



# **International Collaborations and Partnerships: Building Bridges for Higher Education**

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# Introduction



- Education does not limit itself to imaginary boundaries and walls more so higher education since it is and should be all pervasive. Knowledge generated anywhere needs to be compiled and made accessible and available to anyone, anywhere, any time. Knowledge cannot and should not be confined to a locale, or country, or time.
- History has revealed that such dissemination has been slow, sometimes knowledge is never documented as we have many illustrations from Nepal itself and secondly, they are confined unlike as education should be. Precisely, therefore, institutions of higher education are termed as universities, institutions providing higher knowledge to universal learners in universal subjects, themes, and areas. So, instead of international collaborations and partnerships, I would like to call it universalization of education.
- I am not trying to discount the focus and priorities based on times, places, and communities. But knowledge is knowledge, and even the adjustments should have a foundation of proper knowledge. For example, the solar systems, which the astrologers/mathematicians in this part of the world knew some 3000 to 4000 years ago, must be discovered by Pythagorus 2000 years ago and Copernicus and Galileo, more than 1000 years later. The scenario, however, has changed, ICT revolution has made knowledge accessible at the fingertips.

## Brief highlight the rationale for international collaborations and partnerships:

- First, knowledge is being generated, discovered, and rediscovered at every moment. To translate it into papers, then to books and then to curricula takes anywhere between 5 to 10 years and more. This is totally unacceptable. If a medical doctor is trying to cure a patient, he/she must be able to do it with the latest knowledge, equipment, methods, and medicines. But the evidences tell otherwise, meaning the global curing system may be second best and still inferior depending on places and access.
- Secondly, global problems and complexities are growing at a geometric pace making knowledge at hand inadequate to address them. It took some 150,000 years for the homo sapiens to reach the first billion but took less than two centuries to grow eightfold. The real use of mineral resources grew significantly only after the Industrial Revolution 1.0 (i.e. late 18<sup>th</sup> century) and now within the short era, we are harping and crying foul for exhaustion of resources; meaning only when we bring together all the knowledge something can be done, though I believe that may still be inadequate to address the present challenges, at least we should try to address them using ever found knowledge anywhere and only then may our response be meaningful.

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- Thirdly, challenges emanating globally like climate change, depletion of ozone layer, global warming etc. do not know boundaries. No country single handedly can handle and address this problem. For example, in 2023, Kathmandu became the world's most polluted city for two days, not because of our own causes (no doubt ours is also degrading everyday) but because of the 'imported' pollution from India and China. Obviously, every country, every single human resource must be directed towards this end if we want Planet Earth to survive longer and this is where the role of international collaborations and partnerships would be bountiful.
- Fourthly, international collaborations and partnerships will yield synergy providing better results than our inputs, than our individual or confined knowledge and skills. In the present genre of paucity in resources, a contradicting result in the sense that economically we are supposed to have grown by unlimited magnitude but deprivation and inequity is persistent and widespread. We cannot waste in isolated efforts and endeavors, rather should come together, bring together, to get to the right results with minimum efforts.

# Recognizing the Barriers



We can go on and on listing the need for international collaborations. But we should recognize the barriers herein too.

There are political barriers, resources, barriers and technological incompatibility and many other obstacles and challenges. We must overcome them engaging in task and result oriented partnerships not limited to signing MOUs, disseminating our efforts everywhere and posting our interests, specialization, and activities globally so that like minded institutions can come together without having to search in the big data.

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- Nepal Open University, established seven years ago, and launching programs since last 5 years ago fully realize this need for joint and coordinated efforts in order to bridge the gap in higher education. Despite the growth of ICT and resources, as I have observed before, the inputs vary significantly, the pedagogy differs, and the academic environment differs meaning discrepancy in quality in a big way prevails. This is not a satisfactory situation at all, and we must join hands to overcome it through meaningful and result oriented partnerships. The scope, particularly in open and distance learning has increased by many folds. Of course, it also may have generated apprehensions that a few global academia may ultimately dominate the higher education in the world. But for now, let us take advantage of the development so far, learn from institutions who have done it and experienced it and let us all benefit from that.
- Despite being at its infancy, we at NOU have been conscious to foster international collaborations from the very beginning. A few illustrations of our collaborative efforts include research based teacher education (2021-2026) supported by NORAD in joint collaboration with, NLA University College, Norway; University of Edger Norway, Theological University of Appledon, the Netherlands and Early Childhood Education Centre(ECEC); developing pedagogy for 21<sup>st</sup> century skills supported by Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Finland in collaboration with Tribhuvan University Nepal, JAMK University of Applied Sciences, Finland and HAMK University of Applied Sciences, Finland; Equitable access to higher education for students with disabilities and students from marginalized groups (Eathen-Erasmus project) in collaboration with JAMK University, Finland, The university of North Hampton, Masary University, MOEST, Nepal, Tribhuvan University and Kathmandu University. Similarly, we have partnered with Korea National Open University under UNESCO – UNITWIN project. Similarly, despite extremely limited numbers, our faculties are trying to promote and develop such partnerships. We have also carried out a number of international conferences jointly and have joined hands with Cardiff University and others towards this goal.

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- Despite some of these visible results, we have yet to see real ongoing partnerships in research and development, teaching learning processes, student, and faculty exchange and extending other academic services. We are, however, eager, and ready to join hands with all like minded institutions nationally as well as globally. We are also seeking support to have international faculties to launch our programs or join hands to provide academic support.
- Hence, my clamour call is to let us not dissipate our resources in isolation. Let us bring synergy through meaningful collaborations. Survival in isolation is long over. It is the age of interdependence, as is strongly advocated by Lord Buddha, more than 2500 years ago. In order to better the lives including that of Planet Earth, let us therefore join hands by breaking the shackles of barriers and impediments.



**THANK YOU!**

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