

Beyond the MoU: What Really Makes Partnerships Work Across Borders and Sectors?

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Partnerships for Innovation and Transformation



**SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT** **GOALS**



Some Common Problems with Partnerships

- Many partnerships start with excitement, but face challenges
 - ❖ Power asymmetries
 - ❖ Over promising - under delivering
 - ❖ Many buzz words and assumptions
 - ❖ Implementers hardly part of the process of MoUs/agreements
 - ❖ Short termism

The Ghosts in Partnerships

The what went
right approach

The politics of
partnerships

The projection
template

The economics
of partnerships

The usual
suspect dilemma

The Interconnected Dimensions of Good Partnerships

ORGANISATIONAL
↑
↓
RELATIONAL

 Planning and clarity through common visions, agreeing on roles and responsibilities

 Managing time, balance between immediate actions and long-term commitments

 Funding management, ensuring adequate resources and addressing inequalities

 Flexibility, openness, and adapting to changing situations

 Knowing and understanding the partner and each other's contexts

 Valuing partners' views and expertise, valuing the input and skills of different types of actors

 Open and regular communication, both formal and informal

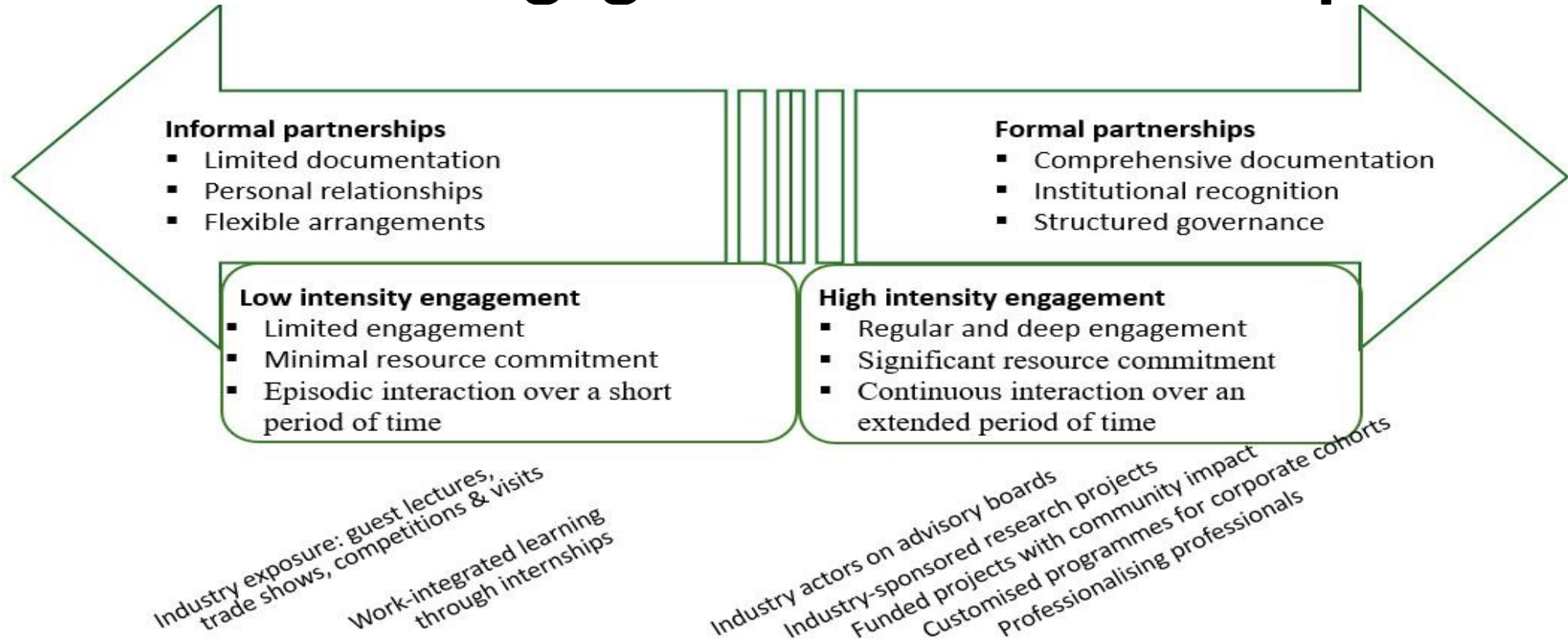
 Agreeing on how to work with external stakeholders

Eta, Tiensuu, Brito Salas, Georges, Kontio, Lehtomäki, Oikarinen, Nghikembua & Shingenge, 2025)

Relationships at the Core of Moving Partnerships Forward

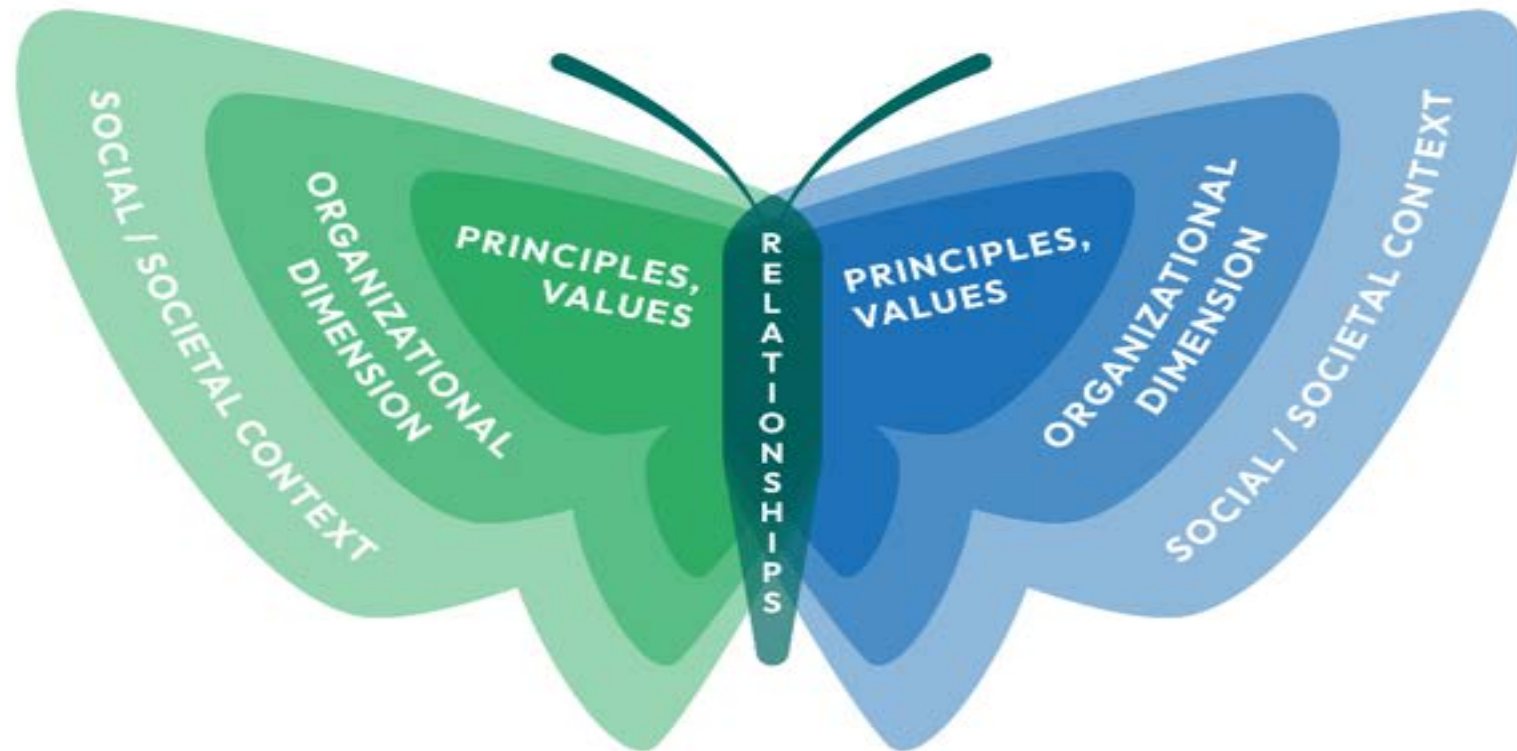


Level of Engagement in Partnerships



HE-industry partnership formalisation and intensity typology (Eta, Kurkkulainen, Esambe, Forthcoming)

Partnerships are Living Systems – the Butterfly Model



The formation of good South-North partnerships in higher education: the butterfly model (Eta, Tiensuu, Brito Salas, Georges, Kontio, Lehtomäki, Oikarinen, Nghikembua & Shingenge, 2025)

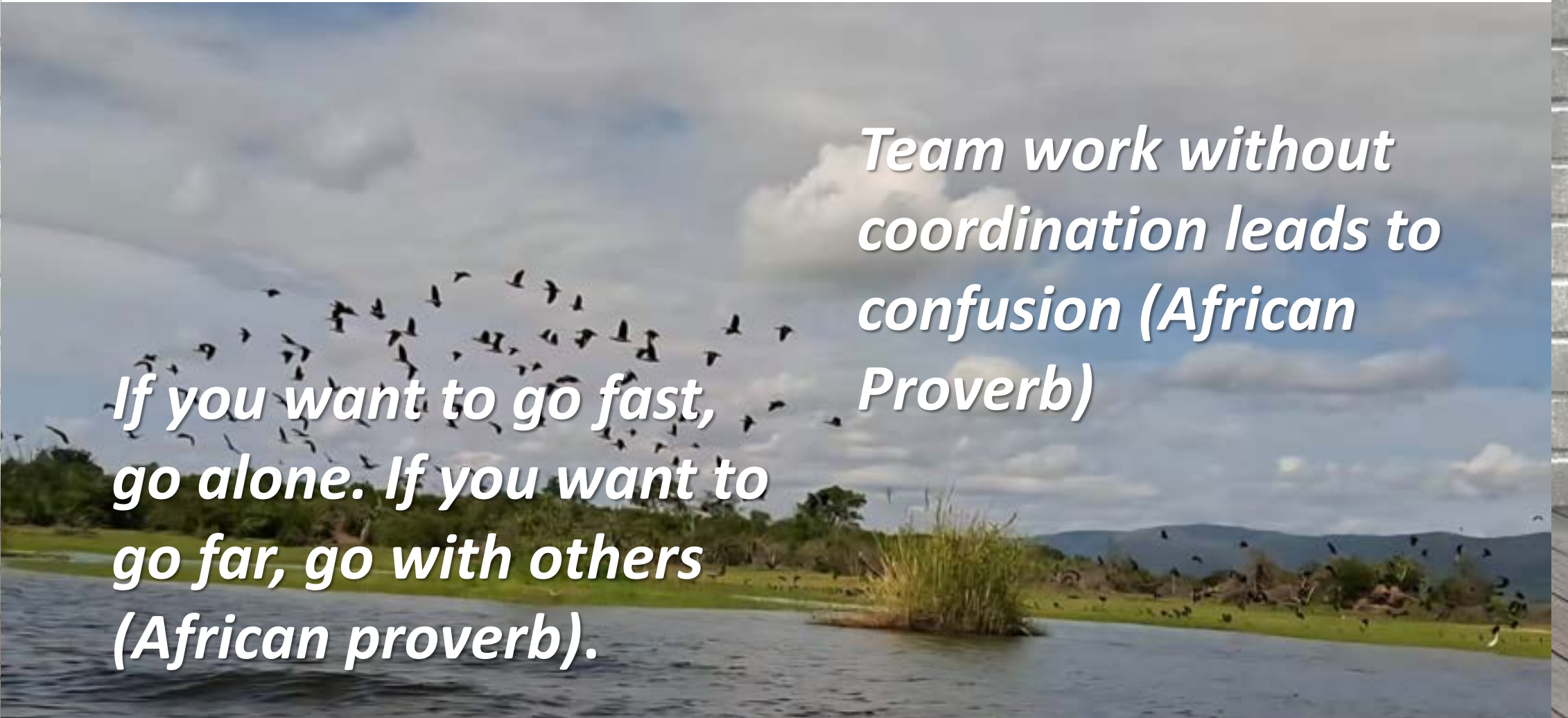
Key take-aways

- Revisit the reason you engage in partnerships
- Make room to co-think and reimagine how we work
- Think globally but act locally
- Co-create — don't just collaborate.
- Invest in relationships not just results
- Be transparent about level of engagement
- Let structures serve people, not the other way around
- Good partnerships, like butterflies, transform through stages

Let's Go Together, but Let's Go Coordinated...

*Team work without
coordination leads to
confusion (African
Proverb)*

*If you want to go fast,
go alone. If you want to
go far, go with others
(African proverb).*



Thank you

Kiitos

Merci

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