



University Partnerships in the Global Business Arena – What Makes Them Successful? Featuring a Current Partnership Example Between U.S. and Moroccan Universities

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ABSTRACT

University partnerships that join together institutions of higher education located in different parts of the world offer significant opportunities to educate all those involved (students, faculty, governmental agencies and participating private organizations). Students become more aware of the globalized environment in which they live and work; faculty build relations that expand their research opportunities and teaching skills, governmental agencies experience a different perspective on global business possibilities; and private organizations gain insights into world markets from the final reports and recommendations that come from such partnerships. This paper draws upon existing literature focusing on how to create and sustain productive university partnerships located in different countries and describes why such collaborations are central to the future of higher education and global business in general. The authors feature the steps taken to create an ongoing partnership between three universities (two in the United States and one in Morocco), whose students engaged with a private organization (the project's "client") seeking global business insights and opportunities. An overview of the project undertaken is also provided. The paper concludes with a call for development of more university based international partnerships and further research into what makes them successful.

BACKGROUND

The collaborative initiative and research project featured in this paper was guided by past research which proposed a conceptual framework developed to provide insights related to international partnership development, implementation and ultimate success (Wood 2021, Wood and Muzata 2022). Figure 1 (see appendix) illustrates antecedents and moderators that drive desired outcomes in successful international educational and business partnerships. In

this paper, a partnership between Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU); the University of Richmond School of Law (UR), both situated in Richmond, Virginia, USA; the L'École Nationale de Commerce et de Gestion (ENCG) Business School – Hassan II University, located in Casablanca, Morocco; and a private “client” enterprise, Indegate Consulting, based in Casablanca, Morocco is highlighted. This partnership’s formation, enhancement and ultimate outcomes were all a result of the insights provided in Figure 1. An overview of the intrinsic value of international partnerships and the factors contributing to their success ensues. This brief overview facilitates a more comprehensive understanding of the model depicted in Figure 1 and its application to the partnership and project featured here-in.

International Higher Education Partnerships – Defining Characteristics, Success Factors, and Inherent Challenges

Several empirically-supported benefits accrue from engaging in international partnerships, including:

1. Acquisition of Invaluable International Experience: Collaborating within a multinational team to execute a project with team members representing diverse nationalities.
2. Attainment of Practical Business Consulting Expertise: Addressing authentic business challenges for bona fide client organizations.
3. Expansion of Professional Networks: Establishing connections with corporate executives, academic faculty, and international peers.
4. Acquisition of Novel Knowledge and Skills: Training in cross-cultural communication, digital collaboration tools, international business practices, professional writing, and presentation techniques.
5. Enhancement of Cultural Intelligence: Enhancing cross cultural compétences from project initiation to completion.
6. Potential for Professional Recommendations: Documenting learning and growth attainments by industry professionals and academic faculty.
7. Augmentation of Curriculum Vitae to Enhance Career Prospects: Improving participants' competitiveness for internships or employment opportunities.

Global collaborations face numerous challenges, including temporal disparities, cultural conflicts, divergent business practices, and complexities associated with digital collaboration platforms. However, the ultimate outcomes (be they valuable or not) depends upon participant’s engagement with authentic, “real world” organizations with genuine needs and challenges.

Student participants acquire proficiency in collaborating with individuals from diverse backgrounds, functioning within cross-cultural teams where experiential learning is paramount. Additionally, student participants receive valuable feedback based on monitored performance from participating faculty, and thus are afforded the opportunity to compose impactful final reports and recommendations and deliver professional skill building presentations to client organizations. Indeed, student participants often come away from such experiences with enhanced public speaking skills and professional demeanor.

Participating faculty enhance their teaching skills and more often than not, developing professional cross-national research opportunities.

And as, alluded to above, participating clients gain additional insights into global business opportunities and how to exploit them.

The VCU, UR, ENCG, Indegate Partnership Project

Subsequent to the formal establishment of the partnership between VCU, UR, ENCG, and Indegate Consulting Company, a discussion between all partners involving the analysis of promising African countries/markets for US-based industries and companies was initiated. This led to the formal development of a graduate-level project/course offered at the three institutions of higher education (VCU, UR, and ENCG) in conjunction with Indegate (again, the "client" in this endeavor). This project encompassed the following elements.

Client and Scope of Project

As noted previously, the "client" for this project was Indegate, an established consulting firm based in Casablanca, Morocco which focuses on assisting businesses and industries expand their international operations into Africa.

Background:

Indegate is an international market development company which mainly facilitates trade and business between Europe, the US, and Africa. Indegate is known for its deep knowledge of key sectors in most African countries, including agriculture, consumer goods, services (tourism, finance), manufacturing (automotive, aeronautics, textiles, pharmaceuticals, and the agro-industry), transport/logistics, construction and renewable energy. Indegate has established a solid and reliable network with permanent representatives in 17 countries in Africa and the Middle East.

Indegate also focuses on matching investment opportunities with foreign organizations. Its clients come from around the world. It collaborates with chambers of commerce, business associations, multi-national and regional organizations, universities and export and investment promotion government agencies.

Over the last decade Indegate has assisted numerous European, American, and Moroccan companies find new business opportunities in Africa. Likewise, Indegate has participated in trade shows and other exhibitions held in Europe, the U.S and Africa related to the sectors noted above. Lastly, Indegate also offers Online Marketing Strategy services to its client companies. Readers can visit its online virtual space for more references and information at <https://www.indegate.com>. Clearly, Indegate Consulting Company represents an ideal partner for the VCU-UR-ENCG project featured in this paper.

OBJECTIVES OF RESEARCH

In this partnership course, there were four VCU student teams and four ENCG student teams (with three students in each team), and there were three UR law students who acted as legal counsel for the project. Specific VCU - ENCG teams were assigned to work with each other and given the over-arching task of exploring how Indegate (and Morocco) might serve as a gateway to other African countries (as well as the Moroccan market itself) for specific products and services offered by U.S. industries and businesses. Thus cross – cultural collaboration (American and Moroccan) was required and intimately important to the success of the project.

The overall goal of this project was to have each U.S.-based and Moroccan-based team (and each student within each team) better understand international business development and consulting as applied to Africa and its specific regions. As detailed later in this paper, each of the four student teams was assigned a specific region of Africa and instructed to uncover the most promising opportunities for U.S. industries in their respective regions. In this endeavor, Indegate acted as both the client to each team and an advisor guiding their research in each region. More specifically, each student team (made up of VCU, UR and ENCG students) was given the task of -

- a) exploring the African continent in general and the respective African region to which their team was assigned;
- b) exploring the most promising industries in the U.S for exporting/investing in their respective African region and explaining why such industries were selected (again, with each team researching African needs in general, and the needs of specific African region assigned to it);
- c) narrowing down and establishing the most promising countries/market within the African region assigned (based on specific region/country dimensions such as market potential, economic growth, political stability, legal structures, existing infrastructure, socio-cultural dimensions and other realities);
- d) undertaking a deep dive into the trade and foreign direct investment considerations associated with entering the African region assigned and the countries/markets within their assigned region;
- e) recommending potential strategic alliances (partners, agents, etc.) to be considered in each of the African region assigned and the countries/markets therein;
- f) developing promising marketing strategies - including the target markets and best products/services, best promotion options, and best pricing and placement options for such products/services in the African region assigned and countries/markets there-in; and
- g) submitting a final report and making a final presentation to the course “client” and other interested parties at the end of the semester.

Both primary research (e.g., personal interviews) and secondary research (e.g., VCU’s, the UR’s and ENCG’s library databases, along with other sources such as those found on the Internet), were utilized by the student teams in arriving at their final report and presentation. Input from Indegate Consulting Company was present throughout the research.

PROJECT OVERVIEW - INDUSTRIES OF FOCUS AND STUDENT TEAMS

The project was operationalized as a graduate-level course. Within this course, four student teams from Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU – Richmond, Virginia, USA) and four student teams from ENCG Business School (Casablanca, Morocco) were assigned specific regions in Africa to analyze and formulate recommendations pertaining to US-based industries and companies. An additional team comprising three law students from the University of Richmond School of Law (UR – Richmond, Virginia, USA) was tasked with acting as legal counsel to – a) the client (Indegate – based in Morocco), b) both the VCU – ENCG student teams, and c) the project in its entirety. Each student team (under the guidance of the respective faculty members from VCU, UR, and ENCG) was required to collaborate throughout the semester to

analyze countries/markets within their assigned region, as well as marketing and trade considerations specific to Africa.

Again, the overarching directive for the participating business students (both U.S. and Moroccan) was to evaluate specific industries/companies based in the United States that exhibited significant potential for establishing or enhancing their presence in African countries/markets. Concurrently, the participating law students were charged with assessing legal issues associated with engaging in e-commerce, trade, and investment in Africa. The ultimate objective of this collaboration was the fulfillment of their respective directives by identifying opportunities for the client to expand the services it provides to those seeking its consulting expertise.

Given the vast and highly heterogeneous nature of Africa, the continent was stratified into five (5) distinct regions (refer to the series regional maps below for detail). Each region possesses unique characteristics that determine its opportunities and challenges for U.S. industries. Each specific team of students was assigned to evaluate one or more of the five (5) specific regions delineated below.

At the commencement of the semester, the students (law and business collectively) convened with the client to discuss the projects objectives and to ascertain the legal issues associated with attaining those objectives. The students subsequently conducted research on applicable political, economic and other issues and formulated legal strategies with the aim of presenting their findings and recommendations to the client at the conclusion of the semester.

Throughout the semester, all participating students were expected to become an integral part of the advisory team, as a whole, as they performed their research and analysis. Moreover, they were expected to assume "ownership" of the process and responsibility for the success of the project. An overview of the finding and recommendations from this research follows.

Overall Continent of Africa and Its Five Regions

Africa is a continent known for its diverse cultures, languages, and landscapes. It is the second-largest continent, covering over 30 million square kilometers and home to more than 1.3 billion people. Africa can be divided into five main regions: Northern Africa, Western Africa, Central Africa, Eastern Africa, and Southern Africa. Each region has its unique characteristics, such as distinctive historical backgrounds, cultures, economies, and political landscapes (World Bank, 2021).

In general, Northern Africa is primarily dominated by the Sahara Desert, and its countries are characterized by Islamic and Arab cultural influences. The Western African region is known for its vast grasslands, dense forests, and varied cultures, while Central Africa is distinguished by its tropical rainforests and significant mineral resources. Eastern Africa is home to some of the world's most impressive wildlife and natural habitats, while Southern Africa has some of the world's most significant diamond and gold reserves (African Union, 2021).

Despite its rich natural resources, Africa faces significant economic and political challenges, including high levels of poverty, disease, and political instability (Busia, K. A., 2023). However,

many African countries have made progress in recent years, with some experiencing significant economic growth and political reforms (World Bank, 2021). Understanding the cultural, economic and political realities of each region is crucial for any industry or organization interested in Africa as a potential destination of its products and/or services. Given this contextual background, a brief look at what the student teams uncovered in in order.

The Economic, Political and Cultural Realities of the Five (5) Regions of Africa

Understanding the economy, politics and culture of each of the five regions in Africa is essential for a variety of reasons and a variety of interested parties including investors and businesses, policy-makers, and scholars. Investors and businesses seeking to engage with African countries need to understand the influential environments of each region to make informed decisions about where to invest and how to operate. For example, the economic dynamics of Northern Africa differs significantly from those of Southern Africa, requiring different approaches to investment and business operations (Frei C., 2006). Likewise, such understanding helps policy-makers make informed decisions about the allocation of resources, the formulation of procedures, and the implementation of programs. By understanding the unique cultural, economic and political landscapes of each of Africa's five regions, policy-makers can tailor their strategies to the specific needs of each area, thus promoting more effective and sustainable development and ultimately enhancing global business opportunities for all involved (Shenkar, O., et al., 2021).

Understanding the realities embedded in each region can also help scholars and researchers better understand the myriad of factors shaping African development. By examining the various cultural nuances, along with the economic and political structures existing in each region, researchers can identify patterns, trends, and potential solutions to some of the significant challenges facing the continent and business development there-in (Kostakis, I. 2014). A closer examination of the five (5) regions of Africa sheds further light on the above realities. The following represents a brief review of what the student teams participating in this project provided for their client.

Region # 1 - Northern Africa



Northern Africa is a region comprised of five countries that share both geographic and cultural similarities. These countries include Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt. The region is characterized by a diverse range of economic activities and political structures, making it a complex area for analysis and study (Darban K., 2024).

The economy of Northern Africa is diverse, with each country having its unique economic structure and challenges. The region's economy heavily relies on agriculture, mining, and oil production, with some countries being more dependent on oil exports than others.

The region has faced challenges in recent years, including political instability, social/cultural unrest, and economic recession. The Arab Spring protests in 2011 had a significant impact on the economies of several countries in the region, leading to a change of the political leaders in Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt, which also resulted in a decline in tourism and foreign investment for these countries, sparing Morocco, who kept its monarchical/secular system and economic vibrancy (David B. O., 2011). Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic had a severe impact on the economies of the region, with several countries experiencing a significant decline in economic growth. Despite the challenges, there are several opportunities for investment and development in Northern Africa. The region has a young and growing population, a strategic location for trade, and abundant natural resources. Several countries have implemented economic reforms to attract foreign investment and improve their business environment. Northern Africa is also home to a diverse range of industries, with each country having its own unique economic landscape. However, there are some key industries that are common across the region.

One of the most important industries in Northern Africa is the oil and gas industry. Countries like Algeria, Libya, and Egypt are major players in the global oil and gas markets, with vast reserves of natural resources that have been developed for export. These industries have played a crucial role in the economic and social/cultural development of the region, contributing significantly to their GDPs (Ertan, A. S. & Musabeh, A. M. 2021). Another key industry in Northern Africa is agriculture. The region has a favorable climate and fertile land, making it ideal for growing a wide range of crops. Countries like Morocco and Tunisia are major producers of fruits and vegetables, while Egypt is known for its cotton and wheat production. Agriculture employs a significant portion of the population in many of these countries and is an important source of income for a significant portion of people (Harrigan, J., 2011).

Tourism is also a significant industry in Northern Africa, with countries like Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia attracting millions of visitors every year. These countries have a rich cultural and historical heritage, with ancient sites and monuments that draw visitors from around the world. Tourism contributes significantly to the economies of these countries, providing a myriad of jobs and generating widespread revenue (Ertan, A. S. & Musabeh, A. M. 2021). Other industries in Northern Africa include manufacturing, mining, and construction. Many countries in the region have developed manufacturing industries, producing a range of products for both domestic and export markets. Mining is also an important industry, with countries like Algeria and Morocco having significant reserves of minerals like phosphates and iron ore. Finally, construction is a growing industry in many countries in the region, driven by urbanization and infrastructure development (Harrigan, J., 2011).

Despite the potential for economic growth, Northern Africa still faces a number of challenges that must be addressed if the region is to fully realize its potential. One of the major challenges is unemployment, which remains a pervasive problem in most of the countries in the region. In fact, youth unemployment rates in some Northern African countries are among the highest in the world (Altomonte C., & Ferrara M., 2014). Additionally, poverty and income inequality are also significant challenges in the region. While there has been some progress in recent years, poverty rates in many Northern African countries are still high, and income inequality remains a major concern (World Bank, 2021). Another challenge facing Northern Africa is the lack of economic diversification. Many of the countries in the region are heavily dependent on a small number of industries or products for their economic growth. This leaves them vulnerable to external shocks and fluctuations in global commodity prices (Ertan, A. S. & Musabeh, A. M. 2021). Northern Africa also faces significant infrastructure challenges, including inadequate transportation networks, limited access to electricity, and poor water management. These infrastructure deficiencies pose a major constraint on the region's economic growth potential and need to be addressed if Northern Africa is to fully realize its economic potential (Altomonte C., & Ferrara M., 2014).

Northern Africa is a region with a rich and diverse cultural and political landscape. It is home to a variety of political systems, including democracies, monarchies, and republics. In recent years, many countries in the region have undergone significant political transformations, with some transitioning from authoritarian to more democratic systems.

Indeed, some countries in the region have made noteworthy strides towards strengthening their democratic institutions, including Tunisia, which has been praised for its relatively successful democratic transition following the Arab Spring (Altomonte C., & Ferrara M., 2014). Another important factor shaping the political landscape of Northern Africa is the influence of foreign powers. The region has long been the subject of competition among global powers, with countries like the United States, France, and China seeking to exert their influence in the region. This has led to a complex web of alliances and rivalries, with different countries supporting different factions and governments in the region (Ertan, A. S. & Musabeh, A. M. 2021). On the other hand, the region has been active in promoting regional integration through the African Union and other organizations. The Arab League, headquartered in Cairo, plays an important role in promoting political, cultural and economic cooperation among Arab countries (World Bank, 2021).

The political landscape of Northern Africa is complex and dynamic, shaped by a variety of factors. Understanding these dynamics is essential for anyone seeking to do business or engage with the region politically. North Africa has a complex web of foreign relations with other countries, both within and outside of the region. Some countries in the region have strong ties with the European Union, due to historical and cultural links. Other countries in the region have close ties with Arab Gulf states, such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which provide financial assistance and investment in infrastructure projects (Altomonte C., & Ferrara M., 2014). However, North Africa has also faced challenges in its foreign relations. Political instability, and internal conflicts have caused tension and strained relationships with some countries. For example, the ongoing conflict in Libya has resulted in a complex web of foreign

intervention, with multiple countries supporting different factions in the conflict (Altomonte C., & Ferrara M., 2014).

Moreover, North Africa has also faced challenges in its relationships with the international community. The region has struggled with the economic and cultural issues arising from illegal immigration, and drug trafficking. Some North African countries have taken steps to address these issues and improve their relations with the international community. For instance, Morocco has implemented measures with the EU (Spain in particular) to combat illegal immigration and drugs and to improve security, which has been recognized by international communities as a standard for other countries to simulate (World Bank, 2021).

Region # 2 - Western Africa



Western Africa is also a region with diverse cultures, political realities and rapidly growing economies, offering numerous opportunities for investment and development. The region is home to abundant natural resources such as oil, gold, diamonds, and cocoa, which contribute significantly to its economic viability.

The economic region is diverse, with several countries boasting of significant growth over the past few years. For example, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, and Senegal are some of the fastest-growing economies in the world. Moreover, several countries in the region have made considerable strides in improving their business environment, such as reforms in their regulatory policies, taxation, and governance structures, thus making them attractive for foreign investors (African Union, 2021).

Western Africa is also a hub for regional trade and commerce, with the establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) promoting intra-regional trade and integration. Several countries in the region have invested heavily in infrastructure development, including transportation, energy, and telecommunication, thus enhancing connectivity and promoting economic growth (Nicolas Cook & Liana Wong, 2023).

Overall, the Western African economy is vibrant and dynamic, with significant potential for further growth and development. The region has a commitment to economic diversification and structural reforms, both of which bode well for potential investors and exporter from the U.S. However, it must be understood by any U.S. (or other) organization that Western Africa is also facing several economic challenges that hinder its development. One of the major challenges is poverty, which affects a significant portion of the population. The lack of access to education, healthcare, and basic infrastructure exacerbates poverty in the region. Additionally, unemployment is a significant issue, especially among the youth. Indeed, the lack of job opportunities leads to increased levels of poverty and social unrest (Nicolas Cook & Liana Wong, 2023).

Another challenge facing Western Africa is the dependence on commodity exports, which are often subject to price fluctuations in the global market. This creates a volatile economy that is susceptible to external shocks. Furthermore, inadequate infrastructure and lack of investment in other sectors of the economy hamper economic diversification and growth (World Bank, 2021).

Finally, corruption is also a major economic challenge in the region. It undermines public trust in government institutions and hinders economic development by distorting the allocation of resources and limiting meaningful investment (Lavallée, E., & Roubaud, F. 2019). Addressing these challenges will require significant efforts from both the public and private sectors in the region.

With an understanding of the economic realities of Western Africa a brief overview of its political landscape is in order. In general, the regions have a diverse political landscape, with a mix of democracies and authoritarian regimes. Several countries in the region have made significant progress in recent years towards democratization, including Nigeria, Senegal, and Ghana. These countries have held free and fair elections, and have seen peaceful transfers of power from one government to another. Additionally, many countries in Western Africa have been actively working to improve governance and combat corruption. Several countries in the region have implemented anti-corruption measures and have made efforts to increase transparency in government operations (Lavallée, E., & Roubaud, F. 2019).

Another dimension of note is the regional organization ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) which has played a significant role in promoting political stability and regional integration in Western Africa and in combating terrorism in the region (Akanji, Olajide O. 2019). ECOWAS has been successful in resolving conflicts in the region through its peacekeeping missions and has implemented several programs aimed at promoting economic development and regional cooperation. Overall, the political landscape in Western Africa is diverse, dynamic, and has shown positive developments towards democracy and good governance, all of which bodes well for would be exporter or investors to the region (Nicolas Cook & Liana Wong, 2023).

It should also be noted, that Western Africa has a rich and complex history of foreign relations with its neighbors and other world areas. Many countries in Western Africa have played important roles in promoting peace and stability within the region, as well as contributing to

international efforts to address global challenges. One positive aspect of Western Africa's foreign relations is its commitment to regional cooperation and integration. Again, ECOWAS is a notable example of this, as it has worked to promote economic development and regional stability through cooperation among its member states (Akanji, Olajide O. 2019). Additionally, many Western African countries have been actively involved in peacekeeping missions in the region and beyond, demonstrating their commitment to promoting peace, security and an attractive business environment. Indeed, Western Africa's foreign relations' efforts to strengthen ties with other regions in the continent, along with policies aimed at attracting foreign investment and trade, including those from Europe and Asia should not be overlooked by would be investors from the U.S. (Lavallée, E., & Roubaud, F. 2019).

Region # 3 - Central Africa



Central Africa is a region with vast natural resources and significant economic potential. The region is home to numerous countries, including Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, and Sao Tome and Principe.

Agriculture is the backbone of the Central African economy, and the region is endowed with vast fertile land suitable for agricultural production. The countries in this region are major producers of numerous crops including cassava, yams, maize, and millet. The region is also home to significant forest resources, and timber production, all of which are exported leading to notable source of foreign revenue that are critical for international trade (African Union, 2021).

The Central African region is also rich in minerals, including diamonds, gold, copper, and oil, making it a vital player in the global commodities market. Again, the exploitation of these resources has contributed significantly to foreign revenues that can be use to pay for much needed imports World Bank, 2021).

Despite the challenges faced by the region, such as political instability and tribal/cultural conflicts, the countries in Central Africa are making notable efforts to improve their overall investment climate from overseas. For instance, Cameroon has implemented economic reforms aimed at improving the business environment and attracting foreign investment. The Democratic Republic of Congo is making efforts to modernize its mining sector, and Gabon has

been investing in infrastructure development to improve its transport network and enhance regional integration (Inançlı, S. & Mahamat Addi, H., 2019).

The Central African region also benefits from its strategic location in the heart of the African continent, which provides opportunities for trade and investment with other African countries and as a location for international investors to exploit Africa as a whole.

However, like other regions, the Central African region faces significant economic challenges that hinder its growth and development. One of the major challenges is the lack of economic diversification, which leaves the region overly reliant on primary commodities such as oil, minerals, and agricultural products. This dependence on commodities leaves the region vulnerable to price fluctuations and instability (World Bank, 2021). Another challenge is the lack of infrastructure, which includes inadequate transportation networks, limited access to electricity, and poor water and sanitation systems. Like the diversification challenge, the lack of infrastructure hinders economic activity and makes it difficult to attract foreign investment (Inançlı, S. & Mahamat Addi, H., 2019).

The region also faces political instability and conflict, which disrupts economic activity and scares away investors. These challenges have resulted in a high level of poverty and unemployment in the region, exacerbating social and economic inequality. Moreover, the region is vulnerable to natural disasters, such as droughts and floods, which can devastate agricultural production and harm the livelihoods of many people (Laraque, A., et al., 2020).

Central Africa is home to a diverse range of political systems, with some countries enjoying relative stability and democracy, while others have experienced periods of conflict and instability. Despite these challenges, there have been positive developments in recent years, including peaceful transitions of power and efforts to promote regional cooperation and integration (Inançlı, S. & Mahamat Addi, H., 2019).

One notable success story in the region is Rwanda, which has made impressive strides in terms of economic development and stability since the devastating genocide of 1994. The country has implemented progressive policies aimed at promoting gender equality and has achieved significant progress in areas such as healthcare and education. It has also become a leader in the region in terms of environmental conservation, with the government implementing policies to protect the country's natural resources (Kadozi, E., 2019).

Another positive development in the region is the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC), which was established in 1994 to promote economic integration and cooperation among member states. The organization has made significant progress in areas such as harmonizing monetary policies and promoting free trade among member countries. Additionally, efforts to establish a single currency for the region are underway, which could provide a boost to regional economic development (Ngong, C. A., et al., 2020).

While there are certainly challenges facing Central Africa in terms of political stability and governance, there are also reasons to be optimistic about the future. With ongoing efforts to promote regional cooperation and economic development, there is potential for the region to

experience sustained growth and progress in the years to come (Inançlı, S. & Mahamat Addi, H., 2019). Central African countries have actively engaged in foreign relations to foster regional and global cooperation. Many countries have established diplomatic relationships with neighboring countries as well as with countries around the world, seeking to promote economic growth and development, and tackle regional issues such as terrorism and climate change. Likewise, central Africa is a member of several regional organizations, including the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC), and the African Union (AU). These organizations provide a platform for the countries in the region to work together on common issues, such as peace and security, economic development, political stability and foreign investment and trade (Ngong, C. A., et al., 2020).

Additionally, countries in the region have forged partnerships with external actors, such as China and the European Union, to promote trade, investment, and development. For instance, China has invested heavily in infrastructure development in the region, including building roads, railways, and hydroelectric dams, to support economic growth and integration (Kadozi, E., 2019).

Moreover, Central African countries have played an active role in promoting peace and stability in the region. The African Union has established a peacekeeping mission in the Central African Republic, which has been instrumental in stabilizing the country and promoting reconciliation between different ethnic/cultural groups. This has helped to reduce violence and improve security in the region (African Union, 2021). Overall, with some cautionary realities, the region is ripe for U.S. investments and trade.

Region # 4 - Eastern Africa



Eastern Africa is a region with a diverse economy and numerous success stories. The region boasts of some of the fastest growing economies in Africa, with a combined GDP of over \$500 billion. Like other regions in Africa, the key drivers of the Eastern African economy are the agriculture sector, which employs a majority of the population and contributes significantly to national GDPs. The region is blessed with fertile land, abundant water resources, and favorable

climate conditions that support the growth of a wide range of crops, including tea, coffee, maize, beans, and horticulture products. In recent years, Eastern Africa has also experienced significant growth in the services sector, particularly in the areas of finance, telecommunications, and tourism. The region's financial sector has witnessed remarkable growth, with the emergence of new banks and insurance companies, and the expansion of existing ones. The growth of the telecommunications sector has been driven by the increasing penetration of mobile phones, which have revolutionized the way people communicate and do business in the region. Furthermore, Eastern Africa's natural beauty and rich cultural heritage make it a popular destination for tourists from around the world, which also contributes significantly to the region's economy (African Union, 2021).

In addition to its growing economy, Eastern Africa has made remarkable progress in achieving some of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The region has made significant strides in improving access to education and healthcare, reducing poverty and hunger, and promoting gender equality. The governments in the region have also been actively involved in regional integration initiatives, such as the East African Community (EAC) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), aimed at promoting economic cooperation, peace, and stability in the region (Lwesya, F., 2022).

Despite its many strengths, Eastern Africa also faces several economic challenges that could hinder its growth and development. One of the major challenges is the high level of poverty, which affects a significant portion of the population in the region. This poverty is exacerbated by issues such as unemployment, underemployment, and low wages, which prevent people from fully participating in the economy and improving their living standards. Additionally, there are challenges related to infrastructure development, such as inadequate transport networks and limited access to electricity and water, which can make it difficult for businesses to operate efficiently and effectively. Other issues include corruption and political instability, which can discourage investment and trade and damage economic growth. Despite these challenges, there is reason for optimism in Eastern Africa, as governments and organizations continue to work towards addressing these issues and promoting sustainable economic development in the region (World Bank, 2021).

Eastern Africa is a region with a diverse political landscape. It is home to countries that have made significant strides in democracy, human rights, and peacebuilding, as well as those that continue to face challenges in these areas. Despite these challenges, the region has seen positive developments in recent years.

One of the most positive aspects of politics in Eastern Africa is the increasing focus on regional cooperation and integration. The East African Community (EAC), which includes Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, and South Sudan, has made notable progress in promoting economic integration and reducing trade barriers. This has led to increased economic activity and investment and trade in the region (Lwesya F., 2022). Another positive development is the increasing participation of women in politics. Countries like Rwanda and Tanzania have made important strides in increasing the number of women in parliament and government positions, with Rwanda having one of the highest percentages of women in parliament in the world (Bauer G., 2021).

Additionally, there have been efforts to promote peace and reconciliation in the region. South Sudan, which has been plagued by conflict and instability since gaining independence in 2011, signed a peace agreement in 2018 that has led to a reduction in violence and an increase in humanitarian access (Pelham S., 2020). Similarly, the peace process in Somalia has seen some progress in recent years, with the formation of a new government in 2017 and increased cooperation between the federal government and regional states (Farah I., 2021).

Region # 5 - Southern Africa



The last area overviewed in this paper is Southern Africa, a region rich in natural resources and home to several thriving economies. With its diverse range of industries and natural resources, the region has been able to weather economic challenges and continue to grow.

One of the major drivers of the Southern African economy is mining. The region has abundant mineral resources, including platinum, gold, diamonds, and coal. These minerals are exported to other countries, helping to boost the region's economy. Another important sector is agriculture. The region has vast tracts of arable land, and its agricultural exports include crops such as maize, tobacco, and cotton. Agriculture also provides significant employment opportunities for many people in the region. Tourism is also a noteworthy contributor to the Southern African economy. The region is home to some of the world's most iconic natural landmarks, such as Victoria Falls and the Kruger National Park. These attractions draw visitors from all over the world, creating jobs and generating revenue for local communities (African Union, 2021).

Despite these successes, the Southern African region still faces several economic challenges. One of the most significant is the need for more investment in infrastructure. Many parts of the region lack basic infrastructure such as roads, electricity, and water supply. Investment in these areas could help to unlock the region's economic potential and create more opportunities for its people. Another challenge is the need to diversify the economy. While mining and agriculture are vital industries, the region needs to develop other sectors to ensure sustained growth. This

could include expanding manufacturing and services industries, which would create more jobs and help to reduce poverty in the region (World Bank, 2021).

Southern Africa has made significant strides in economic development in recent years, but like the other regions noted above, there are still major challenges that need to be addressed. One of the most pressing challenges is the high levels of inequality and poverty in the region. Despite progress in reducing poverty levels, income disparities persist, with some countries experiencing extreme income inequality (Palmer R. H., & Parsons N., 1977). Another challenge facing the region is the need for infrastructure development. This includes improving transportation networks, upgrading power grids, and expanding access to basic services like water and sanitation. Lack of infrastructure can limit economic growth and deter foreign investment, making it important for governments to prioritize infrastructure development (Wanmali S., & Islam Y., 1997).

Additionally, climate change is a major economic challenge for Southern Africa. The region is particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, such as droughts, floods, and storms, which can damage crops, disrupt supply chains, and cause widespread economic harm. Addressing climate change will require both domestic and international efforts, including investments in renewable energy and climate adaptation strategies (Mason S. J., 2001).

Southern Africa is a region that has made important progress in terms of political stability in recent years. Many countries in the region have experienced democratic transitions, and there have been successful efforts to promote peace and stability. For example, South Africa, which is the most industrialized country in the region, has made great strides in building a strong democracy since the end of apartheid (Williams J. J., 2006).

In addition, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) has played a key role in promoting cooperation and integration in the region. SADC is a regional economic organization that has been successful in promoting economic growth and development through trade and investment. The organization has also been instrumental in resolving conflicts in the region and promoting political stability (Boshoff, N., 2010).

However, like other regions, Southern Africa faces challenges on the political front. One major challenge is corruption, which remains a significant problem in many countries. This has hindered efforts to promote economic growth and development, as well as good governance. There is a need for stronger institutions and greater transparency in order to address this issue (World Bank, 2021).

RECOMMENDATIONS

With a base understanding of the challenges and potential of each of the five African regions overviewed above, the project was wrapped up with each student team presenting their thoughts and recommendations to Indegate (the “client”) and expressing what they had learned both verbally (using Zoom technology in a live presentation) and in a written format (with full reports from each team in this project being presented to the client). In brief, individual teams (made up of VCU and ENCG students, and a UR student team) offered the following recommendations that Indegate should focus on moving forward.

Team 1 – North and East African Markets

Team 1 recommended that Indegate focus on developing the Hydrogen/Green Hydrogen renewable energy markets, in partnerships with U.S. companies such as Air Products and Chemicals, Inc.; Ballard Power Systems, Inc; Bloom Energy Corporation, Power Plug, Inc.; and Fuel Cell Energy, Inc.

Team 2 – Central African Markets

Team 2 recommended that Indegate focus on developing the Healthcare and Transportation markets, in partnership with U.S. companies such as the Cleveland Clinic; the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration; John Deer, Inc; and Coastal Equipment.

Team 3 – West Africa

Team 3 recommended that Indegate focus on developing the Education markets, in partnerships with U.S. companies such as Universal Corporation; the United States Agency for International Development; and to also going outside to U.S. and partnering with appropriate organizations in the European Union.

Team 4 – Southern African Markets

Team 4 recommended that Indegate focus on developing the renewable energy and sustainable tourism markets, in partnerships with U.S. companies such as GE Renewable Energy; First Solar; National Geographic Expeditions; and Intrepid Travel.

Team 5 – Legal Team Recommendations

Given that the UR Law Team focused on supporting all four VCU/ENCG teams, it approached its research on a subject-matter rather than a regional basis. In doing so, the UR Law Team presented findings and recommendations for Indegate to expand the services it provides or can provide to U.S. and other clients seeking to engage in e-commerce, trade and investment in Africa, specifically in Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa, Ghana, Egypt, Algeria, Senegal, and the Ivory Coast (the key markets identified by Indegate as the initial “Target Markets”).

In the end, it is appropriate to ask - what was learned from this undertaking and what can be improved in future undertakings such as this?

CONCLUSION

Global higher education partnerships that fully understand and implement the model shown in Figure 1 can provide an evolutionary experience for the students involved. The partnership highlighted in this paper combined the talents, resources and, more importantly, perspectives of the three distinct universities, VCU, UR and ENCG to try and achieve a transformative experience for their respective students. The students involved gained a deeper understanding of interdisciplinary problem solving, consulting demands from a “real -world” client, the value of professional networking and cultural intelligence. All in all, the partnership between VCU, the UR and ENCG, along with Indegate provided a realism that necessitated a buy-in of all students to produce insightful and potentially impactful recommendations to advance Africa’s five regions in meaning ways. In the end, students became more aware of the globalized environment in which they live and work; faculty built relations that expanded their research opportunities and teaching skills; and private organizations gained insights into world markets

from the final reports that come from such partnerships. In conclusion, it is recommended that future projects such as this involve more universities, more clients and more students focusing on more sector of business, leading to greater economic development, trade and investment opportunities for all involved.

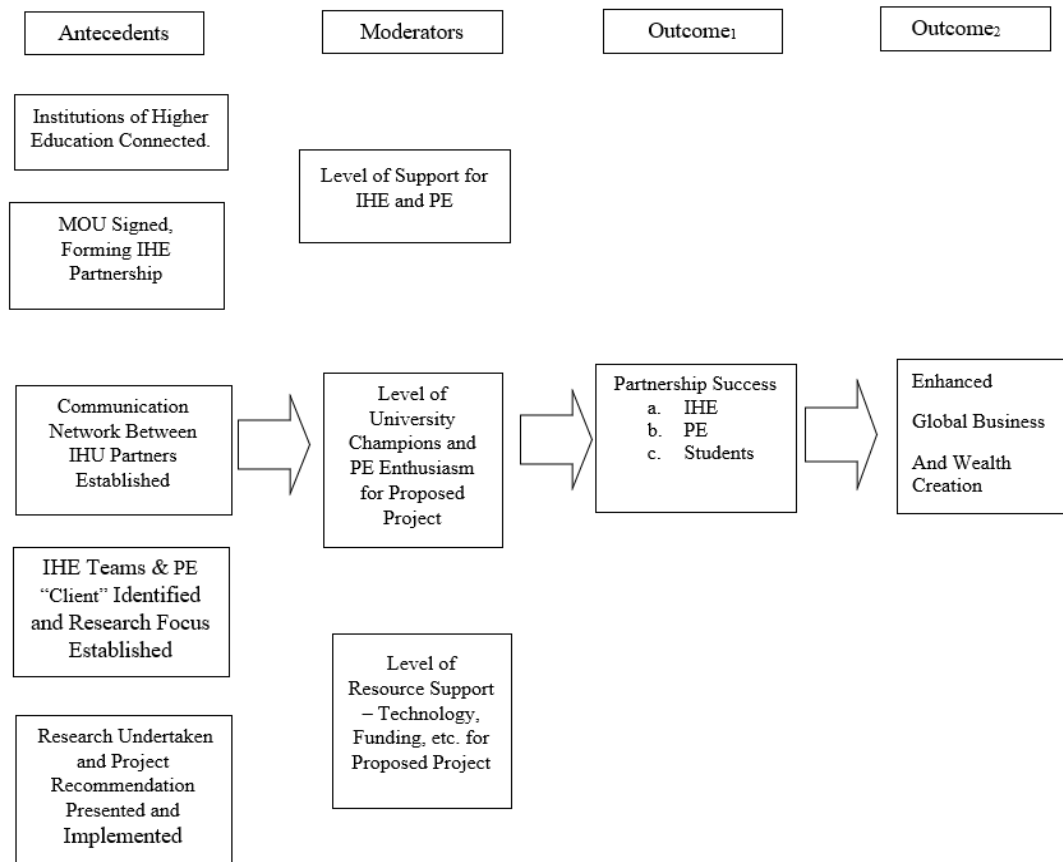


Figure # 1

A Conceptual Model for Developing Successful International Educational and Business Partnership - bringing together - expertise from 1) public and private institutions of higher education (IHE) charged with educating the next generation of globally competitive business leaders and 2) private enterprise “clients” (PE) seeking real growth in the globalized business environment.

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