

Beyond the talk to delivering equity in research partnerships – Lessons from Makerere University

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Introduction

Founded in 1922, Makerere University is Uganda's oldest university and a leading research-intensive institution in Africa.

Through **strategic and enduring partnerships** of research with government, and private sector institutions across Africa and beyond, the University has strengthened its capacity for **innovation, research excellence, and societal impact**.

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Adaptive strategies for equitable partnerships

1. **Translate policy into operational guidance like;** partnership principles → Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), equity commitments → partnership checklists and decision trees,
Tool(s): Partnership Management Plan.
2. **Embed equity at the project design stage;** co-develop research questions with partners, jointly design methodologies and budgets, agree early on authorship, data ownership, and IP.
3. **Inclusive governance and decision making;** MOUs with government and private sector institutions, balanced representation of partners in consortium initiatives, joint steering committees for research projects with voting rights.
4. **Equity in funding and budget control;** delegating budget authority to local partners where projects are implemented, allocating budgets for capacity building of early career researchers.
5. **Equity in contracting and legal instruments;** joint ownership of research data and IP, shared authorship and acknowledgement of research papers.
6. **Monitor, evaluate, and learn from practice;** effectively track indicators and conduct regular partnership reflections and learning reviews, act on feedback and adapt practices.
Tool: Updated annual due diligence reports.
7. **Demonstrate accountability and transparency;** Publicly share partnership principles and commitments, report on equity outcomes to funders and communities, address inequities openly when they arise.

Benefits of equitable research partnerships

- a) **Strengthen Institutional Capacity;** promote mutual learning and skills transfer, enhancing institutional systems.



- b) **Improved Research Quality and Relevance**



- c) **Local Ownership and Leadership;** ie. Kira Motors Corporation which supplies electric buses in Uganda.



- d) **Long-Term Sustainability of Collaborations and society impact**



- e) **Compliance with Donor and Global Standards;** many funders in global health and development who increasingly prioritize **equity, inclusion, and fairness**, positioning institutions well for future funding.

Conclusion.

By promoting shared decision-making, fair resource allocation, and mutual accountability, equitable partnerships have positioned Makerere University as a credible and competitive global research institution and partner across Africa.