

# CONCLUSION & FUTURE DIRECTIONS

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The stated purpose of the Alliance for African Partnership is to promote sustainable, effective, and equitable partnerships between African organizations, MSU, and other international organizations to address mutually defined challenges facing Africa and the world. Yet as we have learned from the essays in this volume, partnership among African and international institutions is not only a popular idea in development circles today, but it has also been in practice—including at MSU—since the mid-20th century (Jamison, Monson & Wiley, Mlama). So why should we embrace partnership now through this Alliance? Why is a new approach to partnership needed? And what are the necessary characteristics of this approach that will differentiate the AAP from other partnership initiatives past and present?

One answer, as explained in our introduction, is that the landscape for partnership has changed. Partner institutions based in Africa are now home to a critical mass of highly trained experts who not only are respected scholars in their fields but also have knowledge of local cultures and global power relations. Our approach to partnership as an ecosystem must fully engage with and be led by African professionals—something that did not always take place in the past.

Second, although partnership initiatives in the past may have been well intentioned, they have frequently floundered from the start due to unexamined power and resource differentials. Old paradigms had a tendency to reproduce uneven power dynamics and to export donor agendas; this led to forms of “scientific colonialism” and to the privileging of external cultural values rather than African cultures and identities (Jamison, Mlama).

Third, even when these inequalities have been identified, and appropriate guidelines for ethical

engagement thoughtfully articulated, in actual practice old habits have been slow to change. As Jamison and Minde point out, more powerful actors may continue to retain control as they play the role of the “helper” in many partnership relationships. Thus partnership in and of itself is not a panacea for bringing about the transformation that is needed in our institutions, rather it is the *nature and practice* of partnership that holds the key.

We must ask ourselves: if ethical principles and guidelines are not the complete solution, then what must the Alliance for African Partnership do differently in order to succeed? How will we know when we have achieved our goals and carried out our cooperative vision?

Isaac Minde provides an answer when he counsels us that partnerships need to be nurtured—and that nurturing occurs when we are self-reflective, even self-critical. We must be willing to bring an open-minded attitude that will allow for mutual understanding and true cooperation. The cultivation of these relationships will take time, patience, commitment and determination. To create genuine sustainability for our efforts, we must start from the beginning with this nurturing approach and carry it through all the way to impact.

Our notion of partnership as taking place within an ecosystem also allows us to recognize that externalities create the contexts within which our efforts take place—thus shaping what is needed in terms of resources, approaches and also our modes of engagement. For example, our history at MSU shows that when we listened and responded to the needs of our African partners at different points in time, we could be most effective. In the early years of independence, we worked alongside new nations like Nigeria to co-develop the institutions of higher

learning that could meet their needs for freedom and development. Many of the graduates of the programs from that era are MSU's leadership partners in Africa today. Then in the 1970s and 1980s when southern Africa was still experiencing the regional impact of oppressive white-settler and colonial-ruled states, MSU responded through activism and also by providing support to refugee scholars in the form of graduate fellowships. Today's externalities, as Sosten Chiotha shows, include challenging forces such as global climate change that must be addressed through new cooperative relationships.

Not only do externalities like climate change shape the partnership ecosystem, but poorly functioning partnerships can have broader impacts. These may not only thwart their own success but can also reverberate to other sectors of society or to the natural environment. Impacts on livelihoods in these cases may not be positive, and our response to such situations once again requires a determined willingness to be reflectively self-critical. When our experiences with such "lessons learned" (and not

only with the happier stories of "best practices") are shared productively with others, then they also have potential to be transformational and to generate beneficial outcomes going forward.

Our new Alliance for African Partnership seeks to build the relationships and networks that will take us into the remainder of the 21st century. These will not only be North-South ventures but will also promote mobility across African institutions into South-South circuits of innovation, personnel, students, and resources (Osiru). This will enable the formation of new ecosystems for development: they must be flexible, changing with different contexts and scales, adapting to new historical moments. At the same time, partnerships must be cultivated and nurtured with intention, through a process of self-reflection that can lead to positive correction and improvement (Minde). And real solutions—whether in climate change, agri-food policy, artistic exchanges or mushrooms—can inspire us collectively and move us to continue to work together for the next generations.



*Recycled packaging table mat, Zulu, South Africa. MSU Museum Collections. Photo: MSU*