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A Working Model for Building Equitable Relationships in International Academic Partnerships

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Summary

Need for capacity building is an immediate priority for many universities in emerging economies in which resource extraction is presumed to accelerate economic growth. A novel approach is developed between University of Dar-es-Salaam (UDSM) and University Aberdeen (UA) to give immediate growth to the pre-existing local content in petroleum geoscience and, to access a large number of indigenous students and academics. Appointment of dedicated lectureships at UA are tasked with developing geological programmes at UDSM. The geological programmes are research driven and, include teaching key undergraduate and post-graduate courses relevant to the hydrocarbon industry. A critical component of our approach is that, the lecturers spend approximately half the academic year in the host country. As such, they are not visitors but fully integrated academic staff in the host university, while enjoying similar status at UA. Appointments were funded by sponsorship from BG Tanzania, now part of the Shell Group. Thus far student feedback is very positive and is accompanied by strong support from the UDSM academic staff. The UA lecturers are “part of the UDSM team” and were completely integrated into the UDSM environment from day 1 thus, barriers to progress with teaching and research collaboration were effectively eliminated.

Building local content, or capacity building, by academic collaboration is a key item on the agenda of many universities in emerging nations. Frequently, the emergence is triggered by sudden or potential economic growth followed by a perception, or by the reality, of extractive resource development, as for example hydrocarbons. Geology and geophysics degree courses are available at very few locations, and often do not focus on academic subjects associated with hydrocarbon E&P. Even in universities where geology and geophysics degrees are well-established, there is invariably a perceived local need to expand and enhance the skills portfolio.

Typically, capacity building is achieved using overseas scholarships that allow small numbers of graduates to undertake degrees abroad and, by in-country academic programmes that deploy visiting lecturers. Our model has a novel approach, which gives immediate growth and stimulus to the pre-existing local content and accesses a large number of indigenous students and academics. This is achieved by creating new lectureships at University of Aberdeen (UA) that are dedicated to developing geological programmes in the host university. The geological programmes are research driven and, importantly, include teaching key undergraduate and post-graduate courses relevant to the hydrocarbon industry. A critical component of our approach is that, the lecturers spend approximately half the academic year in the host country. As such, they are not *visitors* but *fully integrated academic staff* in the host university, while enjoying similar status at UA. At the outset we believed that this approach was ambitious but with uncertain outcomes.

Since 2014 a programme of collaboration began with the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM), Tanzania, for which two lectureships were appointed by the School of Geosciences at UA with sponsorship from BG Tanzania, now part of the Shell Group. Prior to this, UA carried out due diligence at UDSM that included ministerial-level dialogue, a series of meetings with oil companies and meetings with several other academic institutions. Positive feedback and recognition of highly-respectable academic standards at UDSM, including significant research ambition, encouraged UA to proceed with the collaboration. UDSM recognised the value of having the “UA badge” as a mark of recognised global quality. The lecturers’ first sojourn at UDSM began in October 2016. As expected, student feedback was positive and was accompanied by very strong support from the UDSM academic staff. Because the UA lecturers were “part of the UDSM team” and were welcomed and integrated into the UDSM environment from day 1, barriers to progress with teaching and research collaboration were effectively eliminated.

Immediate short-term successes include development of a close working relationship with the Tanzania Petroleum Development Corporation (TPDC), consolidation of a working group of oil and technology companies who engage in supporting UDSM activity and, initiation of professional and academic chapters in Dar es Salaam. Incremental benefit to UDSM Geology Department includes the development of new research initiatives and the raising of independent research funding, the introduction of *ad hoc* field visits and field research in collaboration with international partners new to Tanzania and, consolidation of the academic petroleum geology group. More broadly within UDSM, the collaborative model is recognised as a success that has the potential to be replicated in other disciplines. In reality, the success of the UDSM/UA model will be measured by whether sustainable growth of incremental globally-recognised research output can be maintained along with high-standard teaching. The UDSM/UA expectancy is that this will be achieved.