

Wales Africa Partnership Research: Executive Summary

[Kakaretso ena e fumaneha ka Sesotho.](#)

[Mae'r crynodeb hwn ar gael yn Gymraeg.](#)

[The full report in English is available here.](#)

Context

Dolen Cymru Lesotho is a network of links between Wales and Lesotho, with partner organisations including schools, health boards, sports clubs, community advocacy organisations, and faith groups. Partnerships between Wales and Lesotho are encouraged and supported to build long-term relationships based on friendships, using a balanced and reciprocal model of partnership. In addition, Dolen has signed up to Hub Cymru Africa's Anti-Racism Charter and is working towards those goals.

In 2024, Dolen commissioned a research project to investigate the role of their partnership model in building more equal and effective partnership working. This research addressed the following questions:

1. Does the "Dolen model" contribute to effective and equal partnership working, compared to other models? If so, how? and can these contributing factors be built on further?
2. What implications from (1) are there for Dolen, volunteers, and partners (e.g. in terms of organisational structure, approaches to partnership working, or link activities)?
3. What potential implications from (1) are there for the wider Wales Africa community?
4. For both Dolen and the wider Wales Africa community: through the lens of Solidarity and the intentions of the Wales Africa Anti-Racism Charter, what lessons can be learned from investigating the effectiveness of partnership working, both Dolen's model and other similar models identified in literature? What can be avoided, replicated, or adapted in order to contribute to increased Global Solidarity and the role of Wales as an outward looking nation?

Research and Findings

Research was conducted by Dr Elaine Christian, with link participants from the education, health, sport, and faith sectors; including volunteers, partner organisation staff, funders, and Dolen board members and staff.

Four characteristics emerged which were shared between partnerships with higher degrees of balance and equal involvement, or with a greater self-reported sense of equality and effectiveness. These are:

1. Reciprocity and bilaterality: A sense of balance in travel, programming and roles. Roughly equal numbers of visitors travel in each direction, similar activities are occurring in each place, and there is a shared sense between partners that they have a similar contribution to the relationship.

- 
2. Organisational embeddedness: The relationship becomes part of the organisation's identity, with executive levels supporting the partnership and policies in place to support participation.
 3. Friendship and commitment: Recognition that the relationship itself is of value, worthy of investment of both time and finances.
 4. Regular evaluation: Partners make a priority of examining and evaluating the health of the relationship—including efforts towards equality—at regular intervals.

Research shows clearly that these characteristics are tightly interlinked and support each other; I refer to them as the “Four Strands” throughout the report as a way to understand and interpret research findings. Strengthening one strand positively affects the others, and conversely, if one is lacking, then adverse affects are seen in the others.

Overall, research indicates that:

- The “Dolen model” does contribute to equal and effective partnership working. Partnerships with greater reciprocity are more likely to characterise their relationships as equal and effective.
- Greater reciprocity and bilaterality were also associated with personal and professional development, cultural learning, overcoming challenges, and increasing awareness.
- The “Dolen model” can be applied inconsistently: some organisations may have greater equality in travel but less so in programming or partner roles, or vice versa.
- A few partnerships resemble more strongly the “donor-recipient” model, although these organisations tend to take a more collaborative and partner-led approach. Partners in Lesotho consistently report that they appreciate working with Dolen-affiliated organisations for this reason.
- Welsh partners have, in a few cases, been able to contribute to greater equality and effectiveness by challenging assumptions or practices of funders, e.g. around reporting requirements.

Implications and Recommendations

- Partner organisations require continued support in strengthening each of the “four strands” identified. This could include developing guides for best practice, hands-on resources, training, etc.
- Relationships between thematically-linked partners (i.e. organisations with a similar social remit) can be highly effective, and a way to increase participation in global solidarity. New partners can be identified, and existing partners encouraged to develop their work in this area.
- Partner organisations can be encouraged and supported with practical ways to influence the funding landscape to re-orient itself towards longer-term and friendship-based approaches.