smaller number of projects that are judged to be more directly relevant to IDM's mission, while allowing Agder University College to focus its academic resources more narrowly. The expected pay-offs for Tanzania are improved academic quality, increased relevance of research to national circumstances, and an enhanced competitive advantage in the market for training and consultancy services.

Results and Critical Factors

- Since IDM controls all funds and Agder University College has no independent access to NORAD, the partnership has been an equitable one, with IDM free to manage the agreement on its own professional terms. The practical problems encountered (e.g. cumbersome banking services) have been solved.
- Both institutions have gained. IDM staff have improved their skills with respect to designing and executing research projects, through training courses in research methodology and arrangements for supervision. Agder University College has benefited in terms of international exposure and actual research experience in a developing country.
- Partnerships must be built on the self-interest of partners. It takes a long time to instil confidence, and the cautious approach adopted in this case was essential in establishing a foundation of trust and common interest.
- Equity must be given concrete expression, such as the balance here between research capacity and control over resources. Partners need not, however, provide the same inputs or expect to receive the same outputs.
- Research cooperation, if properly carried out, provides a suitable platform for genuine partnership, since it involves well-defined activities and widely accepted benchmarks for progress. Not all fields of activity may benefit so clearly.

Further information

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Research Capacity Building Through Partnership: The Tanzanian-Norwegian Case. 2000. In capacity.org, July (www.capacity.org).

More on the cooperation between the Institute of Development Management (IDM) and Agder University College (www.cmi.no/public/1999/awp99-04.htm).

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