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Donor-Funded North-South Partnerships and Links in African Public Universities: A Boon or Bane for Academic Freedom?

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Abstract

African governments' budgetary cuts in research and development (R & D) funding in African public universities (with the exception of South Africa according to documentary evidences), have compelled these hitherto the most financially challenged higher education institutions in the world according to Damtew,(2005) to establish and develop extensive research partnerships and links with universities and research centers in the Global North. The establishment of extensive partnerships has coincided with the dominance of and heavy dependence on external donors (predominantly from the Global North) for funding of research and development activities in the majority of public African universities. Apart from dependence on 'research partnerships and links and external donors for funding of R & D in African public universities; the majority of African public universities, if not all, heavily depend on governments for funding of capital and development expenditures, this dependence curtails both individual and institutional academic freedoms. However, documentary evidence shows that governments' funding of the above budgetary items in public universities has been declining in most African countries and under the neo-liberal thinking which has unduly influenced reforms in African public universities since the early 1990s, public universities are encouraged to generate extra-income to fill in the budget gaps.. Referring to Tanzania public universities in particular and sub-Saharan African public universities in general, this paper, using literature and documentary reviews sheds light on the conundrum of whether or not extensive partnerships and links, external donor-funded research in African public universities are a boon (enhance) or bane (constraint) for academic freedom in African public universities. The thesis of the paper is that although North-South partnerships and links and external donor-funded research in African public universities are strategic and instrumental in institutional and individual *capacity building* and in internationalization of institutions; they constrain academic freedoms in universities because of the inherent structural imbalances and inequalities based on resource ownership by the Global North academic institutions and research centers. On the other hand, the effectiveness of donor-funded researches in the context of academic freedom in African public universities is limited, among other factors, by lack of ownership of research agenda and self-censorship by academics themselves for economic reasons which violates academic freedom¹. Dependence on government funding by African public universities limits institutional autonomy and freedom because African governments use funding as a steering mechanism to turn African public universities (which de facto operate as government departments and academics as civil servants) into pro-establishment machines.

Key words: academic/intellectual freedom, donor-funded research, partnerships and links, systemic dependence on government funding.

¹ Because of inadequate/poor salaries and remuneration of academics in African public universities consider external donor funded research as a source of extra income. They are thus unable to truthfully and critically report findings for fear of being blacklisted by external research and partnership funders and donors

Partnerships, Links, External Donor-Funded Research in African Public Universities: Contexts and Rationales

African governments' marginal investments in research and development (R & D) as a percentage of their GDPs in general and in public universities in particular (by design or accident?), in many cases “coincidentally” taking place in tandem with cuts in budgetary allocations to public universities, with the exception of Egypt, South Africa and Kenya according to documentary evidences, have compelled African public universities to establish and develop extensive partnerships and links with universities and research centers in the Global North. These partnerships and links are essentially economic survival strategies improvised by public universities to mitigate inadequate government budgetary allocations and generally funding of these *theoretically autonomous* and *academically free institutions*². The phenomenon of African governments' marginal funding of R & D leading to African governments and their higher education institutions overreliance on international donor funding of R & D (which is a constraint to academic freedom) is well-documented in research literature. For example, *The Conversation*, May 2021 note that despite the acknowledgement that scientific knowledge is a critical driver for human health and well-being, economic developments and environmental sustainability, African governments still only marginally fund R & D.

Furthermore, most African governments cannot meet the commitments they made as African Union members in 2006 of spending 1% of their GDP on R & D. *The Conversation* (Ibid) further observes that by 2019, Africa's R & D funding was only 0.42% of GDP, while the global average was 1.75%. However, by 2021 some few African countries were close the 1% target of 1% of GDP allocated to R & D. These are Kenya (0.8%), South Africa (0.75%) and Egypt (0.6%) (*The Conversation*, May 2021). Table 1 and Figure 1 below shows University A's budgetary requests, Council approval and actual receipts from the Tanzania Government to support my argument of inadequate budgetary allocations to African public universities compelling the institutions to resort to establishing several partnerships and links with universities in the Global North, overly depending on external donors for research funding and undertaking several extra income generation activities, most of them unaligned to their core functions and missions and counterproductive to academic freedom practices.

² Although African public universities claim to be autonomous academic and research institutions through their charters and the respective parliamentary acts establishing them; they are practically not. Documentary evidence show that African public universities are both directly and indirectly controlled by respective governments using various steering mechanisms (e.g. funding, appointment of top university) leaders and prescribing governance frameworks etc.

Table 1: University A's Budgetary Requests, Council Approval and Actual Receipts from the Government, 2015/16-2020/21 (TZ Billion Shillings)

Year	University Budgetary Request	Budget Approved by the University Council	Actual Receipts from the Government	% Actual Receipt vs. Budget Approved by the Council
2015/2016	201.7	197.7	154.7	78.4
2016/2017	320.8	226.5	76.8	34.0
2017/2018	269.3	226.5	158.5	70.0
2018/2019	224.3	231.8	169.7	73.2
2019/2020	259.5	230.7	173.2	75.0
2020/2021	259.9	244.7	187.6	76.6

Source: Adapted from University A (2022). *Facts and figures* p. 54

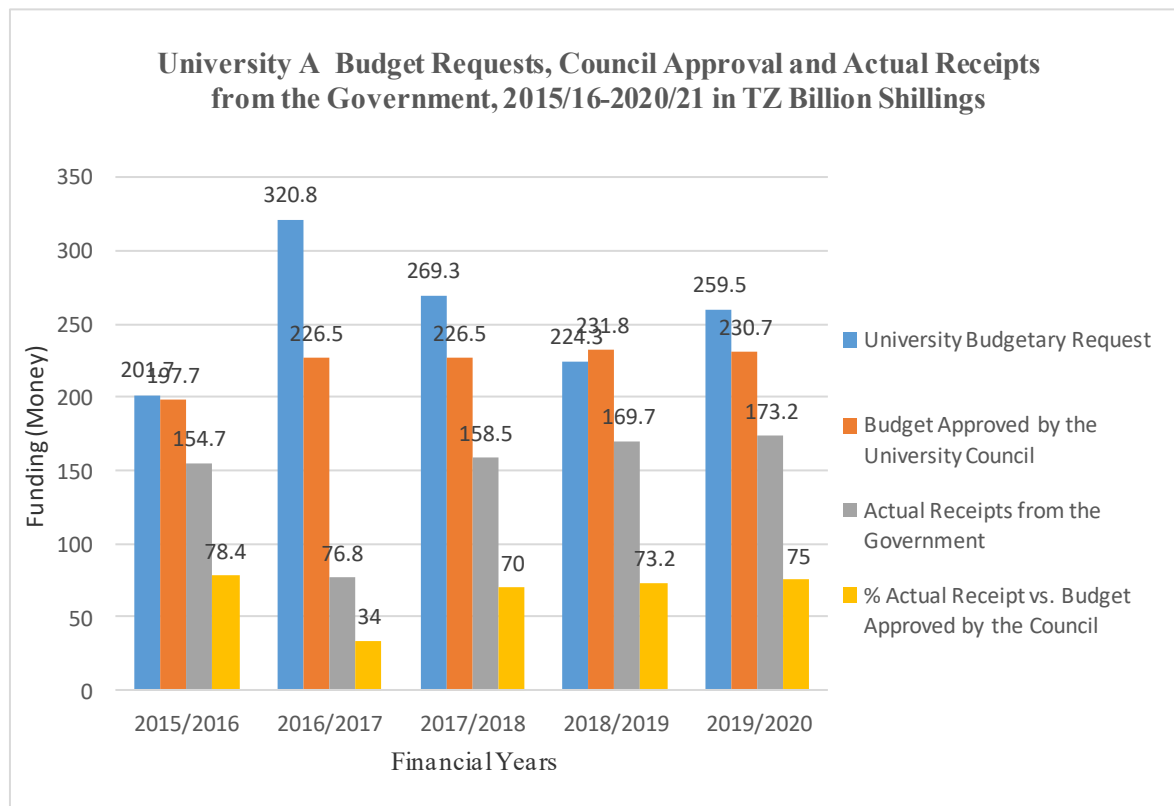


Figure 1: University A Budgetary Requests, Council Approval and Actual Receipts, 2015/2016-2020/2021

Apart from financial and economic rationales for establishing donor-funded partnerships and links in Africa public universities; there are other reasons that compel African public universities to establish extensive partnerships with universities especially in the Global North. These reasons are based on the perceived institutional and personal benefits by “beneficiaries or “recipients” in African universities according to Kot (2016). Institutional benefits include contribution to the growth and development of higher education in Africa and development of an institution and its infrastructure. This “benefit” has (at times) negative implications on the institutional autonomy and academic freedom in general as construction of infrastructure (e.g. ‘state of the art academic libraries’ is not entirely free of binding conditions, most of them impinging on institutional autonomy and academic freedom. For example, construction of the “state of the art academic libraries” by China in some African public universities has taken place in tandem with establishment of Confucius Institutes (ostensibly as a condition) (whose structures are designed by the Chinese architects and engineers). Confucius Institutes are mandated *inter-alia* to teach Chinese language to local students and others and also teach Chinese cultures. Confucius institutes and other partnerships and links between Chinese higher education institutions and African public universities superficially represent South-South partnership/cooperation which is supposed to be equitable and mutually beneficial to both partners, but in practice due to the structural imbalances inherent in these “partnerships” these kind of Chinese partnerships are tantamount to remote colonization of an African public universities.

As Samoff & Carrol (2004) cited in Ishengoma (2016) observed, from an African perspective, the high priority goal for an international partnership is the development of the institution and its infrastructure (p.31). On the other hand, literature shows that Global North universities perceive partnerships with Africa public universities as part of international cooperation and foreign/donor aid as the majority of partnerships functions and operates through aid modality and some are financed by respective governments through bilateral arrangements. Aid modality through which partnerships and links in African public universities operates limits their impact on academic freedom and institutional autonomy.

On the other hand, personal benefits from partnerships and links in African public universities are essentially economic/financial benefits (in many cases short term) personally accruing to individual academics and researchers mainly in African public universities, the majority of them poorly financially resourced as I pointed at the beginning. These benefits include: graduate training in Global North universities; generous research grants to conduct research in African countries whose agenda are set by “partners” in the Global North universities and the whole research process is characterized by self-censorship by African public universities researchers grossly contradicting the principles of academic freedom, particularly the principle of the right of the academics to *freely* research and comment on all (national) issues without fear, paid

international travel, accommodation to attend international conferences and present papers³, and per diems in foreign currencies to attend conferences and workshops in the Global North. Other personal benefits from N-S partnerships include: opportunities to purchase new computers and laptops (per diems) and at times second hand cars from research project funds for project team leaders if a project is well-funded. Generally, partnerships are “cash cows” for the minority partnerships and links coordinators in African public university to have any meaningful impact on academic freedom.

North-South Partnerships in African Public Universities: A Conceptual Framework in the Context of Academic Freedom

North-South partnerships and links in African public universities should be understood within historical and political frameworks and the economic relationship with the West since Africa’s political independence in the 1960s. Hinged on neo-colonialism, this relationship has remained imbalanced and exploitative in favor of the Global North. Ironically, partnerships and links in African public universities operate within neo-colonial structures which have perpetuated resource dependence (or to be precise dependence on foreign/donor aid) from the Global North and currently on China by African countries and their public universities despite their proclamations of being economically self-reliant. Documentary evidence shows that many African countries *heavily* [emphasis mine] depend on foreign aid although studies reveal its failure to promote sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction. Official aid in Africa obtained through *aid dependence model* surpasses private capital (*Africa Leadership Magazine*, 2024, February).

The reliance on donor aid by African public universities (as their governments) need also to be understood within the broader context of the globalization of higher education which has necessitated the marketization and corporatization of public universities and corresponding decline of government funding for R & D. As I pointed out at the beginning declining state funding of African public universities has compelled these institutions to rely on external donors for funding some of the core universities’ functions which are *raison d’être* of university institutions. External donor funding of the universities, while it might be a logical survival strategy for an institution amidst declining or inadequate state funding imperils academic freedom and institutional autonomy.

The post colonial theory also explains why partnerships between Global North universities and Global South universities have not effectively worked to enhance academic freedom particularly in African public universities which is a thesis of this paper. The theory posits that power asymmetries between Global North and South facilitate the dominance of Northern interests in

³ These papers are also very likely to be censored to please funders of a foreign trip by an African academic in public universities.

the development of partnerships. King (2009) also argues that asymmetries of power between Global North and South result in the replacement of the local agenda in favor of projects (partnerships) designed and directed by the Northern partners (higher education institution). In fact as Jowi (2012) argues, N-S partnerships in African public universities are viewed as “reproductions of traditional patterns of economic and geographic dependency” (p.15) and thus they are systemically limited in terms of enhancing academic freedom in African universities.

Table 2 below shows some selected partnerships and links at University A in Tanzania as of 2024. Although the focus of the paper is on partnerships between Global North universities and Africa, Table 2 also captures data from some few African countries and China which is emerging as a dominant aid donor to education (particularly higher education) in Africa, leading to some concerns about China’s intentions.

Table 2:.University A International Collaborations and Partnerships by Country and Number of Collaborating HEIs as of 2024 (Selected)

Country	Number of Collaborating Partner (HEIs)
Ethiopia	1
Egypt	1
Senegal	1
Ghana	1
<i>South Africa</i>	7
Uganda	1
Democratic Republic of Congo	1
Malawi	1
Namibia	1
Rwanda	1
Zimbabwe	1
India	2
South Korea	2
Japan	2
<i>China</i>	<i>16</i>
Canada	3
<i>USA</i>	<i>10</i>
Belgium	1
Denmark	2
Finland	2
German	8
Ireland	2
Italy	2
Norway	4
United Kingdom	4
Russia	1
Poland	1
Portugal	1
Switzerland	1
Sweden	7

Total partnerships	88
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Source: Adopted from University A's website (2024)

Data in Table 2 shows that China is leading in terms of the total number of partnerships with University A (18.1%), followed by the USA (11.3%) reflecting China's growing influence in higher education in Tanzania and in other African countries as research and documentary evidence shows. The growing influence or dominance of China in higher education partnerships and collaborations should be understood in a larger framework of China's education partnership with Africa through several development programs including long and short-term training Africans in China, establishment of Confucius institutes, stand-alone higher education projects and the 20+20 scheme for higher education cooperation between China and Africa⁴ (King, H. 2014). There is another research supported explanation of the emerging China's dominance in higher education in Africa. For example, King (2013), argue that most of China's higher education partnerships modalities with African universities have changed over the years from *mutual* and *win-win cooperation* based on political equality and respect operating in a larger framework of south-south cooperation to *soft power* modality where education and training and partnerships are used as key strategies for political and cultural competition/domination and public relations influence in the Global South rather than *collaboration for development*. Ye (2023), on the other hand, observe that China's rise in education aid provision in Africa has attracted global attention and is being viewed as the demonstration of soft power of a neo-colonialist kind in an international relations context. Ye (ibid) further argue that government scholarships, training, establishment of Confucius institutes and teaching of Chinese language and partnerships in African public universities are all part of China's soft power strategy. In the following section I discuss what I consider plausible factors that have limited or constrained partnerships and links to enhance academic freedom (individual and institutional) in African public universities according to my views, observations and my experiences as an academic and researcher for many years in a public university in Tanzania.

N-S Partnerships and the Enhancement of Academic Freedom⁵ in African Public Universities: A Missing Link?

The Concept of Academic Freedom

Let me introduce this section by briefly attempting to do the impossible, i.e. to define the elusive concept of "academic freedom" despite the acknowledgement in literature and documentary reviews that there is a paucity or dearth of literature on academic freedom in sub Saharan Africa and that there are many meanings of the concept. There is an acknowledgement that the concept of academic freedom means different things to many different people (Owusu-Ansah, 2005). The quotation below sums it all:

⁴ The 20+20 scheme for higher education cooperation links 20 most prestigious African universities (including UDSM) with 20 prestigious universities in China, which came into being in 2006 after the Forum on China and Africa Summit (FOCAC) (King, H. ibid.)

⁵ The reference is to both individual academic freedom and institutional academic freedom as categorized by Owusu-Ansah (2005).

Academic freedom is not a simple concept. While there is some agreement that it is meant to protect researchers and scholars from those in power and authority, the contents of academic freedom has never been clear-cut as it carries *many meanings* [emphasis mine] that have developed differently under different circumstances and power relations (Owusu-Ansah, 2005: 174.)

Despite the above caveat on the different and a multitude of meanings and conceptions of academic freedom let me cite some few definitions which align with my own conceptualization of academic freedom in the context of this paper. I will cite three authors: Heaves, G. & Vught, F. (1994), Owusu-Ansah (2005), and Mama (2006). For “benchmarking” purpose: I will also cite *The 1990 Dar es Salaam Declaration on Academic Freedom and Social Responsibility*.

Heaves, & Vught (1994) define academic freedom as the freedom to pursue truth in one’s teaching and research activities wherever they lead to without fear of punishment or termination of employment for having offended some political, religious or social orthodoxy; while Owusu-Ansah who claim that even among the academics academic freedom is rarely understood, define the concept as scholars being allowed to work without constraint from authorities and governments and the society providing conducive conditions in which ideas can be generated, nurtured and freely exchanged. Owusu-Ansah also describes the two types of academic freedom as: individual freedom and institutional academic freedom. Individual academic freedom focuses and protects the individual academic; while the institutional academic freedom protects universities from government interference. According to Mama (2006), academic freedom is the right of higher education teaching personnel to determine the curriculum, carry out teaching, research and publish without interference (from government and other ‘authorities’), to freely express opinions and undertake professional development outside their universities as long as they do not impinge on their home institutions functions. Finally, *The Dar es Salaam Declaration on Academic Freedom and Social Responsibility (1990)* provides a very “cold” and “neutral” definition of academic freedom ostensibly influenced by the political environment in Tanzania in 1990. In 1990 when the Declaration was made at the University of Dar Salaam (UDSM) Tanzania was still a single political party state with the ruling political party being “supreme” to any state organ directly controlling public universities and other higher education institutions in the country. The Declaration defined academic freedom as *freedom of members of the academic community, individually or collectively to pursue, develop, and transmit knowledge through research, study discussions, documentation, production, creation, lecturing and writing*. The definition is by design or accident “silent” on possible interferences by internal and external forces on the above aspects of academic freedom according to the definition.

In the context of this paper, I simply and briefly define academic as the freedom and right of the academic staff (s) in a public university⁶ to freely teach, research and report research findings without self-censorship, express opinions and comment on critical national issues (e.g. politics, the state of the quality of education, the state of the economy, citizens’ security and wellbeing and other national issues branded as “sensitive” by the authorities/establishment without fear of

⁶ This paper strictly defines academic freedom in the context of public universities for the obvious reasons I do not want to mention in this paper!

reprisal, punishment or witch-hunting. My definition mainly focus on individual academic freedom, although a reference is also made to institutional academic freedom in a larger context of university-wide partnerships, which among other objectives aims at enhancing institutional autonomy (institutional academic freedom).

Why Have Extensive Partnerships and Not Effectively Worked to Enhance Academic Freedom in African Public Universities?

Although so far, I have not seen any empirical study on the influence of N-S or S-S on academic freedom in African public universities, literature on academic freedom (individual and institutional) in African public universities shows that both types of freedoms face a plethora of external and internal constraints. For example, Oloka-Onyango (2024), correctly point out that state control and dominance of African public universities is still prominent and it influences academic freedom. African public universities still heavily depend on government and external donor-funding of core universities compromising their institutional academic freedom and making themselves vulnerable to state interferences. There is subtle at times overt domination and control of African public universities using various strategies and steering mechanisms. For example, appointment of top university leaders (VCs and their deputies are *de facto* presidential appointees), and in some cases, there is *gerrymandering* of the electoral processes for the academic assembly leaders to guarantee the election the election or sneaking in some state agents and operatives to ensure the will of the government prevails. As a part of state control and dominance in African public universities, new methods of monitoring and measuring of academic staff performance through new performance indicators and metrics have been introduced. These metrics (in many cases irrelevant in the university context because universities are unique institutions established with different mandates from purely government ministries and departments) treats academics in public universities and other public higher education institutions as any other civil servant. These invasive performance metrics are counterproductive to academic freedom because they are imposed from the above. Unfortunately, top university leaders who are presidential appointees are unable to resist these superficial metrics because of fear of losing their positions and “fringe” benefits.

At the individual level, academic freedom in African public universities, situation is not better. Again, as Oloka-Onyango (op.cit.) observes, because of opportunism (aspirations of the academics being appointed to the political class), selfishness, careerism, parochialism and academic intolerance; academics have weakened their collective power against the state assaults. Critical debates and intellectual engagement on local and international issues are absent in many African public universities campuses due to fear “of the authorities above” and the desire to be seen and remain “politically correct” readying themselves for a possible presidential appointment when the “right time” comes (My observation). There is also a chronic problem of self-censorship among the academics in African public universities particularly in donor-funded research reporting and consultancies. The major reason for self-censorship in donor-funded (partnership) research and consultancies is that academics in African public universities consider donor-funded research and consultancies as part of extra-income generation projects to mitigate their inadequate government salaries. N-S partnerships and are also viewed as extra income-generation projects the coordinators and other participants and not as instruments of long-term

capacity building in a larger context of enhancement of academic freedom both individual and institutional. The focus of many African academics in public universities is mainly economic benefits accruing from these partnerships.

. However, despite of the above constraints in the practice of academic freedom in African public universities through partnership and links is ineffective. Research and documentary evidences for example, Ishengoma (2011 & 2016) among others reveal that despite their apparent ineffectiveness in enhancing academic freedom, extensive partnerships and links and external funding streams have been useful institutional survival strategies and key internationalization instruments in African public universities. In the following section I generally discuss what I consider the factors which have rendered N-S partnerships in African public universities ineffective in the context of enhancement of academic freedom (individual and institutional).

Factors Rendering N-S Partnerships Ineffective in Enhancing Academic Freedom in African Public Universities

Although there are a number of factors that render N-S partnerships in African public universities ineffective in enhancing academic freedom in African public universities, the major factor appears to be the imbalance of power between Global North universities (the donors) and African public universities (the recipients). (I earlier noted that partnerships in African universities operate in donor aid framework). As Downes (2013) affirms, "N-S higher education partnerships are not founded on authentic balance in a horizontal relationship in which actors recognize each other in an exchange considered mutually useful and enriching by both parties" (p.1) Besides the above major factor, there are other factors discussed below:

Lack of Reciprocity between Partners

Partnerships in African public universities operate within the donor aid modality/framework, where the Global North university is the donor and the African public university (the recipient). This framework is unlikely to change soon until African governments lessen their dependence on foreign aid which constrains their independences just as overreliance on government funding by African public universities constrains the institutional academic freedom of these institutions as I attempted to show. The relationship between the donor (North university) and the recipient (an African public university) is neither reciprocal nor equal due to resource dependence. Practically, African public universities have very little to contribute to N-S partnerships in terms of financial, human or technological resources, a structural limitation which exacerbates inequalities in these partnerships with implications on both individual and institutional academic freedoms.

Another example of lack of reciprocity in N-S partnerships is staff-student exchanges programs which feature in many partnerships in African public universities and which potentially can enhance both academic staff and students' academic freedoms.⁷ Staff-student exchange programs

⁷ Some few authors on academic freedom include students in the definitions.

are almost always in favor of academic staff and students from the Global North universities because they possess financial and other resources required to pay for the costs of participating in the exchanges. Very rarely do academics and students from African public universities participate in exchanges in the Global North universities. From observation, apart from financial resources limitation to academic staff for participating in staff-students exchange in the Global North universities, realistically they are unlikely to do so because their mentality and thinking about N-S partnerships in universities is that they are part of other sources for extra-income (cash cows). This may be one of the reasons N-S partnerships in our public universities are any time soon likely to enhance academic freedom in our universities, they largely benefit individual academics.

Power Asymmetries and Self-Censorship

Literature and documentary evidence show that the majority of partnerships in African public universities (for obvious reasons) are one-sided giving more powers to external partnership funders/donors to determine even research agenda and terms of references (TORs) for donor-funded consultancies. Unequal power structure in partnerships results in self-censorship in reporting research and consultancies true findings among academics in African public universities. Self-censorship is self sabotage by academics and grossly undermines and contradicts academic freedom.

As noted in Ishengoma, J.M. (2009), the tendency of self-censorship in research and consultancy reporting by academics in African public universities should be construed as a critical survival strategy to appease research and consultancies donors and funders to get more research and consultancy assignments to supplement their inadequate salaries and remunerations paid by respective governments. Salaries and remunerations paid to the majority of African public universities academic staff (with perhaps the exception of South Africa) compared to what is paid to other professionals with similar or even less academic qualifications and ranks in other public sectors, e.g. politics are relatively low. Table 3 shows salary structure of academic staff in public universities and university colleges in Tanzania.

Table 3: Salary Structure of Academic Staff in Public Universities and University Colleges in Tanzania, 2019/2020 (in TZS)

Academic Rank/Title	Salary Scale	Salary Range (Per Annum)
Professor	PUTS 6	65,640,000 [USD 26,140]- 74,640,000 [USD 29,724]
Associate Professor	PUTS 5	60,540,000 [USD 24,109]- 68,640,000 [USD 27,334]
Senior Lecturer	PUTS 4	50,820,000 [USD 20,238]- 57,528,000 [USD 22,909]
Lecturer	PUTS 3	38,340,000 [USD 15,268]-

		46,668,000 [USD 18, 584]
Assistant Lecturer	PUTS 2	27,720,000 [USD 11,039]- 30,540,000 [USD 12,162]

Source: Adapted from Ngalomba, S.P. (2022). Influence of Salary and Promotion on Academic Staff Job Performance in Tanzania Universities. *Papers in Education and Development* 40 (1), p. 68.

Samoff & Carrol (2004) alluded to the problem of self-censorship by African academics, its “justification” and by implication its impact on academic freedom in African public universities. The quotation below, in a way summarizes one of the reasons donor-funded research which prominently features in N-S partnerships cannot effectively enhance academic freedom (individual and institutional).

They argued:

With low salaries individual researchers are highly motivated to become consultants to external agents. The fees for a few weeks of consulting may surpass several months’ salaries in their home country. Their commissioned researches enables them to acquire computers, cars, cellular telephones, travel overseas to participate in international meetings to escape crowded classroom (p.26).

Although there is nothing wrong with individual researchers/academics in African public universities receiving short term benefits from donor funded research partnerships consultancies to mitigate underfunding of African public universities; in the long-run these individual benefits do not significantly contribute to long-term and sustainable enhancement of academic freedom at the individual and institutional levels. In a broader context of donor-funded consultancies in African universities and their implications on academic freedom Harle (2013) argues that the consultancy character inherent in many African universities is of particularly damaging condition:

Limited funding for research, poor salaries and the dysfunctions of university system for many years, coupled with the presence of many development agencies and non-governmental organizations seeking African expertise to advise and or evaluate policies to pursue consultancy work in place of what might be considered more academic work (p.47).

Academic work includes also actions which are likely to enhance academic freedom and the individual and institutional levels.

Lack of Focus on the Critical Aspects of Enhancing Academic Freedom in African Public Universities

Another factor rendering partnerships and links ineffective in terms of enhancing academic freedom is the lack of focus on the critical issues/aspects related to the enhancement academic freedom in African public universities because of their structure

and modalities. Partnerships and links in African public universities are managed as fragmented stand-alone (personal) projects/programs) in different academic units (departments, faculties, schools, etc) without focusing on coherent activities and tasks that are deemed by the recipient an African university⁰ as critical in enhancing academic freedom at the department, faculty, school or university levels. For example, it is very rare to find an international partnership in an African public university focusing on thwarting brain drain of senior academics from universities and enhancing academic staff retention. Yet, these are critical areas related to academic freedom because brain drain generally undermines academic freedom by eroding senior and experienced academic human resources from universities.

In the following section, I attempt to provide an answer to the ‘question’ I posed in the title of this paper. Are donor-funded partnerships and links in African public universities a boon or bane in the context of enhancing academic freedom in these institutions?

Donor-Funded Partnerships and Links in African Public Universities: A Boon or Bane to Enhancement of Academic Freedom?

My answer to the above critical question which carries the major theme of the paper is that donor-funded partnerships and links in African public universities have generally been a bane in the context of enhancing academic freedom in these institutions, although there are some institutional and individual benefits accruing from donor-funded partnerships and links. Some of these have been discussed in the paper.. Observations and experience show that individual benefits from donor-funded partnerships and consultancies exceed institutional benefits on the balance sheet. In the following few paragraphs I attempt to convince the readers why I think partnerships and links in African public universities have been a bane in the context of enhancement of academic freedom; but I am not suggesting abandoning them! We only need reforms to make them work in the context of enhancing academic freedom in African public universities.

Literature and documentary evidence shows that despite the existence of a multitude of donor-funded partnerships and links in African public universities, academic freedom is still muzzled by authorities and establishments using indirect and direct strategies and mechanisms.

There are some documentary evidences to show that in some cases partnerships, especially research partnerships have constrained academic freedom through self-censorship of researchers in African universities and have contributed to internal brain drain of academics in the sense that partnerships and links coordinators in African

public universities use their official time to work on partnerships because they pay more than their official jobs. Contracted research and consultancy partnerships, the most popular form of partnerships in African public universities are inimical to academic freedom because of inherent and rampant self-censorship among African researchers to please donor universities (Ishengoma, 2016). Furthermore, because of external funding, research agendas in most research and consultancy partnerships are not determined by researchers in African public universities, but by research funders, a gross violation of academic freedom.

Like donor aid which has not effectively worked in African countries since their independences from the early 1960s, donor-funded partnerships in African public universities, despite their short term benefits they are unlikely to sustainably enhance academic freedom in African public universities because of their modality and structure.

Conclusions and Recommendations

As I have observed above (my observations are supported by research and literature) that donor-funded partnerships and links in African public universities operate and function under donor aid model which is used by the Global North countries to maintain neo-colonial power relations and asymmetries. I have also noted that partnerships operate as projects or programs which limit their sustainability, effectiveness and impact at the individual and organizational levels. Both partnership modality and *modus operandi* and organizational structures limits their capacity to contribute to the enhancement of academic freedom in respective institutions, one of their critical mandates. Generally, the modality and structure of partnerships and links in African public universities is disempowering almost in all aspects including our focus in this paper enhancement of academic freedom. Thus, I am proposing a framework for an equitable and empowering N-S partnership in all university aspects but with more focus on academic freedom in African public universities. An equitable and empowering partnership that can enhance academic freedom should be composed of the following elements (Ishengoma & Mgaiwa, forthcoming).

- Transformational-a partnership seeks to transform an institution
- Cost-sharing (both partners share partnership costs)
- Transparency and mutual accountability
- Regular communication between partners
- Mutual understanding of cultural values and contexts
- Equality of decision-making
- Sustainability
- Strong commitment from partners

Box 1: Characteristics of Empowering and Equitable Higher Education Partnerships

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Africa Leadership Magazine 2024

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