

# Public And Private Partnerships

*Barnabas M. Dlamini*

The purpose of the roundtable discussion on “Public and Private Partnerships” is to identify innovative ways our universities could link with private businesses to accomplish common goals, promote corporate sponsorship, and develop engagement with and service to our clientele through outreach and extension. Public and private partnerships are defined broadly as a partnership that exists when the public sector (federal, state, and/or local officials or agencies) joins with the private sector (families, employers, philanthropy, media, civic groups, and/or service providers) to attain a shared goal.

Although each partnership is unique, they share some characteristics: they bring together public and private sector partners; partners work together towards shared goals or objectives; each partner contributes time, money, expertise, or other resources; and decision-making and management responsibilities are shared among the partners.

As we are all aware, universities worldwide have contributed significantly to their respective national economies as public institutions by providing human resources to those economies. At the same time, universities—particularly those in developing countries—depend almost entirely on government subventions for their sustenance. However, the nature, form, and operations of universities have to change in response to changes in the global economy if they are to be sustained and continue to be relevant to the development of their respective national economies. Thus, the need to form partnerships with business, industry, and civil society has become more crucial now than at any other time in the history of our countries, particularly in Africa. The training of graduates should be diversified and made more relevant to the needs of the wider society including the private sector. The ultimate goal of both universities and the private sector is the betterment of society.

## Why Partnerships Between Public and Private Sectors?

Partnerships between business, industry, and universities are necessary for the development of common visions, goals, and objectives, as well as for shared responsibilities and accountability. The partners must work together to commercialize and exploit the research and innovations of the universities. The average African entrepreneur, for example, has little knowledge of the potential business opportunities that exist in the research laboratories of our universities. It is crucial that universities and industry work together to put the technical resources, business skills, and deep pockets of private industry to work to build new markets, new revenue systems, and new processes that will help us compete effectively in the global world economy. It would require the universities themselves becoming entrepreneurs. Companies educate, so do universities. Companies build markets and make profits, universities do not. But the two can come together to harness their strengths to create wealth. And in creating wealth through building and exploiting capabilities, universities and industry will be creating the stimulus for even faster transformation of our economies.

There is the issue of legalities and contractual arrangements in the process of partnerships that must be taken care of. These issues will include budgetary arrangements, intellectual property and publication rights, and so forth. All of these matters will require careful negotiation. But with common vision and trust, these difficulties can always be overcome.

Universities need to provide relevant programs that will enable business and industry to discharge their new roles as the engines of growth. Skills and competencies developed by our universities must serve not only the needs of industry today, because we know what those needs are, but also the future skills and competency needs of industry. Blaise Pascal, the brilliant seventeenth century scientist observed more than 300 years ago that, “Our achievements of today are but the sum total of our thoughts of yesterday. We are today where the thoughts of yesterday have brought us. And we will be tomorrow where the thoughts of today take us.” Pursuing this foresight will require close collaboration between the two arms of growth drivers to develop such relevant course programs.

Also, business and academia must work together to influence public policy. Academicians possess inestimable intellectual capabilities and creativity. They represent the diversity of disciplines necessary to analyze public policy implications. They have the breadth and depth of international experience to appreciate the process of policy development and implementation.

## Partnership Options

Universities need to diversify their sources of information, enter into strategic alliances, be experimental, and mix boldness with prudence; they should also remember who must be in charge. The university must serve the future job market, not be a slave to it. There is need to seek new relationships, not give up one’s ultimate responsibilities. A conference of university presidents held in June 1999 in Accra, Ghana, produced a comprehensive list of ideas for partnership options, some of which are as follows:

1. **Use advisory boards made up of leading experts in a number of sectors to work with specific schools and departments.** Advisory boards should help deans and department heads to be more creative and open to new opportunities and should mobilize resources for special programs. This option in Swaziland resulted in a College (the Faculty of Commerce) built by the private sector for the provision of human resources for the commercial sector.
2. **Establish an office to promote internships with locally based, private profit and nonprofit institutions, as well as with government.** The office would assure that internships offered real training instead of slave labor, and that the training would be significant enough to extend university credits for successful completion. Such offices would establish the relationships, work out the contractual agreements, and monitor them for academic compliance. The Faculty of Agriculture at the University of Swaziland runs an internship program. The private sector pays the students while they are in training.
3. **Encourage research on the relationship of the state, the private sector, and civil society.** There are real problems to work out where creative thinking is needed. By raising the issues in research, and by promoting seminars on the results, one can help promote an atmosphere of jointly seeking solutions in which all sectors have a stake.
4. **Establish adjunct and visiting professorships with the private sector so that leading people from civil society, the profit sector and government become engaged in teaching at the university.** This approach has the advantage of spreading teaching loads while enabling good people to take the time to reflect upon what they are doing. Naturally, this is an investment in good will as well as in education.
5. **Give points towards final examinations or similar benefits for important community service by students.** The points would encourage students to work for the public good, as well as to pick up new practical perspectives as part of their education.
6. **Encourage students to become politically active by allowing them to elect representation to the university’s board.** Universities, in the best of circumstances, teach responsible governance through the classroom and through applied experiences.

7. **Develop research collaboration with the private sector to conduct joint research, or accept grants for specialized research in which the findings will enter into the public domain.** Carry the research idea further by helping to set up, in collaboration with the private sector, research centers near the university.
8. **Foster an entrepreneurial spirit aimed at either the public good (these are called social entrepreneurs) or the private good.** Courses can ask for earning projects in terms of proposals for an actual private sector or civil society initiative. In a number of institutions around the world, these concrete proposals have turned into start-up firms and community services. Private and nonprofit experts working with the professor should review these proposals. All would learn, including the professor. And the university's role as innovator and incubator of ideas would be strengthened.

Other links may include partnerships between a university from the North and a university from the South. One example is a collaboration between The Ohio State University and the Faculty of Agriculture at the University of Swaziland. The effort included amending the curriculum of the University of Swaziland's Faculty of Agriculture, launching attachment programs, holding professional faculty development workshops in teaching methodology, initiating a master's degree program in agricultural education and extension, and internationalizing faculty members at The Ohio State University.

The teaching and curricula-related workshops have resulted in faculty producing high-quality lesson plans and notes for their students as well as practical manuals for their laboratory classes. The partnership improved outreach programs at the University of Swaziland, which are of value to students, employers, and the institution training prospective employees. Field attachment programs were introduced to enable students to relate to the pragmatic operations of their chosen field of study, make career decisions, acquire skills of immediate relevance to the work place, and improve their job prospects after graduation, which could hasten promotion. Field attachment programs benefit employers by giving them an inside track for identifying, selecting, and hiring the quality of employees they desire.

Overall, the collaborative effort supported by the U.S. Agency for International Development has enabled both institutions to better their academic programs and helped the faculty to experience significant professional growth and better serve their formal students and outreach clientele groups. The professional horizons of faculty members have been broadened, the University of Swaziland has an improved capacity for outreach programs, and teaching strategies and programming at the university farm have improved.

Partnership with the informal sector may include offering courses, conducting workshops and seminars, establishing industrial outreach/extension centers and technology transfer offices, and supporting consultancies by professors, researchers, and students. Funding could be on a cost-sharing basis to ensure sustainable quality higher education.

Provision of certain types of infrastructures and services, such as vacation employment, fellowships and grants, equipment and facilities, endowment for staff development, book stores, health services, sanitary arrangements, transport, housing of staff and students, and catering services and meals.

Participants in the roundtable discussion may wish to consider these issues and share their experiences with private and public partnerships. Is there need to debate the issue of "why" have partnerships? But many questions still lie ahead. What options are available for effective partnerships? What happens in a country where the private sector is weak? What is the best way to manage partnerships? And, what experiences do people have with partnerships in the different countries represented in this group?