

# A HISTORY OF AFRICAN PARTNERSHIP AT MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

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## INTRODUCTION

The African Studies Center at Michigan State University (MSU) and its faculty have a long and complex history of partnerships with faculty, staff, and students in African institutions of higher education and research institutes. MSU today has more than 200 faculty and staff engaged in research, teaching, and development cooperation in nearly every African country, as well as more study abroad programs in Africa than any other U.S. university for both graduate and undergraduate students. The quality of our collaborations with African scholars and institutions is therefore of crucial and strategic importance. For such African engagements to be sustainable over the last half-century, the establishment, care, and feeding of these partnerships has been critical. Our partnerships have had their ups and downs over the years, as global economic and political shifts have impacted African nations, and conflicts have taken place within some African countries, especially during the years when the Cold War was being fought across Africa. Sailing has not always been smooth. Yet, even when some of our partnerships have struggled and some have failed, they are still critically important in our globally connected world.

To fully understand the benefits of sustainable partnerships for MSU's faculty, staff, and students as well as for the State of Michigan and the wider United States, it is necessary to understand the historical and contemporary contexts that have shaped that cooperation and the resulting possibilities for deep and lasting partnerships.

## DECOLONIZATION IN AFRICA AND MSU AFRICAN STUDIES: THE 1960S

Beginning in the 1960s, the development of African Studies at MSU coincided with the dawning of political independence from colonial rule for African nations. This was a period of broad and deep commitment by many influential liberal elites in the U.S.—from Roosevelt to Kennedy and beyond—to establishing freedom, democracy, human rights, free trade, and a new global order that could reach nations

abroad, including those in Africa. Countervailing forces emerged in U.S. security agencies during the Cold War to compromise those commitments, with manipulation of African governments in the name of fighting the USSR and Eastern Bloc nations. However, the character of collaboration among African and U.S. higher education institutions was shaped by that decolonization of Africa and the

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newly found self-confidence of African peoples. This spirit of collaboration was supported in turn by a new commitment to “development,” broadly supported in the U.S. through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Fulbright, the U.S. Information Agency and other pro-development programs. These government efforts were joined by those of private donors such as the Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation and the Carnegie Foundation, all organizations that supported international development programs in U.S. institutions of higher education including MSU (Rosenfeld, 2014).

## MSU PARTNERSHIPS AND THE LAND GRANT TRADITION

At MSU, the beginning of African partnership was shaped by its president from 1941-1969: John A. Hannah. President Hannah was a committed internationalist who later headed the U.S. Agency for International Development after expanding Michigan Agricultural College “...from a college of regional reputation into a nationally recognized research university.”

MSU's beginnings as an agricultural college were shaped by the 19th century rise of industry and science

and by the sustained call for knowledge to support human development and scientific agriculture. This resulted at mid-century with the Morrill Act of 1862 and the founding across the nation of “land-grant colleges.” From the 1830s to the 1850s, there had been a broad political movement, especially in the Midwest, urging the creation of agricultural colleges. The Michigan Constitution of 1850 called for the creation of an “agricultural school,” followed in 1855 by a bill establishing the United States’ first agriculture college, the Agricultural College of the State of Michigan. Known today as Michigan State University, this was the nation’s first land-grant university, and it served as a model for the Morrill Act of 1862.

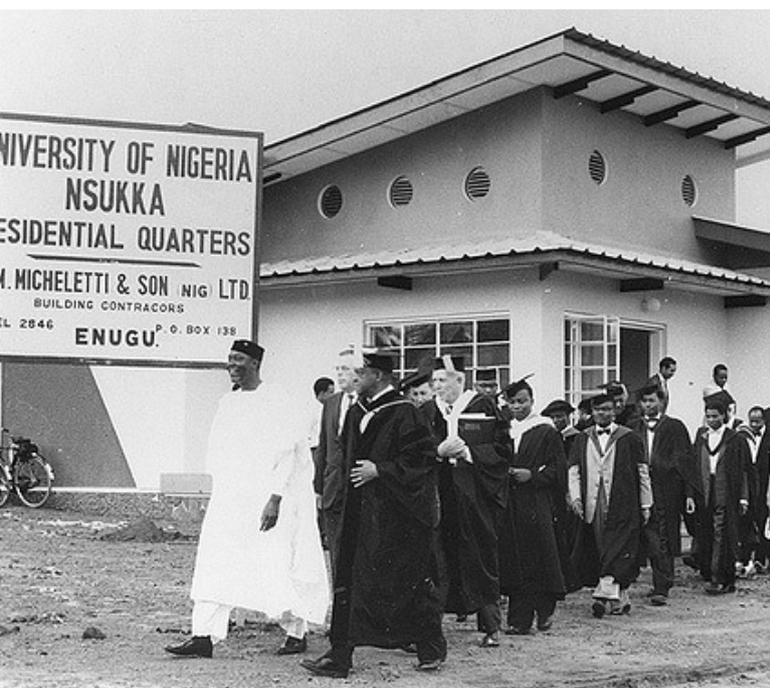
The Morrill Act sought to create colleges that could teach agriculture and “the mechanic arts” as well as classical studies. This would allow members of the working classes to obtain a liberal, practical education. In addition, in 1914 the Congress passed the Smith-Lever Act to provide federal support for land-grant institutions to offer instruction beyond their campuses through cooperative extension efforts in agriculture and home economics. This brought higher education to rural populations both on campus and also in their communities via cooperative extension outreach. The valuing of educational and professional development for rural life and production was an embodiment of the nation’s commitment to democracy and universal education. For African scholars in the period following their nations’ independence, this was highly attractive, and many sought PhD training in the U.S. in order to draw on that tradition.

## PRESIDENT NNAMDI AZIKIWE AND THE LAND-GRANT UNIVERSITY IN NIGERIA

Excited by this land-grant democratic education, in the late 1950s, Nnamdi Azikiwe, governor of the Eastern Province of British Nigeria, Governor-General of Nigeria from 1960-1963 and first President of Nigeria from 1963-1966, came to MSU to seek a partner in building a “people’s university” in Eastern Nigeria. With his education in the U.S. at Storer College and Columbia, Howard, and Lincoln Universities, Azikiwe had an admiration for the democracy and practicality of American higher education and especially its commitment to scientific agriculture and its application, as practiced at Tuskegee Institute (now University). In Nigeria, Azikiwe was dismayed that the University of London-affiliated University College of Ibadan, which had no agricultural studies or extension services at that time, was required to offer a University of London degree, and its largest faculty was in Classics. Azikiwe invited MSU’s President John Hannah to form a partnership to build Africa’s first “land-grant university.”

## THE UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA PARTNERSHIP: LESSONS LEARNED

With support from the U.S. International Cooperation Agency—predecessor to the U.S. Agency for international Development (USAID)—many MSU faculty and their families joined their Nigerian partners from 1960 to 1967 to build and operate Nigeria’s first indigenous university with a full curriculum in arts and letters, sciences, engineering, and agriculture. This partnership was of signal importance to MSU in developing faculty expertise on many aspects of Nigerian society, history, culture, economy, agriculture, governance, and more. The cooperation was interrupted by the civil war between Biafran and Federal Nigerian armies. The Federal Army victory in 1967 ended the MSU partnership, and for almost two decades the Federal Nigerian Government prohibited MSU personnel from entering the country because of their close association with the University of Nigeria seen as the seat of the Biafran rebellion and the “Igbo peoples” of the East. Some MSU faculty had been active in the U.S. in publicizing some of the atrocities of the war and, in the later stages, the food and medical crisis that resulted in the deaths of an estimated two million Eastern Nigerians. In 1990, relations were formally renewed by UNN Vice Chancellor Ikoku with an honorary degree awarded to MSU President DiBiaggio, who was accompanied to Nigeria by Dean of International Studies and Programs Gill C. Lim, MSU Trustee Melanie Foster, and African Studies



*MSU President John A. Hannah (third from front) marches in the opening convocation procession of the University of Nigeria at Nsukka, 1960. Photo: MSU Archives*



*Sunlight on Ghanaian Fabric. Photo: Rebecca Kolar*

Center Director David Wiley. A happy reunion was celebrated with President Azikiwe and many MSU alumni from Nigeria.

In spite of the termination of this partnership under tragic circumstances, it had important impacts on MSU, its interest in African language and area studies on campus, its approach to partnerships elsewhere in Africa, and its commitments to African development. It provided MSU faculty with their first experience of Africa and of African culture, and this shaped the subsequent careers of many faculty who found engaging research problems and colleagues in the African field. This large focus on Africa at MSU and the needs of graduate programs for research materials resulted in a focused investment in African library holdings and Africana librarians. For many, Nigeria provided the first experience of partnerships with foreign colleagues. Some of the resultant friendships and collaborations lasted for many years. The experience gave the faculty new understandings of issues and needs in socioeconomic development as well as practical experience of collaborative research, teaching, and administration abroad. A number of them subsequently traveled to other countries and institutions on the continent supported by Fulbright, Rockefeller, and Ford Foundation funding. In some cases, especially for Agricultural Economics, this foundational experience reshaped the direction of the entire department so that it became the fulcrum of much Western collaboration in African development, food security planning, and training of African PhD candidates who now are found in many universities and development institutes across Africa. Faculty in diverse departments became enthusiastic about PhD education for African candidates, and those faculty sought foundation and government funding for their African graduate students, often joining them after their graduate studies in cooperative research projects. Partnership with Nigeria demonstrated that excellent cooperation was possible with African colleagues and institutions and often was very rewarding.

## SUPPORT FOR FREEDOM AND DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTHERN AFRICA: THE 1960S-80S

At the beginnings of African independence in the 1960s and 1970s, there was great optimism at MSU about the potential for freedom and development in the new nations, and the university was one of the national leaders in recruiting Peace Corps volunteers. MSU collaborations in Africa took a more activist turn during the decades of the 1970s and the 1980s in response to the persistence of colonial and minority rule in white settler-ruled states of southern Africa. In the extreme cases of Rhodesia, Mozambique, Angola, Namibia, and South Africa, MSU faculty and students in 1979 sided with the United Nations and its sanctions policies regarding these non-self-governing countries and opposed the pro-South African policies of the U.S. government. As a result, MSU Africanists approved a policy of non-collaboration for any of these countries while focusing our partnering efforts on majority-rule self-governing countries that had achieved independence. On campus, students and faculty joined in supporting sanctions against these minority regimes, including supporting African liberation movements with financial contributions and provision of information on U.S. policies.

The most difficult test of this policy arose with the proposal to disinvest the university's endowment stockholdings from U.S. corporations operating under and in cooperation with the South African government, including major donors to the university such as Kellogg, Dow Chemical, and the auto companies. In 1978, with strong faculty and student support across campus, the MSU Board of Trustees voted to divest the university of its holdings in stocks of corporations continuing to do business in South Africa, followed by a parallel action by the MSU Foundation in 1986. The university thereby became the first in the U.S. to completely divest its financial holdings.

In 1986, in order to address the need after minority rule for post-graduate training for southern Africans for their universities, MSU convened a national conference on education and training for South Africans and Namibians. This conference brought together representatives of U.S. colleges and universities, major U.S. foundations, U.S. government (especially the State Department and USAID), and representatives of the African liberation movements (ANC, PAC, SWAPO, ZANU, ZAPU, as well as representatives of the South African and newly independent Angolan departments of education). The conferees recommended graduate fellowships for refugee scholars who had been living in exile during the liberation struggles. While this plan was not realized due to financial limitations, in the 1990s MSU was able to provide fellowships to approximately 20 South African graduate students, many of them seeking advanced training in cultural and development-relevant fields.

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In 1999, the MSU African Studies Center led a project to support the growth of high quality U.S. academic partnerships with South African universities and technikons. With support from the Rockefeller Foundation for the U.S.-South Africa Higher Education Foundation (HEF) through the American Council on Education, MSU created: a) the first online directory to all S.A. higher education institutions, their addresses and fields of study, a list that did not exist at that time; b) an online directory of South African government and private educational organizations with their purposes and contact information; and c) a database of U.S.-S.A. binational higher education partnerships with their purposes, funding sources, activities, and contact numbers.

In conversations with South African educational leaders in the U.S.-S.A. HEF, there was a recurrent request to develop standards of high quality partnerships for both U.S. and South African collaborators to use in planning and operating academic partnerships. To conclude the project, in 2005 in Johannesburg, the MSU member of the

Higher Education Forum of the U.S.-S.A. Binational Commission and representing U.S. Africanist scholars, collaborated in a meeting with members of the CTP, SAUVCA, and HESA, for a consultation to develop a set of ethical standards or guidelines for university partnerships between South African and U.S. higher education institutions. After long discussions and recurring reviews of draft documents, there was a unanimous agreement on a consensus document "Guidelines of 'best practices' for partnerships between tertiary institutions in South Africa and the United States."

## DEVELOPMENT OF ETHICAL PRINCIPLES FOR AFRICAN PARTNERSHIPS

From the beginnings in the 1960s, the MSU African Studies Center has sought to be a leader in African partnerships, not only in establishing diverse, high-quality and sustainable collaborations, but also in recognizing that meaningful engagement requires mutually agreed-upon ethical principles that serve as a guide. MSU's long experience with African colleagues, students and research subjects led to recognition by its faculty of the importance of transparency, equity and reciprocity in partnerships both between individual scholars and higher education institutions. This resulted in the MSU African Studies faculty and graduate student statement of ethics, "Faculty Guidelines for Scholarly and Professional Cooperation between Colleagues in Africa and Michigan State University" (see Appendix 1). Later, these ethical principles were utilized by the African Studies Association to develop their "ASA Ethical Conduct Guidelines."

One component of these MSU principles responded to the repeated insistence from African colleagues in light of many clandestine government programs of the Cold War to know who sponsored and funded MSU's research in Africa as well as, in light of U.S. government Title VI funding from the Department of Education, the African studies programs in the U.S. In the MSU principles, the faculty stated,

*"We shall make every effort to keep all of our research, instructional, and service activities free of sponsorship, direct funding, or secret uses by military and intelligence agencies of all governments. We shall not knowingly engage or participate in projects which could be reasonably construed as sustaining or strengthening the powers of political leaders or states guilty of violations of human rights. Furthermore, we are committed to keeping in the public domain all work completed under any government sponsorship."*

This overt rejection of military and intelligence funding was debated widely in the U.S. academic community and, eventually, was adopted by all the 11 other Title VI African Language and Area Studies National Resource Centers, the African Studies Association, and the members of the Association of African Studies Programs but not by other world regions centers. Subsequently, MSU worked together with African university vice chancellors, principals, and presidents from across the continent to further develop new guidelines for best practices in academic partnerships. This effort, supported by the Carnegie Corporation through the Association for African Universities (AAU), resulted in both guidelines for “Best Practices for International Partnerships between Higher Education Institutions in Africa and Abroad,” (see Appendix 2) and, with the concurrence of many U.S. sponsors of many study in Africa programs, the “Guidelines for High Quality Study Programs in Africa.”

## CONTINUING THE TRADITION: THE ALLIANCE FOR AFRICAN PARTNERSHIP

In May 2016, MSU invited a core group of African leaders of academic and other institutions to join us in developing a new approach to African partnership that could build on our long experience and leadership. The Alliance for African Partnership was the outcome of this convening, and will launch a next generation of partnership that will move forward into the 21st century. The landscape of Africa is changing—demographically, in terms of challenges such as climate change, food sustainability, health, energy, water and cultural development—and the AAP is positioned to make a contribution to building the collaborative relationships that are needed to address these challenges.



2016 Alliance for African Partnership Convening participants, from left to right: Sosten Chiotha, Lisa Hinds, Thelma Awori, Amy Jamison, Aggrey Ambali, Isaac Minde, Ibrahim Thioub, Chance Kabaghe, Ebenezer Ansah, Jamie Monson, Jorem Awadu, Chinwe Effiong, Lou Anna K. Simon, Thomas Jayne, Denis Kyetere, Lisa Fruge, Steven Hanson, Nango Dembele, Eva Tetteh, Richard Mkandawire, Pauline Wambua, Penina Miama, Paul Zeleza, Leonard Wantchekon. Photo: MSU