

**THE POSITIVE EFFECTS OF GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP FOR MUTUAL LEARNING: THE GAMBIA – UK PARTNERSHIP**

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DOI: 10.46609/IJSSER.2021.v06i12.021 URL: <https://doi.org/10.46609/IJSSER.2021.v06i12.021>

Received: 26 Nov. 2021 / Accepted: 21 Dec. 2021 / Published: 31 Dec. 2021

**ABSTRACT**

An important inspiration for this research desired from the over-riding Colonial discourse in policy documents which promote intercultural learning and global citizenship as against discourses hidden under a rhetoric which focuses on liberal ideals of common humanity and celebrations of diversity.

The research design has been informed by a number of theoretical perspectives with a view to the principle of reciprocity mutuality and equality in north/south teacher study visits. It is argued that before global citizenship can achieve the goals of social and ecological justice, teachers need to examine critically their won assumptions/and perceptions of other cultures and the world. As suggested by the post-colonial theory, development was never designed to deal with humanitarian and environmental problems but simply a way to perpetuate the dominance of the western countries and cultures with their high standards of living.

The research approach was at two levels: the more strategic level which mainly targets officials of the National Environment Agency (NEA) of the Gambia, and the school level was to examine how the UK – Gambia Partnership had developed and it provided the study visit courses for both the UK Gambian teachers to learn from them.

Collected data revealed that the NEA/Tide Partnership had promoted and motivated reflective engagements of both the UK and Gambian participants through the study visit courses, thus enhancing mutual understanding and respect. These benefits were expressed by the participants particularly with regards to increasing knowledge in sustainable development education, in intercultural understanding and in their professional practices.

## **1. Introduction**

Before delving into the crux of the issue, it is pertinent to give a brief background information on the Gambia. The Gambia is a small West African country covering only 10,689 square kilometers. Its population is about 1.8 million, with a density of 128 people per square kilometers. The rate of annual demographic increase is 2.8 percent. Around 49 percent of the population is under 18 years of age and 19 percent between 15 and 24 years old. According to the 2003 population census, children under 3 years constitute 25 percent of the population and children under 3 years represent 8 percent. The Gambian economy is mainly based on agriculture in which women play a vital role because they represent 49 percent of the total produce. Tourism is the second source of national revenue (Gambia Bureau of Statistics 2003) According to the UNDP report 2002), The Gambia is among the poorest countries in the World, ranking 160th out of 170 in the UNDP Human Development. Index. Poverty is characterized by factors including poor health, inadequate food, ignorance, lack of employment opportunities, and lack of communication. The highest rates of poverty are in the Lower, Central and Upper Regions of the country. Around 69 percent of the population is considered poor. In rural areas, 60 percent of the households live in extremely poor conditions. The ramification of poverty includes disease, malnutrition, environmental hazards as well as infant and child mortality rates. Government and other partners are making great efforts to improve the situation by improved food production, educational expansion, water supply and public health facilities, exclusive breast-feeding campaigns, immunization against childhood disease, malaria control measures and the primary Health Care programme.

The main goal of the Global Partnership and Mutual Learning Project was to explore issues of power and representation by researching teacher development through North- South visits. The focus being that these teachers apply what they have learned back in their respective educational settings. Equal weight, to the learning experience of both northern and southern teachers is imperative in the partnership.

This ideapartly derives from the over-riding colonial discourse in policy documents which promote intercultural learning and global citizenship as against discourse hidden under a rhetoric that focuses on liberal and global ideals of common humanity and celebrations of diversity (Zemach – Bersin 2007) in Matin 2010, with very little positive impact on third world countries. Despite the emphasis of globalization theory on the growing capital mobility, the reality shows that capital is still highly concentrated in the rich countries and in rich people eve in third world countries. The majority of third world countries are marginalized. Foreign direct investment, (FDI) for example, are directed to the rich capitalist economics. In other words, rather than the

world economy being global, investments and financial flows mainly circulate within Europe, Japan and North America. Optimists believe that the development of mass communication and information technology are fostering global interconnectedness which can inspire positive progress in developing nations in various sectors. The increasing global contacts can open new possibilities and progress in the spirit of mutually, equality, and reciprocity (Rondall, V and Theobald, R 1998). This notion however, is not yet realized by many poor countries which continue to record wider poverty gabs between them and the rich nations.

## **2. Theoretical Perspectives**

The research design has been informed by a number of theoretical perspectives with a view to the nature of the global partnership being studied, which is based on the principle of reciprocity, mutuality and equality manifested in the study visit courses. This approach clearly supports the arguments based on the post-colonial theory of Fielder 2007 and Andreotti 2007 in Matin 2010, that, before global citizenship can achieve the goals of social and ecological justice, teachers need to critically examine their own assumptions and perceptions of the world and other cultures. Post-colonial theory suggests that development was never designed to deal with humanitarian and environmental problems but simply a way of allowing the Western countries to continue their dominance of the world so as to maintain high standards of living. This is further stated in Sidibeh 2005, P4 which states as follows: “The crux of the problem is that neo-classical approach and its various refinements that led to the neoliberal paradigms had and still has, political and ideological motives which directly impede efforts of third world countries to liberate themselves from cultural and socio-economic domination “. David Korten, a leading proponent of alternative development, contrast ‘growth centered’ ‘with people – Centered’ visions of development. He describes the basis of people – Centered visions as the survival of our civilization and perhaps our lives depending on our commitment to an alternative development practice guided by the following three basic principles of authentic development, which is violated by current development practices: justice, sustainability and inclusiveness (Korten 1995b) in Allen and Thomas 2002. A critical aspect of the alternative development vision is cultural diversity, which suggests that where people and communities are empowered to develop themselves, they will do so in diverse manners within cultural contexts. How to relate and present the specific cultural elements is essential, and this is a salient consideration in this NEA/Tide partnership. The contemporary globalization concept basically reflects an economic interpretation and the emergence of a global market, the principle of free trade, capital mobility and competition. The dynamics of this global market forces suggest that, rather than globalization creating a unique world,’ there is increasing global inequity, exclusion, and the marginalization

of majority of developing countries from the global economy. An important living consequence testimony is the drive of many people in the south to migrate to the north for greener pastures. The current globalization order is described as a new mode of western imperialism whereby, colonial military power is replaced by multinational capital. The transformationalist analysis further argues that beyond the new economic tactic of western imperialism through globalization, is all aspects of social life pertaining to cultural, environmental, security, criminal, legal and political aspects.

At the present, there are growing strengths of transnational corporations supported by international institutional agreements such as the World Trade Organization. Government and citizens powers are consequently subsumed by economic interests whereby only the strong ones are included. This NEA/Tide Partnership is in line with the Nobel Peace Prize Winner, Amartya Sen's vision of development as the expansion of capabilities i.e., increasing the possibilities for more people to realize their potentials as human beings through the expansion of their capabilities for functioning (Sen, 1990b) in Allen and Thomas 2202. Sen's vision reflects the key goal of this partnership.

This north south teacher study visit between The Gambia and UK is a move to the right direction to help curb the deep-rooted social, economic and psychological disadvantage of African nations and Africans. The project also gives an opportunity to the British partners to be exposed to first-hand knowledge about the Gambia, Gambian (African) people and as well as their learning and teaching approaches. It further enables them to observe similarities and differences in many human respects, especially in learning and teaching. The Gambian teachers on the other hand, have expressed how their interactions with the British colleagues have enhanced their understanding of learning and teaching practices. The need to foster further collaborations was emphasized by all the participants.

### **Historical Perspective**

The Gambia has been colonized by Britain for over 300 years. The colonial system which acquired political control by settlers, exploiting the economy and human resources. Independence from colonial rule was not the end of capitalism as the former colonies such as The Gambia still face the unequal structures of the international divisions of labour and the world markets in their efforts to achieve Sustainable development. Western development notions included the introduction of western education and medicine as well as the creation of new commodities staple foods, (like rice in The Gambia) and the formation of new life styles and

values. The Gambia has gained very little from the new western lifestyles and values. All colonial nations share the following seven political characteristics:

- 1) An international political dimension
- 2) Bureaucratic elitism and authoritarianism
- 3) The use of traditional or customary authority figures in colonial society
- 4) Use of force
- 5) Technological advantage
- 6) Statism and
- 7) Hegemonic ideology.

The hegemonic ideology was one of the most central tactics of the British. This refers to the encouragement of the dominance of an African social group or tribe over others making the Africans too weak and disunited to oppose colonialism. Furthermore, Africans were made to believe that the British were invincible and benevolent. An ideology which was authored by the colonialists to the extent that it was internalized in the hearts and minds of Africans. Even today, unfortunately, some African people still harbor some of these beliefs. The hegemonic tactic was a vital asset for the British in their endeavour to maintain their dominance in Africa and in other continent such as Asia. To quote the remark by an Indian historian: “the major objective of the hegemonic colonial ideology was to hide the face of the real enemy which is “Colonialism”. By Chandra 1989, P 501, in Allen T & Thomas, A (2007).

British Colonization was capitalistic in nature with emphasis on respect for authority figures, failure to do which will subject the sub ordinate to some form of punishment. Capitalism depends on productive labour, people who refused to work were labeled as “deviant”. Colonialism was inherently also, an arena of inequality that generated conflict and change even among the colonized. A good illustration is the explanation of the Sociological social-conflict paradigm which examined conflict between dominant and disadvantaged categories of people. Example, the wealthy in relation to the poor or white people in relation to black people. Sociologist have found that people on top typically try to protect their privileges while those below try to gain more for themselves. Another example of the conflict analysis is how western education perpetuate inequality by reproducing the class structure from generation to generation. Children from privileged families often get the best education, which serve as a springboard for higher occupations and higher incomes later in life. On the other hand, children from poor families are disadvantaged. They are generally not well-prepared for tertiary education and like their parents, end up entering low-paying jobs.

In-equality brought about the Colonialists and the Colonized, which also generated internal inequalities within the colonial nations themselves are evident. With such disadvantages in mind, The Gambia NEA and the UK Tide became interested in a profound UK/Gambia relationship in environmental and sustainable development issues through the development of learning materials and mutual teacher learning among UK and The Gambian Lower Basic School teachers.

### **How the Project Started**

The NEA facilitated joint consultive meetings and workshops for both UK and Gambia teachers on environmental and sustainable development issues. The objective of the initial relationship included the development of learning materials for Gambian schools on the environment and sustainable development to be incorporated into the Social and Environmental studies component of the Lower Basic School Curriculum, also the encouragement of dialogue in the role of teachers in sustainable development. The NEA/ Director of Tide then had contacted some organizations in The Gambia such as the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education to explore the possibility of having professional discussions with UK-teachers on issues such as sustainable development and education.

Tide became interested in inquiring about a more profound relationship. At the same time, the NEA was trying to establish within its Education an communication Division, an Education for Sustainability (ESD) Sub-committee involving local teachers. The value orientations of the two diverse organizations and their mutual interests led to further work on subsequent visits. Teachers from both UK and The Gambia visited the partner organizations in the early stages of this partnership. However, due to financial constraints on the Gambian side, Gambian teachers were comparatively unable to organize study visit courses in the UK. Nevertheless, study visit courses continued to come to the Gambia from the UK until February 2010. What is interesting and worth noting is the fact that despite relative financial hindrances on the Gambian side, the partnership continued to be valued, and the two partners continued to work together mutually. This scenario is rather unusual and impressive. Money is not everything, trust, commitment and mutual respect seem to supersede everything else.

As mentioned in Fran 2010, inherent imbalances in financial resources should not mean inequity in the relationship. While one partner may be stronger in one or two aspects the other partner may also be stronger in other aspects. The idea is to pull the diverse resources together as has been demonstrated in the partnership between 2000-2002 by a joint publication entitled "Educating for Sustainability – a resource for teachers of children aged 7-14 years 2002. Tide covered the production and printing costs. Both UK and Gambian teachers had resource inputs in

terms of expertise, local knowledge, time inputs and access to sites in UK and in the Gambia which enabled them to focus on specific sustainability issues. This publication is in use in Gambian schools. Another Tide/NEA partnership production is the publication: "Learning today, with tomorrow in mind, 2000".

The study visits developed into study visit courses in 2002. All the study visits had basically been held in The Gambia. Whereas intracultural learning happens in the duration of the visits, one can infer that the Gambian teachers may be relatively disadvantaged because they have had much less exposure to the UK environment. However, regarding knowledge and experience gained during the visit courses, majority of the Gambian have endorsed what they have learnt from the visits and how they actually apply them in their respective educational activities. Although the Gambian teachers do share some of their experience among themselves after the courses, there is room for more systematic local interactions, which allow consolidation of the ideas and experience gained and their applications in teaching and learning in the school system.

Mutual intercultural learning activities have been in existence between teachers of UK – Gambia and UK – India for over 5 years. During this process the idea of a joint study which seeks to fine out the effectiveness of study visit project and how it informs teachers' understanding of and participation in global partnership emerged. To this end, one UK researcher and one Gambia researcher were engaged. As the Gambia researcher, my task was to collect data from the Gambian participant teachers and from officials of the National Environment Agency (NEA). The adaptation of the research tools to the Gambia cultural and educational context preceded data collection. Data analysis, interpretation and dissemination of data at a joint conference at the University of Exeter in the United Kingdom were also undertaken by the Gambian consultant.

### **3. Method of Data Collection**

The main research question is: what impact do the North-South study visits courses have on teachers' understanding of development issues and how this informs their understanding of and practices in global partnership. Specifically, the project seek to find out:

- How the UK – Gambia partnership developed and what context does it provide for educational study visits courses?
- What do teachers from both UK and the Gambia learn about development and global issues from their involvement in the study?
- What are the key factors that prompt any changes in knowledge?

The research was at two levels: the more strategic level which mainly targets the NEA officials and it examined how the UK- Gambia Partnership has developed and the context it provides for the study visits courses. The pedagogic level explores what and how teachers from The Gambia learn about development and global issues as a result of their involvement in the study visit courses. In the first phase of the project, strategic level research data has been collected from documentation, interviews and discussions with Senior NEA officials also from research diaries. At the pedagogic level, structured and semi-structured questionnaires were developed, covering the main elements of the study. Some ten participants completed these questionnaires. All of them also completed a biographical questionnaire.

I(the author), participated in some activities of a study visit courses held in the Gambia in February 2009.I also gathered some information about teachers' learning through participated observation, interviews, questionnaires and research diary. A focus Group Discussion was also conducted. The judicious application of the Focus Group Discussion (FDG) with the teachers enriched the data collection process and allowed a wider consultation and participations. The discussions were recorded, transcribed and analyzed. The first level data obtained from the interviews, questionnaires, discussions and observations were shared with the UK Principal Researcher and analyzed accordingly with a collaboratives approach. It involved a mixture of the reflective and interpretative approaches with more emphasis on the latter while making sense of research participants explanations. The issues are arranged schematically. This data focused on the characteristics that participants identified as being significant in the development of the NEA/Tide Partnership, and the context it provided for educational study visit courses.

### **Findings**

The collection of data reveals that the NEA/Tide Partnerships project has indeed promoted and motivated crucial and reflective engagements of participants, particularly through the study visit courses. Despite the complex cultural processes at the point of intersection between UK and the Gambia teachers, this project has enhanced mutual understanding. Of particular interest to us in The Gambia is the added dimension of Gambian (southern) perspectives with regards to the relationship between professional knowledge and practice in the context of global partnership. One of the strongest aspects of this partnership therefore is the principle and practice of equality, reciprocity and mutuality in the learning process.

The analysis of collected data is based on the characteristic listed below, that respondents identified as particularly important in the development of the partnership, and how they have attempted to establish practices that challenge western dominating discourses.



Some of the key findings from the partnership can be enumerated as follows:

- Closer collaborated and understanding between Gambian and UK teachers has been demonstrated example, mutual respect for each other's culture, concept, perception and reliefs.
- The issue of equality, reciprocity and mutuality is high in the partnership agenda
- Teaching materials were jointly developed, distributed and being used in Gambian schools
- Evident personal and professional development and enhancement of teaching practices among the Gambian teacher sub-committee members.
- At the policy level, NEA continues its support at the national level, especially in providing the enabling environment for the teachers.
- Endorsement of the value of the partnership with regard to sustainable development education and mutual inter-cultural understanding.
- The partnership has had some positive impacts on various schools in the Gambia, notably: Bakau Newtown Lower Basic School rated as one of the cleanest schools in Region one in February 2009. Mr. Sowe was awarded the second-best teacher in the region for his efforts in promoting the goals and objectives of this partnership. Educational activities for sustainable development have been spearheaded by Mr. Trawally since he served as a teacher and focus point at the Sukuta Lower Basic School. He continues with the enthusiasm now at the Brufut Lower Basic School with visible effects, especially in relation to the environment and other related areas as indicated above.
- The goal is to encourage additional teachers to join the partnership.

### **Discussion**

Some 12 schools participated in the partnership, compared with an initial four schools, an increase over the years. One of the teachers, Mr. Ebou Sowe who has been a member of the teacher sub-committee for 9 consecutive years, and participated in the Interim Conference in UK, stated thus: "During the past nine years I participated in many meetings and workshops provided me the rare opportunity of meeting teachers from other parts of the world with whom I was able, to share knowledge and best practices as far as my profession is concerned. As a result of these meetings, workshops and visits to places in the Gambia helped me a great deal in building my capacity both professionally and academically". Mr. Sowe further stated: "This

partnership has not just helped me to become a better practitioner but it has helped me to grow as a person because of the opportunities, the relationships and experiences it has provided me.”

Mr. George Trawally, who has been involved in the Partnership since 1999 and also took part in the conference, stated as follow: “As a result of the partnership, I have learnt a lot of new ideas, skills, methods and techniques for environmental protection and conservation. Waste management and disposal methods and skills re-using and recycling are lessons that I really appreciate, because waste disposal was one of The Gambia’s main environmental problems. I have learnt about agents of green-house gas immetion, the damage that gases are causing to the ozone layer leading to global warming and climate change. This knowledge will be very useful in my teaching.

Through the exchange of ideas and experiences with teachers and educators in the partnership, I am able to learn new teaching methods, skills and ideas. I learnt how to write short stories, how to gather information and collect data, write and dramatize short plays. The partnership has contributed tremendously towards my professional development as well as my inter-cultural and environmental awareness.”

Similarly, the knowledge and experience gained by the author from the partnership is helping him greatly in all spheres of life especially in my work as a teacher. He is using some of the new methods and skills to prepare lessons and teaching aids (visual). The knowledge gained on the natural environment is also helping in nurturing sustainable development ideas and attitudes into children and students.”

In brief, the main issues depicted in both Mr. Trawally’s and Mr. Sowe’s statements relate to improvements in personal and professional knowledge and development in professional practice, in inter-cultural relationships and in sustainable development education. These messages have surfaced in the interview and questionnaire responses from the other teacher sub-committee members and from NEA key information interviews.

Impact or effectiveness can only really be measured over a period of time and through the collection of base line data. This then provides the nucleus for assessing the ways in which NEA and Tide partnership has transpired. As is the case in this project, impact studies require longitudinal research to be able to discover what has actually happened within the specified period and the results achieved. For the purpose of this interim paper, the findings enumerated above are indicative and quite revealing. Although the NEA/Tide partnership has been operational in The Gambia over a relatively short time span compared to other NGO relationships which have been in existence for over 20 years, one can discern some evident

achievements against the project objectives especially in terms of collaboration and relationship building between the UK and Gambian teachers as equal partners. A relationship is diffusing, allowing a more participatory and equal relationships in terms of share of knowledge, ideas, experiences, mutual respect, and professional practices. One of the Gambian teachers reported that he initially felt some kind of an “inferiority complex” but with interaction with the counterpart, he eventually became very self-confident. Mutual learning and trust, communication and relationships, (both intra and inter) have shown manifested improvements over the years through this partnership. The increased participation and interest of additional schools in The Gambia shows a multiplier effect. It will be an interesting development if there could also be future south-south study visits organized or a mixture of north-south teachers to visit a partner country. Of course, these ideas are largely dependent upon the availability of funds and collaborations.

### **Conclusion**

It must be stated however that in order to sustain any future intended global partnership programmes as well as improve quality and performance of the partners, adequate attention must be given to the capacity building of partners – particularly as regards education, mutual understanding, learning and teaching, research, and advocacy skills. The backbone for the effectiveness and sustainability of any desired partnership programmes is a sustainable funding mechanism which will generate funds both internally and externally. Further research in area of sustainable development and education will enhance knowledge and stimulate further mutual partnerships in global education and sustainable development efforts.

### **Acronyms**

CODERSIA – Council for the Development of Social Science Research Science

DEC – Development Education Centre

NEA – National Environment Agency

PRISM – Prime School Management

TIDE – Teachers in Development Education

NGO – Non-governmental organization

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

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