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International fieldschool reciprocity: using a whole-of-university approach to create positive change in Northern Uganda

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ABSTRACT

International fieldschools to developing countries have become an important component of the university curriculum because they provide experiential learning and research skills, while also contributing a range of soft skills such as resilience, empathy, resourcefulness, critical thinking, and cross-cultural communication. Yet, with the increasing popularity of ‘developing world’ fieldschools, an ever-more pertinent question to ask is, *cui bono*? Who benefits when relatively ‘privileged’ students from wealthy countries travel to visit ‘underprivileged’ communities in poorer parts of the world? In this article, we contribute to the discussion about fieldschool reciprocity using data from a newly established program in Northern Uganda, established as part of the University of New South Wales’ UNSW2025 strategy. We show that a whole-of-university approach has significant benefits for staff and students from both institutions, more diffuse benefits for the wider Ugandan host community, as well as the potential to create synergies to leverage community transformation. We also look at challenges that include: power differentials, uncertainty in the field environment, sustainability, and the ability to maintain collaborative equity between institutions over the long term.

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1. Introduction

Fieldschools to the ‘developing world’ have become an increasingly common component for ‘developed world’ programs in anthropology, development studies, and geography, among other disciplines (cf., Connell, 2006; Downey, Siciliano, & Coffey, 2017; Guinness, 2012; Robson, 2002). Although taking numerous forms, ranging from field tours to research expeditions, they are commonly designed to augment traditional university courses, ‘helping to render “book learning” more meaningful, and providing a site to practise application and integration of different (interdisciplinary) theoretical approaches’ (Mitussis & Sheehan, 2013, p. 43). As Guinness notes, in the age of the Internet, it has

become too easy for students to use ‘search engines, find a few well-written paragraphs on a website and submit a very serviceable essay without engaging with the issues at any deeper level’. Thus, international fieldschools offer opportunities to train students ‘in resourcefulness and creativity and in the ability to deal with complexity and uncertainty’ (Guinness, 2012, pp. 329–330). Moreover, fieldschools tend to be popular with students, and therefore, beyond the pedagogical benefits, they have arguably become a key selling point for universities to attract students in an increasingly competitive tertiary context (McGuinness & Simm, 2005).

With the rising popularity of these fieldschools, an ever-more pertinent question to ask is, *cui bono*? Who benefits when relatively ‘privileged’ students from wealthy countries travel to visit ‘underprivileged’ communities in poorer parts of the world? While a range of pedagogical, professional, and personal benefits for the travelling undergraduate student has been widely recognised (cf., Gmelch, 1992; Karakos et al., 2016; Mitussis & Sheehan, 2013), there are lingering questions around reciprocity: to what extent are benefits (if any) realised in host communities (Binns, 1992; Guinness, 2012; McGuinness & Simm, 2005; Nairn, Higgitt, & Vanneste, 2000; Robson, 2002)? Indeed, going further, some academics have raised concerns that fieldschools have the potential to become forms of ‘developmental tourism’, where ‘visiting students and staff are mere development tourists with the gaze of wealthy outsiders’ focusing on underprivileged communities as their muse (Robson, 2002, p. 334). The issue of benefit also extends to home institutions, where questions arise about the participation of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds who may have access to fewer economic, social, and cultural resources to realise international travel (Green, Gannaway, Shepherd, & Jamaram, 2015; Green & Mertova, 2014). As a consequence, there is an apprehension that *cui bono* is mapped out across Massey’s (1994) power-geometry of mobility, with privileged students occupying a more powerful position to reap benefits from intercultural fieldschool exchanges.

To be clear, we do not see this *a priori* as an outcome of international fieldschools to developing countries; rather we agree with Crabtree when she notes that there should be critical reflection on ‘how can we undertake appropriate interventions in other(s)’ communities that balance the enhancement of student learning with sustainable improvements and meaningful social change?’ (Crabtree, 2008, p. 29). As such, international fieldschools can certainly offer reciprocal benefits, however, they do not automatically emerge from the fieldschool process; rather, fieldschool design is critical to realising them (Karakos et al., 2016).

In this article, we contribute to this debate through an examination of an undergraduate fieldschool to Northern Uganda in July 2017 run by the University of New South Wales (UNSW), Sydney. The pertinence of this case study is not just with the fieldschool, but also how it has been situated in a broad UNSW strategy to engage with different entities in Northern Uganda, including a partnership with the main local tertiary institution, Gulu University (GU). For UNSW, this engagement is part of its strategy to ensure impacts are felt well beyond its ivory tower walls, as well as shoring up its ambition of being ‘Australia’s Global University’. Yet, as we argue, there are considerable power differentials between the two institutions that have to be addressed and carefully managed (Koehn & Obamba, 2014). We also suggest that situating fieldschools in a longer-term sustainable, whole-of-university approach to a region, rather than as a project-based approach, opens

up different opportunities to ensure that fieldschools have longer-lasting positive effects on host communities.

To inform our analysis, we draw upon staff auto-ethnographic observations made during the fieldschool (all six authors were involved in supervising the students). We, individually and then collectively, reflected on our experiences and interpretations of the fieldschool's reciprocity dynamics. Such auto-ethnographic pedagogical praxis are recognised as an underutilised tool for improving student learning outcomes (Hains-Wesson & Young, 2017; Warren, 2011). Thus, by sharing our auto-ethnographic insights in this article, our approach is not only methodological, but also normative in that we are prompting scholarly conversation about teaching praxis (Trahar, 2013). This data was augmented by evaluative surveys completed by UNSW students ($n = 15$) and GU students ($n = 18$), as well as documentation produced by UNSW about its Northern Uganda strategy.

To be clear, the purpose of this article is not to evaluate the effectiveness of the overall UNSW Northern Uganda program, which would be a premature endeavour given its nascent status, but rather to focus on its design and discuss the model's potential to engender positive change.

In the following section, we introduce the context of Northern Uganda, followed by a discussion on the design of the UNSW fieldschool and its position in the broader strategy of the university. The third section interrogates how different groups might realise benefits from international fieldschools, enmeshing our own empirical interpretations with observations from existing literature. The fourth section discusses the opportunities and challenges of a whole-of-university approach, followed by a final concluding section.

2. UNSW and Northern Uganda: a whole-of-university approach

Since the cessation of hostilities in 2008, Northern Uganda has been recovering from protracted conflict, with Gulu, the largest town in the region, still a work in progress. Responding to re-building needs and the refugee crisis in South Sudan, the town is the beneficiary of a large aid-worker economy and a supply node for border zone refugee settlements (Branch, 2013). The region has also been the focus of legions of non-government organisations (NGOs) and donor-funded activities, which promote development programming for human rights, livelihoods, gender sensitivity and children's rights, among other issues.

However, despite these interventions, tensions remain. Research by Saferworld and the Refugee Law Project in 2013 points to a state of latent conflict in the region, where recovery is compromised by competition over land, environmental destruction, poverty, youth unemployment, reintegration challenges and ineffective transitional justice processes (Saferworld Refugee Law Project, 2013). Unfortunately, these inequities are often read through an ethnic lens, leading to hostilities between groups affected by the conflict's aftermath, who still find themselves without adequate livelihood resources (Branch, 2011, 2013; Dolan, 2009). These issues, together with regional instability caused by nearby South Sudan's conflict, create significant challenges for Northern Uganda and for those within the donor community seeking to help.

Such complex dynamics generate a myriad of confounding factors and where project implementation is concerned, an all-too-frequent lack of 'big picture' information about

the context in which NGOs now operate. As Ferguson (1994) has noted, lack of contextual information by large scale development actors in Africa has resulted in a form of ‘anti-politics’, which treats projects as if they are exempt from the political context, while still deeply embedded in those same power relations. In the case of agricultural project that seek to return Uganda’s internally displaced to their rural homes, they now face complications as a result of unclear post-war land boundaries, and land-grabbing by both government and commercial interests (Bartlett & Dhizaala, 2018; Branch, 2011). Once plentiful land now also faces pressures from forced displacement that is occurring as a result of the South Sudan conflict.

In addition, development actors have now become aware of the limits of single focus approaches, leading to attempts to provide more holistic solutions. For example, East Africa initiatives such as the Millennium Villages Project have attempted to demonstrate the benefits of a multi-sectoral approach by bringing a range of international NGOs together to address broad spectrum needs rather than a single project-based approach (Sachs, 2018; Sanchez et al., 2007). The aim of what is often called the ‘big bang’ approach to development programming and service delivery is to provide holistic interventions in agriculture, education, health, and infrastructure to see if this stimulates future growth. Such initiatives have been welcomed but have also been critiqued on the grounds of theoretical weakness, long-term financial sustainability and the inability to disentangle cause and effect in measuring impact (Carr, 2008; Clemens & Demombynes, 2011).

Universities may be in a better position to address these issues given the length of their potential engagement and their ability to access to a wide range of intermeshed academic resources and expertise. UNSW has, to some extent, positioned itself in this regard with its 2025 Strategy that aims to provide, *inter alia*, capacity building, knowledge transfer and community transformation through a ‘whole university approach’ to collaboration between itself and a partner institution. The strategy encompasses three core priority areas: ‘Academic Excellence’ aimed at research and teaching; ‘Social Engagement’ orientated towards greater societal equality and diversity and ‘Global Impact’, which is focused on expanding the University’s strategic partnerships and global reach. Northern Uganda is one of three initial target regions for UNSW’s Institute for Global Development, with Gulu University (GU) being the partner university in the region. The rationale for this choice is the level of need at GU, which is a new university that operates in a post-conflict and resource-scarce environment (Whyte & Whyte, 2015). In August 2016, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the two universities to guide future research and teaching collaborations (Maniaty, 2016).

The Uganda Fieldschool is a key pillar of UNSW’s ‘Global Impact’ strategy. Its focus on education (for UNSW and GU students) and its strategy of collecting research data to inform longer-term future projects, means that it also makes contributions to UNSW’s first two strategic areas. It also directly builds upon a core component of GU’s objective, as outlined in the Uganda’s *Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act, 2001*, that holds universities responsible for transforming the communities they are embedded in (Walters & Openjuru, 2014). As Mbah (2016) notes, international partnerships offer opportunities for African universities with limited resources to realise their community improvement goals. The UNSW and GU partnership thus has the potential to fulfil core objectives of both institutions. Nevertheless, like similar partnerships (Koehn & Obamba, 2014), there is a power asymmetry in that UNSW is the institution that provides

the majority of financial resources, while Northern Uganda is the main site of project interventions.

Over a six month period, meetings took place between GU, UNSW and local community stakeholders. Four projects emerged from these talks, which involved the UNSW faculties of Arts and Social Science, Engineering, Medicine and UNSW Business. The projects respectively centred on: (1) conflict prevention and livelihoods (including the fieldschool); (2) summer school student engagement program in relation to agribusiness; (3) transformative community engagement in health through mobile health outreach; and (4) transformative academic development through a Foundation in University Learning and Teaching program (see Mirriahi, Alonzo, McIntyre, Kligyte, & Fox, 2015) that would be delivered to GU staff.

In what turned out to be a happy synergy between faculties, 20 students from UNSW's Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences travelled to Uganda in July 2017, with 10 fellow students from Engineering on the Agribusiness Summer School. Both projects had clear commonalities since they were working in the community, engaging around issues of land and livelihoods to help improve longer-term community stability and sustainability. Even from early discussions, ideas started to emerge about how the groups could work together. These continued with informal discussions across the two student cohorts about their days, creating unexpected, yet welcome, opportunities for interdisciplinary and intersectoral learning.

Students from both universities were selected on a competitive application basis to attend the fieldschool. This application process considered not only academic merit, but also a track record of community engagement and action. Although subsidised by the university, UNSW students still had to contribute financially to attend the fieldschool. Thus, short of optimal, there was a financial barrier for some students to attend. During the fieldschool, students first attended a week-long, intensive methods training course before they travelled to three different fieldsites to complete 465 surveys. The data collected from the three sites related to a range of socio-economic and livelihood issues and was designed to inform future UNSW–GU projects in the region, as well as providing a baseline from which to measure future interventions and their likely impact.

3. Benefits of international fieldschools

The design and implementation of international fieldschools, unsurprisingly, varies greatly. Nevertheless, they all tend to adopt an experiential learning approach, immersing 'students in a situation that is part of, or relevant to, the subject matter about which they are developing knowledge and understanding' (Hirsch & Lloyd, 2005, p. 322). While in this situation, the goal is for students to use the context and specific issue to problem solve, while developing some autonomy in their own learning process. As one UNSW student pointed out:

This course has changed me. I have had experiences in 'developing' countries in the past. But never on such a profound and meaningful level as this. This is not a 'study abroad' kind of experience, nor is it some kind of 'voluntourism' experience. This is working together as a group to help contribute to a body of research which is working to help other people. This course forced me to grow up. Not that I'm young, but more that I was forced to stop acting like a sheep and start taking some initiative ... I felt I was able to attack the challenges

faced on a much more mature level. ... It meant knowing when to go over and ask if someone was alright at the right time, and knowing when to ask for help myself. This trip took me from looking at the world as if it was 'out there' and made me start looking at the world as if I was already there. I will never forget this experience for as long as I live. (UNSW Student 5)

In this quote, the student captures a critical aspect of experience-based learning with the focus on personal development, echoing many of the developmental attributes that have been identified in the existing fieldschool literature, such as adaptability, self-reliance, confidence, autonomy, reflexivity and coping (Connell, 2006; Downey et al., 2017; Gmelch & Gmelch, 1999). Mitussis and Sheehan (2013, p. 45) sum all of this up neatly, noting that the fieldschool experience can provide students with 'confidence to cope when confronted with difference in other settings, prompts lateral thinking and problem solving and is a straightforward entrée to the experiential learning processes of re-learning and resolving conflicts'. Students, in short, learn to think and act on their feet.

Learning to overcome challenging circumstances helps to create a key attribute that is highly valued in contemporary workplace environments: resilience. Resilience is a prominent topic in higher education today because it relates to the ways in which students navigate through environments in which the parameters are not always known and where failure is possible (Turner, Holdsworth, & Scott-Young, 2017). Yet risks must be mitigated, so that there is a safety net in which students can feel free to make mistakes. Fieldschools provide this environment because they are embedded in an uncertain real world, teaching occurs *in situ*, but there are high levels of supervision and the ability to cope with unforeseen change is modelled by staff mentors and other students.

Personal development is not just about internal development but also interpersonal engagement, and particularly in a fieldschool setting, cross-cultural interpersonal engagements (Downey et al., 2017; Hirsch & Lloyd, 2005; Mitussis & Sheehan, 2013). The 'internationalisation' of the student experience thus incorporates intercultural dimensions into student learning and praxis (Cooper, 2009; Clifford, 2011; Hutchings, Jackson, & McEllister, 2002; Sanderson, 2011). For the UNSW fieldschool, as noted earlier, UNSW students were paired with GU students, resulting in a group with a broad range of cultural, socio-economic and disciplinary backgrounds. Aiding their interpersonal interaction was poor mobile phone reception, meaning that students could not escape into their social media worlds; rather, they had to deal more directly with the dynamics of their material social world:

For me, one of the greatest challenges was finding the energy to communicate constantly with my buddy and other Ugandan students; because I felt under pressure to constantly communicate. After basic pleasantries, it was difficult to find topics to talk about. This was soon overcome however; the more we associated with our partners, the easier communication became. During our 4 day-trip to Agago, I became closer to my partner. Being placed in a rural community with no phone service, we both came to depend on each other. (UNSW Student 8)

The UNSW students were ultimately given insights into the experiences and perceptions of their GU counterparts on a wide variety of development and livelihood issues in the context of Northern Uganda. As Hirsch and Lloyd (2005, pp. 320–330) note, in these intercultural approaches 'students are encouraged to learn as much as possible with, through and about their local peers' which allows for a 'multiperspectival experience

... [that] gives students a chance to internalize ... issues at a grassroots level instead of from the seat of a lecture theatre'. As one UNSW student reflected:

What types of interventions or solutions could be applied to social challenges in a classroom in Sydney is far too removed from the real world in which all of these issues are occurring. I found the experience of learning in a classroom in Gulu alongside local students to be so enriching. They could offer so many different perspectives, stories and theories that I never would have been exposed to in Sydney. (UNSW Student 3)

Cross-cultural learning experiences, as Downey et al. (2017, p. 168) note, help 'students to better develop their critical analytical skills, encouraging them to see more clearly their own preconceptions so they better perceive what is possible, ask more penetrating questions and recognise their unexamined assumptions'. As a couple of GU students observed, one of the key take-home experiences from the fieldschool was 'getting to know [a] foreign culture' (GU Students 6 and 18). In this sense, many UNSW students found that it was not just a question of trying to understand why things are different in Uganda, *compared to Australia*, but also, in explaining their lives to their GU counterparts, to work out why things were different in Australia *compared to Uganda*. In essence, their sense of normalcy was disrupted (Figure 1).

Beyond (inter)personal development, fieldschools of course offer what Mitussis and Sheehan (2013) describe as discipline-specific content. In the case of the Uganda Fieldschool the focus was on data collection with household surveys. It had a research-based learning approach, introducing students to methodologies, and developing of their understanding of the relation of research data to development theory (Guinness, 2012). Thus, being in the field, UNSW and GU students were exposed to the messy endeavour of



Figure 1. Into the field. Source: Author.

fieldwork, where they focused on a specific project and had to learn how to reflect on the issues, deliver the project and figure out solutions:

This course taught me how to actually DO research. So much of university life is focused on discourse and theory. Not to deny the importance of these aspects of academic life, but to be able to actually apply the theories learnt to real life gave the theories a grounding that I will carry with me for the rest of my life. The course changed my attitudes towards glorifying the researcher, as actually DOING research forces you to reflect on your own flaws and preconceptions that are a shared experience amongst all researchers. (UNSW Student 5)

Given the combination of personal development, cross-cultural communication and applied skills learnt during fieldschools, there is little wonder why they are seen as a key factor in enhancing employability of graduates (Mitussis & Sheehan, 2013; Trooboff, Vandenberg, & Rayman, 2008) as well as being considered the 'high spot of their entire degree programme' (Robson, 2002, p. 330):

I have realised through this course the importance of doing practical learning. Most of our courses are classroom based, and while they're good, this was by far the best course I've taken at university. (UNSW Student 14)

Beyond student benefits, we also receive many benefits as staff. Although running fieldschools can be exhausting and do not feed neatly into our performance indicators, we agree that leading fieldschools can be a 'most professionally satisfying mode of teaching' (Mitussis & Sheehan, 2013, p. 51). As has been noted, good staff-student relationships often develop during fieldtrips as the two cohorts are forced to operate in close-quarters over extended periods. For example, one of the trip highlights, for many students, was having a vehicle stuck in the mud, requiring staff and students alike to get messy to literally dig their way out of the dilemma:

My favourite moments of the trip included getting bogged in the mud and being very well acquainted with my course convener as we pushed it out side by side and emerged from it filthy from head to toe. (UNSW Student 2)

Uncertainty, unexpected problems, logistical challenges, and exhausting days can test both students and staff alike; indeed, perhaps the most common student critique about the program was that they would have liked clearer communication on each day's activities. This is a fair critique, although given the vagaries of the fieldschool, daily itineraries were a dynamic process, adapted around political meetings with local officials and unexpected road conditions. We, as staff, were learning as the fieldschool progressed (Hoare, 2013). Nevertheless, pushing through such adversity can be beneficial for all involved, creating unique learning environments.

The literature is opaquer about what benefits international fieldschools might leave behind in host communities. GU students certainly constitute an important part of this community and in post-course evaluations they articulated valuable aspects of participating in a fieldwork course. First, there was a clear appreciation for sharing ideas and the benefits of working with Australian students, who were routinely cited as being friendly. Indeed, 'making friends' (GU Students 7, 8, 10, and 12–14) was a key highlight for numerous GU students. Other positive aspects cited were interviewing skills, analytical skills and enhanced ability to use technology, which was learnt in situ while working with their Australian counterparts. Interestingly, some benefits emerged that might not have been so

easily foreseen, related to knowledge of the wider community in northern Uganda. Ugandan students, for example, pointed to the ability to travel to places in the North where they had previously had no opportunity to visit. Numerous students also said that they valued getting to know community elders' concerns for the first time.

Nevertheless, as with all North–South tertiary collaborations (Koehn & Obamba, 2014; Obamba & Mwema, 2009), there are evident power asymmetries between UNSW and GU, in terms of institutional capacity and student experience. Like many Sub-Saharan Africa universities, GU has a limited budget and is reliant on donor funding and technical support for many of its projects (Omeje & Abugu, 2015). UNSW, for example, covered the costs of GU students to participate in the fieldschool and its activities. While efforts were made to equalise participation between UNSW and GU students, discrepancies frequently arose. For example, many UNSW students' found themselves covering the cost of GU student's lunches due to the local students' lack of disposable income. This, in turn, led to numerous discussions about privileges available to students at UNSW *vis-à-vis* their Gulu colleagues.

Individual student outcomes from the fieldschool are also mapped over similar power dynamics. While, in part thanks to the rise of internet and communication technologies in Africa (Samarakoon, Christiansen, & Munro, 2017), there are similar skill-sets in UNSW and GU students, the post-university job market opportunities are significantly different. In Gulu, there is high unemployment and very limited 'white-collar' job opportunities compared to Sydney (Datzberger, 2018; Mutwarasibo, Ruterana, & Andersson, 2014). Thus, arguably, UNSW students were in a more powerful position to realise benefits from the skills they developed in the form of future jobs than their peers in Uganda.

For the wider host community, tangible benefits are more difficult to identify but can be discerned in a number of areas. Robson (2002, p. 334), considers this question in some depth, where she notes that *material benefits* can emerge in 'the form of wages, gifts, purchase of souvenir handicrafts'. This is certainly something we observed during our trip, as the UNSW students made notable contributions to the local economy in northern Uganda. Most students extended their wardrobes with creative new fashion configurations made by the local market's tailors. Food vendors also benefitted considerably. An ongoing joke, made by staff and students alike, was that the *rolex* (rolled eggs) street vendor near the hotel in Gulu received enough of a revenue boost to put his children through school thanks to the UNSW students' addiction to the Ugandan delicacy made from chapatti, egg and vegetables. Fittingly, *rolexes* first emerged as a cuisine option in Ugandan university campuses, providing students a budget meal (Kagumire, 2016). UNSW students were getting a taste (quite literally) of Ugandan university student life.

In designing the fieldschool, a key challenge for UNSW was to develop strategies that produce more tangible positive impacts for host communities. Certainly, after initial rounds of engagement with local districts and stakeholders and the rollout of the fieldschool baseline survey, district governments and commissioners expressed 'unwavering support as a district to the implementation of projects'. Although it is still very much a nascent collaboration, the initial traces of positive impact are evident, notwithstanding the resources needed to get the job done.

4. Opportunities and challenges of a whole-of-university approach

Besides a range of tangible benefits that are emerging from a whole-of-university approach to fieldwork, there are also a range of longer-term opportunities. At the institutional level, there are distinct advantages in creating a wider network across both universities. First, at the level of planning, an institutional relationship has the benefit of contributing to a deeper understanding of how fieldschool programs sit within the broader strategic framework of both universities. GU's strategy to transform the wider community in a post-conflict society enabled a critical discussion of what the relationship could offer. These wider conversations, therefore, created an awareness on the part of the local community and the ability to see beyond the parameters of conventional donor-funded projects.

Emerging from the planning process for the fieldschool as part of a whole-of-university approach, was a set of relationships that provided not only personal, but also institutional foundations. At the project level, relationships between the leads (sometimes forged in adversity through difficult aspects of program conception), went far beyond superficial polite meet-and-greet interactions. Such relationships provided a solid foundation to build future work and a deep appreciation for efforts made by colleagues to solve issues while projects were underway.

The synergy between colleagues at the planning level that allowed problems to be overcome also continued while the fieldschool was in process. Long evenings, discussed earlier, often turned to how to solve particular issues and in conversation between Social Science and Engineering disciplines, innovations were created as solutions to some of the problems that students faced. Students often recounted challenging issues, only to find that their colleagues had encountered something similar. Large, community-wide problems, such as land-conflict and environmental destruction (Bartlett & Dhizaala, 2018), prompted discussions about how to engineer better charcoal kilns or how to develop new livelihoods. These collaborations have continued after return with cross-faculty collaboration to plan Stage 2 of the projects. The fieldschool provided an interactive basis for encountering issues, discussing their nuances, and for UNSW and GU students and staff to discuss and plan future collaborations and interventions.

The role of the fieldschool, and undergraduate students more broadly, is also an important consideration in the development of these collaborations. There is a need to balance student learning with data quality for research and project implementation. The two are certainly not mutually exclusive, but nonetheless trade-offs are invariably made. For example, the household surveys conducted by the UNSW and Gulu University students had a dual purpose: (1) to teach students research skills; and (2) to provide baseline data to inform (and measure) future projects. As the students themselves became aware, the act of learning-by-doing meant that not only did their surveying skills improve as the research progressed, but the quality of data collected also varied over time. This does not invalidate the data collected by the students, but it does emphasise the trade-off in working with experienced versus neophyte researchers. We believe that this is an acceptable 'cost', especially given that 20 GU students were involved in the research and thus skills were embedded locally.

In terms of sustainability, there is, of course, an entirely different set of considerations for a whole-of-university approach compared to a project-directed collaboration. Whereas individual projects require one-off funding for project cycles of three to five years, an

institutional approach requires much longer-term thinking. This sits well with current discussions about bridging the humanitarian–development divide in NGO circles, where critics have identified short-term humanitarian solutions as needing integration with longer-term development policy and planning (SDSN, 2016; Zetter, 2014).

Resources are thus critical to a whole-of-university approach. At UNSW and GU, the partnership forms part of a 10-year strategy, and so far, both universities have put forth considerable resources (human and financial) to set a foundation for future collaboration. This has included many UNSW and GU academics developing pilot research and intervention projects that help to set the stage for longer-term collaborations. For these, and subsequent fieldschools, to realise this long-term impact, support needs to be forthcoming from both universities for at least the life of the decade-long strategy.

Finally, to maintain a relationship of this sort, reflexivity is important. While UNSW is committed to dedicating resources for the medium term, careful thought about the findings and what they say about the partnership are also essential. Given the post-colonial environment in which programs have been launched and the power dynamics at play, it is vitally important for both partners to be contributing and to feel that involvement as meaningful. This may not always mean providing the same kinds of resources, but it should mean that contributions, be they financial, intellectual, logistical or otherwise, provide the building blocks for longer-term equitable relationships. As a result, checking-in and reflection by both partners becomes an important part of the process to ensure that equity in the collaborative process is felt and owned by all concerned.

5. Conclusion

This article has reflected on a recent fieldschool in Gulu, Uganda in order to address the question of reciprocity and *cui bono*, or who benefits from international fieldschools? While it would be inappropriate to imply that universities in the developed world do not stand to gain from these endeavours, we do nonetheless show that there are also ongoing benefits for developing world partner institutions. In addition to the considerable benefits to GU staff and students, we indicate nascent benefits at the community level where local traders see commercial gains and districts are happy to partner in what might be a longer-term collaboration.

The foregoing highlights differences in the kind of reciprocity that can be found in different kinds of partner relationships. While it is indeed early days for the UNSW–GU partnership, it does nonetheless appear to be the case that there is a considerable difference between project-based partnerships and institutional partnerships in their form and outcomes. The first of these differences can be found in the way that each type of partnership engages with the university and community. Project-focused engagements tend to be narrower, shorter in duration and focused on specific project deliverables. Institutional, whole-of-university relationships by contrast are often more diffuse, longer-term and have a variety of goals, including education, research and community development. Second, where reciprocity is concerned, it is this very diffuseness built into the institutional partnership that may create more willingness to engage outside of specific projects in areas where benefits may be not so immediately tangible.

All of this said, there are, and likely will always be, critical questions about power relations in such dynamics. UNSW is an internationally renowned university with

considerable human capital expertise and financial resources, whereas GU is a recently founded institution that is still working to establish itself in a post-conflict context. In this sense, an ongoing question for the relationship is about participation: how do staff and students realise benefits from the partnership in a way that challenges the disparity in terms of resources and mobility between the two cohorts? There is no simple solution to this challenge, but rather these power asymmetries need to be acknowledged and openly considered as the partnership develops.

For students, the reflection brought on by engagement with each other has lasting reciprocal effect. Months after the fieldwork program ended, students still report that the experience unsettled their assumptions about the world and made it difficult to settle back into their old ways of university life. On return, the whole-of-university approach ensures that networks have expanded beyond faculties, creating students who network around their involvement in the fieldschool. Friendships and text messages still create connections between Uganda and Australia and memories of a different way of life, with some students from both institutions working on projects and faculty research agendas and many wanting to return to Uganda again.

The whole-of-university institutional involvement continues to drive conversations about the nature of strategic engagement forward. Although a new partnership, these foundations have built a structure through which relationships can continue to deepen. If nothing else, this demonstrates the opening of a dialogue between educational institutions who now view each other as a source of help, research support and a partner in the life of their community over the longer-term.

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