



African Virtual University  
Université Virtuelle Africaine  
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## AVU POLICY BRIEF

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Research & Practice in Open, Distance & eLearning

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### Win-Win Partnerships around ODeL: A Path to Sustainability in African Universities

#### Issue at-hand

As African higher education institutions are struggling to expand access and improve quality and relevance in resource-strapped countries, building mutually-beneficial partnerships among institutions is a must. This is all the more important as universities are embarking on the use of ODeL to mitigate the challenges presented by the cost of expanding access from a very low base and ensuring at the same time quality education. ODeL, however, comes also with a hefty price tag at the early stages of its implementation and requires a major paradigm shift in the current business model of universities. If donors and governments have financially supported the introduction of ODeL and continue to do so, this will not be always the case in the long run. As it is, the current world economic crisis and the dwindling rent money generated from export of mineral resources and other commodities are negatively affecting education budgets; and more particularly those of higher education. Therefore, universities have to find new sources of income.

With respect to their business model, introducing ODeL leaves no choice for African universities but to rethink the way they do business. This entails among other things the need for strategic repositioning (organizational model), development of new approaches to instructional delivery, student body management, assessment and certification, professional development of faculty, research and development, etc. This paradigm shift is heavy for any institution to shoulder alone without technical support from a network of institutions going through the institutionalization of ODeL with its corollary challenges. Hence, the importance for African universities to enter into partnership frameworks with other universities and institutions at the national, sub-regional, regional and international levels.

### ***Policy Recommendation: developing partnership frameworks for cooperation at national, regional and international levels***

In a handbook developed for the nonprofit sector in the USA entitled ***Partnerships: Framework for Working Together (2010)***, Publrow and the Compassion Capital Fund (CCF) explain the importance of partnerships by remarking that “*while there are many nationally recognized benefits and advantages to partnership development, the answer to why one seeks to establish partnerships is relatively simple. **There is added value in working with other organizations.** The benefits of effective partnerships do not appear overnight. Establishing effective and inclusive partnerships takes time, and it is important for [the institution] to create the right framework from the start and review the structure and process of the partnership on an ongoing basis to measure its success or failure*”.

Indeed, building a robust and win-win partnership framework requires systematic planning around key conceptual components: (i) shared leadership; (ii) common understanding of the framework, culture, values, and approach of partner organizations; (iii) a shared common vision and purpose that builds trust and openness and recognizes the value and contribution of all members; (iv) shared culture and values; (v) **learning and development as core principle**; (vi) seamless and constant communication among members; and (vii) performance management through systematic monitoring and evaluation.

Partnership frameworks structured as shown above can be built between and among African universities in order to address the following challenges: policy formulation, infrastructure building and management, organizational design and development, program/course development and use of MOOCs and OERs, income generation strategies, ICT integration and training, etc. A network and then communities of practice are thus created to ensure that every member contributes based on its comparative advantage and gains where it is weak.

For instance, expertise sharing and transfer of skills and complementarity can be enhanced to support members who are at the initial phases of ODeL development and integration. Strong partners can also organize to carry out advocacy activities to change policies or lobby for new ones that are more conducive for ODeL at the national, sub-regional and regional levels.

In areas such as research, agendas for investigating developmental issues or those presenting common challenges can be developed. The expertise for and costs of carrying out surveys, mapping or benchmarking activities can be shared among the members of the network to realize economies of scale.

### ***Recommendations***

Following the above, the following recommendations can be made to African universities that do not have institutional partnership/cooperation frameworks in place and/or are not members of a sub-regional or regional ODeL grouping such as the AVU:

- Develop a cooperation/partnership framework along the 7 components suggested by the CCF handbook to guide their own engagement with other institutions.
- Integrate the framework within a business plan which includes a sustainability strategy
- Join the AVU Cooperation Framework developed in 2012 and other frameworks in their sub-region or at the continental or international levels
- Carry out regularly a cost-benefit analysis of belonging to a partnership and adjust frameworks by articulating areas of needs.

## References

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3. European Distance E-learning Network. 2004. New Challenges and Partnerships in an Enlarged European Union. EDEN

**For more information, please visit AVU's Website:** <http://www.avu.org/avuwweb/en/>

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