Key Success Factors for Promoting Business to Business Collaboration between enterprises from Africa and the Global North

Dr. Phanuel Wunu
University of Cape Coast
Cape Coast, Ghana
email: pwunu@ucc.edu.gh

Dr Simon Züfle
Reutlingen University, ESB Business School
Reutlingen, Germany
email: Simon.zuefle@reutlingen-university.de

Abstract

The dawn of the 21st Century has witnessed a tremendous increase in trade pacts among nations, resulting in renewed hopes for sustainable enterprise development in emerging economies worldwide. Ghana and other sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries have signed onto several North-South and South-South free trade agreements with the hope of strengthening their presence in the international trade arena, and to promote economic growth in SSA. For over two decades, however, very little has changed, and many have dashed their high hopes as enterprises continue to struggle in SSA. Not even the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) could renew the hopes of sceptics. Several studies opined that enterprises in SSA could improve their domestic and international competitiveness by establishing mutually beneficial partnerships with their counterparts from the Global North and South. This study delved into the issues that affect North-South and South-South business collaborations and recommends key success factors that could help promote mutually beneficial cross-border business partnerships. The research includes both literature and empirical information on the key success factors of business partnerships between African enterprises as well as between African enterprises and firms from the Global North. We approached the study qualitatively using a phenomenological research design. Research participants included important stakeholders in Africa and Europe's international trade and sustainable enterprise development ecosystem. The study identified several challenges with the current business collaborations and recommended new ways of making such partnerships more beneficial.

https://doi.org/10.18418/978-3-96043-104-6_6

Introduction

Trade among nations has been with humanity for several decades and has been primarily motivated by both economic and business arguments. Many developed countries in Asia, Europe, and the Americas have leveraged these international trade opportunities to produce high-quality goods and services and sold them successfully in global markets, bringing prosperity to these enterprises, individuals, and the state. David Ricardo's theory of comparative advantage also provides a strong justification for the specialisation and liberalisation of cross-border trade (Lawrence and Weber, 2017; Hayes, 2020). Therefore, the coming of the Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) era has been celebrated widely as a new window of hope for African countries to expedite the development of their enterprises and hence, their economies.

The free trade phenomenon has led to the development of multinational enterprises around the globe. Kuratko (2014) revealed that international entrepreneurs who took advantage of international trade opportunities were the champions of the massive economic growth in both local and international businesses. Likewise, Gil-Pareja et al. (2019) also noted that developing countries have relied on trade agreements to increase their exports to developed markets such as the European Union (EU). Data from The World Bank (2021) indicates that sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries have access to three main economic blocs (EU, US and Africa) with a combined GDP worth approx. 84,000 bn US Dollars and with a population of more than two billion people (World Population Review, 2021) through free trade agreements and preference systems like the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) or the EU's Generalized System of Preferences (GSP). In addition, this study comes in when the African Union initiated the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) to provide a common platform for member states to trade among themselves as a linchpin to promote economic growth.

That notwithstanding, SSA seems to be lagging in this global trade windfall just as in many areas of development. Similar to other SSA countries, Ghana is currently able to tap only a negligible 0.04% of the combined market potential in Africa, USA, and Europe (Ghana Export Promotion Authority, 2020). Several studies have provided leads to the major issues that have militated against SSA's drive towards becoming active and significant players in the international trade arena. Some studies also discovered that the poor ecosystem of North-South and South-South collaborations accounts for SSA's inability to tap the benefits of these economic prospects (Osei-Assibey, 2015; Liu, 2016; Boateng, 2020).

Loconto (2014) observed that part of the challenges holding back Africa's economic and industrial revolution could be attributed to the lack of ready markets for production. Mutala (2014) and Fukui (2019) also noted that most enterprises in developing countries fail in their internationalisation bid because they are ill-prepared for the global marketplace. On the contrary, Grossman (2016) argues that many individual countries and economic blocs in the developed world have joined forces over the years to "exploit their joint market power in trade" (p. 422). These findings corroborate the call for more effective business-to-business (B2B) collaborations in SSA, which is expected to help boost their economic fortunes in the international trade marketplace.

In general, business-to-business (B2B) partnerships may result in various benefits for the firms involved, including improving their cost positions, increased foreign market entry opportunities or refining their business model (Schmitz Whipple, Gentry, 2000). However, several critics observe that B2B partnerships in SSA did not come with the intended benefits (Liu, 2016; Fukui, 2019; Boateng, 2020). This serves as the motivation for this study to investigate further the issues that affect cross-border business collaborations and to come up with the key success factors (KSFs) that would promote collaborations between enterprises within Africa and between African countries and their counterparts from the Global North. These KSFs are expected to promote sustainable cross-border trade partnerships with a consequential benefit to sustainable enterprise and economic development in SSA.

The lack of detailed understanding of the reasons for the persistent failure of enterprises in SSA to get the maximum benefit from cross-border B2Bs resulted in our research question: What are key success factors of business-to-business collaborations between African enterprises and companies from Africa and the Global North? Our research objectives are twofold. First, we sought to examine the issues that affect cross-border business collaborations. Then, we also aimed to ascertain the key success factors that would promote cross-border B2B partnerships in SSA and between enterprises from Africa and the Global North.

The study was approached qualitatively using a phenomenological research design. First, the study provides a literature review on business-to-business collaborations and key success factors of business partnerships between African companies as well as between African companies and firms from the Global North. In addition, we collected and analysed empirical data using interviews, focus group discussions, and a workshop. The empirical data gathering also focused on broader consultations with major stakeholders in the international trade and sustainable enterprise development ecosystem in multiple countries within Africa and Europe. The combined analysis of literature and empirical data helped to generate new knowledge on KSFs for promoting South-South and North-South mutually beneficial and sustainable B2B collaborations.

The remainder of this paper is structured into four segments. First, we review the literature on B2B collaborations and the issues that affect successful partnerships. Then we discuss the research methodology adopted and how the enquiry process was organised. After this section, we discuss the results and findings from the empirical data. The last section summarises the major findings and presents the conclusion of the study of the key success factors of cross-border B2B collaborations between SSA and the Global North.

Literature Review

Several types of business-to-business (B2B) partnerships can be distinguished in the literature, including strategic alliances and supply chain partnerships. Strategic Alliances are perceived as cooperative agreements between two or more firms (Das, Teng, 1998; Parkhe, 1993; Spekman et al., 1998). While the firms remain independent entities, they contribute to the strategic alliance in one or more areas critical to the alliance, including production, marketing or sales (Mockler et al., 1997). The supply chain partnership refers to the vertical integration of companies. It could be described as a collaborative relationship between a firm and its partners along the supply chain (Corsten, Kumar, 2005).

The academic debate has uncovered many aspects of the lifecycle of a B2B partnership, including its initiation, termination as well as success factors during its existence (Das, Teng, 1998; Kim et al., 2010). This paper focuses on the success factors of B2B partnerships. Partnership success is "the best outcomes the organisation could achieve through supply chain partnerships given its business situation, measured against a portfolio of project, early operational, and longer-term business results metrics" (Archer et al. 2006, p. 281). The success of a B2B partnership could simply include its long-term existence, given that many partnerships fail during the first three years of their existence. Success could also mean that the partnership is meeting its goals. This could include an improved competitive situation of the involved partners or a general satisfaction and financial performance of the partnership (Dyer et al., 2001).

Apart from outcome aspects such as satisfaction or performance, many papers have examined other success factors that positively affect B2B partnerships. They are organised along different theoretical standpoints. First, according to the social exchange theory, developing relational factors such as trust, commitment and communication are of utmost importance for a successful partnership. Mutual trust reduces the partners' concern about opportunistic behaviour (Gulati, 1995) and ensures that the partners believe in each other's credibility, reliability and good intentions (Ganesan, 1994; Smith, Barclay, 1999). Commitment means that the involved companies are willing to wield effort on behalf of the B2B partnership and follow a long-term orientation (Mohr, Spekman, 1994). In addition, communication includes the timely and accurate provision and sharing of credible information (Mohr, Spekman, 1994; Smith, 1997).

Second, resource-based perspectives emphasise the important role of the resources the partners possess and yield into the partnership. A B2B partnership constitutes an opportunity to build on the partners' resources and create new resources together. Therefore, the core success factors linked to that perspective include complementary resources (Lambe et al., 2002). Third, authors see a crucial role of relationship learning for partnership success. This includes learning intent, knowledge integration, and cross-cultural sensitivity in a global environment (Liu, 2012). Fourth, the transaction cost theory assumes that relationship-specific investments reduce the danger of opportunistic behaviour. One success factor found in empirical papers relates to the construct of asset specificity (Sambasivan et al., 2013). In addition, authors point out that a suitable governance mechanism through the formalisation of the partnership, including contracts to establish an equity Joint Venture, must be found (Ahmed et al., 1999).

Turning to B2B partnerships that involve African companies, the literature has also investigated success factors in collaborations between, on the one hand, African companies and, on the other hand, firms from Africa and the Global North. Starting with intra-African partnerships, Moalusi and Coetzee (2018) emphasised the important role of benevolence, integrity and reliability in promoting trust in business collaborations between South African companies. Similarly, a further study on South African buyer-supplier relationships underscored the central role of trust. Economic satisfaction, according to the authors, influences trust, which positively affects commitment. Both trust and commitment positively influence non-economic satisfaction, which covers affective and social elements of the relationship (Mpinganjira et al., 2017). Another study on supply chain partnerships in South Africa points out that, to improve performance, companies should focus on integrating resources and processes along the value chain (Mofokeng, Chinomona, 2019). In addition, a study on B2B relationships in Ethiopia found that personal bonds and longevity are critical for enhancing supplier relationship satisfaction. The positive relation between trust and supplier satisfaction was found only in situations where the producer depends on the supplier (Shanka, Buvik, 2019). Another study on Nigerian SMEs revealed that the institutionalisation of strategic alliances positively affects their performance (Nwokocha et al., 2020). For Ghanaian buyer-supplier relationships in the cocoa industry, a study concluded that cooperation, information-sharing and satisfaction reduce the perception of opportunistic behaviour (Glavee-Geo et al., 2020). A survey of supply chain partnerships in Kenya revealed that communication and joint decision-making between manufacturers and suppliers positively affect the manufacturing firm's operational performance (Onyango et al., 2015).

In general, there are only few pieces of research on strategic alliances or supply chain partnerships between companies from Africa and the Global North. Concerning B2B partnerships between African companies and firms from the Global North, the literature identifies similar success factors. A study on alliances in the construction sector in inter alia Botswana, South Africa, Sweden and UK revealed that successful alliances had established equal stakes in the alliances, leading to strong levels of trust. In such cases, partners choose to exercise alliance activities while refraining from opportunistic behaviour (Ngowi, Pienaar, 2005). Another study on international alliances that also included a couple of African-European alliances found that companies may leverage cultural distance if they build on certain culture-specific complementarities and engage in frequent communication (Pesch, Bouncken, 2017). A further study on inclusive business in Ghana involving local, US and European companies concluded that contracts, trust and frequent decision-making meetings are prevalent to guarantee the stakes and resources of all parties (Amponsah et al., 2019).

Research Methods

The study used a qualitative inquiry approach to uncover the key success factors of business-to-business collaborations involving enterprises from Africa and the Global North. Qualitative research provides several design alternatives (Flick, 2018). Among these alternatives, phenomenology was selected as the dominant design for this study. Phenomenology became appropriate because this study investigated the issues with cross-border B2B collaborations as a phenomenon in SSA. Besides, Belz & Binder (2017) advised that sustainable entrepreneurship practices and related research are at the nascent stage and require a lot of qualitative inquiries to establish the necessary baselines for future studies.

Even though qualitative research does not follow a typical rudimentary approach as in the case of a typical positivist research, we followed systematic procedures recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1986), and Patton (2002) in the conduct of the study to ensure that the outcomes of this study are reliable and trustworthy. The qualitative research design enabled us to conduct in-depth interviews and intensive discussions with major stakeholders resulting in the co-creation of the knowledge in this study. The qualitative research approach also helped to generate an in-depth understanding and critical insights into purposefully selected samples and information-rich cases (Patton, 2002).

The data collection process involved multiple forms of interviews. There were ten in-depth interviews, two focus group discussions, and a workshop from January to July 2021. The study participants were perceived to have extensive knowledge of international business collaborations. These persons are international trade experts, private sector CEOs and managers, and enterprise development experts from Ghana and Germany. There were also significant contributions from Nigeria, Kenya, and Burundi participants. In addition, we interviewed trade facilitation and regulatory agencies from Ghana. This sample was a build-up on similar to the participants selected by Osei-Assibey (2015) in a related study. The key informants were identified in the respective sampled institutions, considering their positions or roles in the respective organisations. Preference was given to persons with direct experience and knowledge in the discussed issues, which qualified them as subject matter experts and their availability to participate in the study. Therefore, the research team selected the key informants in consultation with the leadership of the participating institutions.

Guided by the recommendations of Knight (2013), the data collection instruments were designed to contain two open-ended questions. Each question has its respective prompts, which helped to understand further the important issues related to the main question. Real-time prompts relating to the research objectives were further investigated as follow-up questions to enrich the research data. However, we ensured that the informants or participants could respond to all the questions within the interview period 'without feeling rushed'. We were guided by the principles of epoche in phenomenological study to ensure that we "bracket" ourselves from the study to focus solely on the investigated phenomenon. Data saturation was reached after Focus Group Discussion (FGD) #1 and seven interviews. The additional data from three subsequent interviews and the closing FGD helped confirm and validate earlier participants' assertions.

This study's data collection procedures deployed recommended qualitative data collection practices. The collected data was cross-validated through multi-stage data collection from multiple sources to ensure that the research participants were subject matter experts. There was an initial focus group discussion; then interviews were conducted in-between, followed by the workshop, then the closing focus group discussion to validate the collected data. The study also used the focus group discussions to synthesise and validate claims in real-time; include all important stakeholders in the discussions; cross-check collected data with the informants for validation, and ensure that the researchers strictly maintain a facilitation role in all discussions.

The summary of the processes is depicted in Table 1 as follows:

Table 1: Summary of Data Collection Processes

Stage	Activity	Participant Institutions
	In-depth interviews	▪ Private sector enterprises ▪ Trade regulators and support service providers

Data collection stage 1 (January – March 2021)	Focus Group Discussions	▪ Business associations ▪ International consulting firms ▪ Enterprise development experts
Data collection stage 2 (May – July 2021)	Focus Group Discussions	▪ Trade Policy Group ▪ Business Associations ▪ Private sector enterprises group
	Workshop	▪ Group of entrepreneurs from sub-Saharan Africa and Europe
	In-depth interviews	Follow-up interviews

Source: Author's Construct (2022)

The data analysis was done manually and approached from an inductive reasoning perspective. To further guarantee the reliability of the process, all the interviews, the workshop, and FGD sessions were recorded and later transcribed. The original transcripts were subjected to cleaning to guarantee their quality before analysis. The data analysis process used "multiple coders and observed inter-coder consistencies to establish the validity and reliability of the themes that form the basis of the data analysis" (Patton, 2002, p. 267, emphasis in original). The coding process began with framework analysis of predetermined codes based on research objectives and concepts, but this was open to accommodate emerging codes as the data analysis progressed. A line-by-line coding approach was used initially. Later, we deployed an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) technique to understand how the participants perceived the investigated issues. The line-by-line and IPA coding approaches were applied to the structured analysis. At the same time, the emerging codes were determined through an in-vivo coding method as recommended by Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2009) and Turner (2019).

The coding frame was alpha-numeric to provide unique identities to the various themes that emerge from the data analysis as the key success factors for cross-border B2B collaborations. The frame has numeric codes of one and two, representing the two objectives of the study. Each numeric code had alphabetic sub-coding to identify each subtheme and link it to a particular theme or objective. For example, code "2a" on the transcript refers to objective "2" a priori theme "a." The coding was mainly deductive but flexible to make room for newly observed codes from the transcripts. We also used differentiated colouring to distinguish between the themes related to the various objectives, which enhanced the easy identification and grouping of data for further analysis. This process helped to smoothen the process that helped to identify the themes and trends during data analysis. The comparison of a priori themes and emerging themes also helped to synthesise data further to identify new knowledge, which formed the basis of the results from this study.

Ethical issues in this study were approached based on the recommendations for social constructivist research by Patton (2002), and Batmanabane & Kfouri (2017). As a result, we followed confidentiality and data protection norms to safeguard the personal identities of key informants. There were no inducements to manipulate the inputs from key informants. Interview durations were limited to the 90-min maximum limit suggested by Knight (2013). Most participants were interviewed only once, and where follow-ups were necessary, we ensured that none of them was interviewed more than twice. This helped to avoid research fatigue among the participants.

Results and Discussion

From the analysed data, several factors were found to affect the development of sustainable international B2B collaborations within SSA and between African businesses and their counterparts from the Global North. The factors that emerged from the analysed data are country-level international image and reputation; enterprise level reputation and credibility; building trust, foreign culture orientation; building trust; foreign culture orientation; business language effect; negotiation power and capacities; pursuing comparative advantage; and moving towards sustainable partnerships. These factors are discussed in the next sections.

Country-level international image and reputation

The research participants were almost unanimous that country-level reputation affects prospects for successful B2B collaborations. With high optimism, one discussant at Focus Group Discussion (FGD) #1 said, "it is remarkable to know that some credible rankings placed Ghana among the top five investor destinations and enterprise development hubs in Africa, alongside Nigeria, South Africa, Egypt, and Kenya." They argued that these rankings open up prospects for potential collaborations for enterprises in these countries that make it to the top list of international acclaim in Africa.

Research Participant #5 who is an expert in EU-Africa business collaborations, revealed that:

> Many European countries are looking at West Africa from the eyes of Ghana and Nigeria. However, doing business in Ghana is more convenient and less complicated compared to Nigeria. This gives Ghana a very strong competitive advantage over its West African peers. Ghana is the international community's West African 'darling' even though Nigeria has a far bigger economy and market. Ghana is a good entry-level country in West Africa. Entering the Nigerian market is more difficult, and Ghana's market is very decent even though it is not very big like Nigeria or South Africa (Research Participant #5, 2021).

Research participants were unanimous that Ghana's political stability and consistent economic growth in the last two decades have created a niche for the country as one of the most stable and business-friendly countries in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). An EU trade diplomat who participated in Workshop #1 explained how his working visit to Ghana in 2019 helped informed his willingness to accept collaborations from that country. Other research participants turned in that Ghana's reputation is an important marketing tool for Ghana and creates a positive image for Ghanaian businesses in the international business arena. This is their opinion: "I found it very interesting the way of life of Ghanaians (…) very open and accommodating (…) we were greeted with open arms everywhere, and that is still hanging on me".

These revelations by the research participants underscore the importance of country-level reputation in promoting cross-border collaborations. The sub-themes that emerged under country-level reputation are overall international credibility, political stability, ease of doing business, safety and hospitality, market potential, and economic growth rate. When these indicators are positive, the country's international image also looks positive to foreign investors and businesses who may be motivated and willing to accept business collaborations from such countries. On the other hand, the research participants believe business collaborations will suffer tremendously if the country-level image and reputation appear unacceptable.

Enterprise-level reputation and credibility

Research participants point to enterprise-level reputation and credibility as extremely important requirements for successful cross-border business collaborations. The important indicators to assess the enterprise level reputation include a strong, reliable partnership with the buyer(s); strict compliance with relevant certification requirements; and development of trust through the delivery of consistent quantity and quality of produce. The research participants indicated that every enterprise requires a strong positive outlook with these indicators to be able to attract potential partners abroad. As indicated by one key expert, a firm in SSA that is contemplating international collaborations should not "try to play smart because in the end you will be exposed, and the relationship will be curtailed in the short term" (Research Participant #1, 2021).

Building trust

The research participants disclosed that sincerity, truthfulness, and honesty are important pillars of building trust and creating sustainable partnerships. They revealed that dishonesty is, perhaps, the most destructive character in creating and building effective international collaborations. Research Participant #8 cautioned that dishonest entrepreneurs from Africa "can fool the Whiteman once, but you cannot fool him all the time, and you can get blacklisted." They explained that some African enterprises "try to be smart" when dealing with their foreign counterparts, but such tendencies are extremely hurtful and cannot promote sustainable collaborations. The main thrust here is that successful business collaborations will thrive only when the entities involved have been able to build trust among themselves and then they can now leverage on this goodwill to undertake mutually beneficial business collaborations.

Foreign culture orientation

Enterprises that want to go global and collaborate with foreign firms must consider important contextual issues like language, business culture, and domestic regulations for doing business. A research participant explained further that language is the currency of communication. Businesses who identify markets in foreign destinations are expected to understand the language and business culture of the people. "When language issues are handled carefully, that will also help smoothen international business collaborations" (Research Participant #7, 2021). Participants also mentioned that collaborating partners should understand their potential collaborators' business norms and rules as an important step in ensuring mutual understanding and adaptation for effective and sustainable business collaborations.

Business language effect

The English language came up as an important lingua franca for successful B2B collaborations between African businesses and those from the Global North. Research participants maintained that the diversity of international languages makes it "tricky" to believe that a national language is what is needed to benefit from business collaborations. However, Research Participant #5, who is very familiar with business dynamics in Africa, revealed that the English Language has become a great asset in international collaborations. According to the expert, English is widely spoken in many countries globally. Even countries whose primary official language is different are likely to adopt English as the second language for business and social purposes. Contributions from the research participants indicate that the EU, US, China and many other developed markets are "comfortable" with the English language for business purposes. This has given a unique advantage to English-speaking countries in SSA. They recommend that all businesses in Africa promote English as part of their business languages.

Negotiation power and capacities

In the international business arena, country-level agreements are influenced by the negotiation power of the countries involved. The research participants believe these also affect enterprise-level negotiations. Considering that the size of many enterprises in SSA is very small, research participants noted with regret that this affects their collaboration fortunes. Collaboration enterprises from the Global North often require certain logistical capacities before availing themselves for such partnerships. Since many enterprises in SSA fall short of these expectations, they are usually at the "mercy" of collaborators from developed countries. Participants observed that SSA businesses lack effective negotiation expertise, making them "not confident and assertive enough" to engage their counterparts in arms-length negotiations in developed countries. This phenomenon leads to unbalanced negotiation power, affecting such collaborations' effectiveness and sustainability.

Research participant #5 observed that many firms in developing countries are usually excited about international collaborations without carefully considering the benefits they want from such partnerships. They cautioned that this "rush to partner without clear objectives" puts the partnership at the mercy of the dominant partner, usually those from developed countries. "It is not a matter of just going global or into Europe; the benefits must be clear; completely clear," Research participant #5 added.

Research Participant #7 also linked the confidence and capacity of collaborators to the state and competitiveness of their domestic market. They explained that enterprises in developing countries should develop a formidable domestic market as an important first step before going international. Research participant #5 added further that this approach will avoid a situation where enterprises are placed at the mercy of their foreign counterparts because "they have nothing locally to compare with the offer from an international partner."

Pursuing comparative advantage

In separate interviews, three participants suggested that firms in Africa could be more successful in their international negotiations if they focus their business operations ons products that give them a comparative advantage and pursue them. In their opinion, if firms in Africa offer goods or services of higher quality or cheaper than others in the international market, they will have higher confidence and capacity to negotiate and dominate partnership discussions to their benefit. Likewise, SSA businesses are expected to acquaint themselves with up-to-date market information in their target market, for example, the EU, and then decide "how to fit in." In this regard, potential collaborators are to first "identify the cash cows (in their target foreign markets) and then strategise and milk that cow" (Research Participant #9, 2021). This makes it imperative for B2B candidates to have a strong market intelligence function to navigate their way to success.

Moving towards sustainable partnerships

Research Participant #7 expressed grave concern that many collaborations are short-lived because they have short-term goals of "merely securing business deals." They opined that a partnership that is meant to be sustainable must be built on "win-win" strategies where each party has some benefits as long as the partnership continues to exist. They argued that when parties to such collaborations contemplate a long-term relationship, they are likely to act in the interest of each other, and they would be equally concerned about the gains of the other party, without which the partnership cannot stand firm.

According to the research participants, a sustainable collaboration should result in a perpetual win-win, growth and development of all partners involved. Research Participant #10 also suggested that B2B collaborators from developed countries should support the capacity development of their collaborators from SSA because it will be to their mutual benefit if they are well resourced and are able to meet the required standards for effective collaboration. Participants #4, #5, and #7 also added that logistical and resource support components are usually conspicuously missing in most of such collaborations, and even when they exist, they are hardly implemented adequately to serve the interest of their counterparts from developing countries. Collaborators from developed countries are, therefore, encouraged to support their trade partners who are less industrialised to help improve their capacities so they can become jointly competitive.

Conclusion

The study began with theoretical underpinnings of international trade and how B2B collaborations play a key role in promoting cross-border trade. Then came the economic and business arguments from literature on the need for sustainable collaborations to promote international trade in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). This context resulted in the need to identify the success factors for B2B partnerships and how they help to developed international enterprises. Literature analysis indicate that African enterprises are not benefitting adequately from cross-border B2B collaborations. This led to the identification of the missing gap to find out how international B2Bs can become more beneficial African businesses. This formed the basis for the development of the appropriate instruments for empirical data collection from multiple stakeholders. The results are the outcomes of both the literature analysis and empirical data collected during the research period between January 2021 and March 2022.

The following emerged out of the study as key success factors for promoting partnerships between firms in SSA and their foreign counterparts. The KSFs are:

1. International image and reputation of the entrepreneur's home country.
2. Reputation and credibility of the enterprise that is seeking a partnership.
3. Ability to build trust to attract and maintain partnerships.
4. The level of understanding and integration into the home culture of the foreign partner.
5. Ability to establish a common business language with the partner.
6. A balanced negotiation power and capacity of the partners.
7. Ability to pursue comparative advantage to offer unique value to the foreign partner.
8. Being committed to establishing sustainable partnerships.

Table 2 summarises the key success factors for ensuring effective collaboration between SSA firms and their counterparts from developed countries. It also provided an analysis of economic actors who should primarily take responsibility to o ensure that the indicators for the various KSFs are positive and generate the needed benefit from such collaborations for a win-win cross-border business.

Table 2: Key Success Factor for Promoting Sustainable Collaborations Between Entrepreneurs in SSA and their Global North Counterparts

S/N	Key success factor	Primary responsibility
1.	International image and reputation of the home country	Government and citizens
2.	Enterprise-level reputation and credibility	Enterprises
3.	Building trust	Enterprises
4.	Foreign culture orientation	Enterprise executives and their agents

5.	Business language effect	Government, enterprise executives, and their agents
6.	Negotiation power and capacities	Enterprise executives and their agents
7.	Pursuing comparative advantage	Government and enterprises
8.	Moving towards sustainable partnerships	Government, enterprise executives, and their agents

Source: Authors' construct (2022)

Table 2 also ascribed primary responsibilities to the respective stakeholders who are expected to ensure that the benefits are derived from these potential success factors. The KSFs could have either negative and positive effects on international business partnerships, depending on how they are managed. That is why it is important to ensure that all stakeholders play their respective roles in ensuring that the South-South and North-South business partnerships are re-engineered and promoted to benefit all parties involved. It would be useful to continue investigating the cross-border B2B situation in SSA in several ways. This study has created a general understanding of the success factors of B2B partnerships. It would, therefore, be interesting to have some case studies of partnership pairs between, for example, African and European enterprises to provide a contextual understanding of this phenomenon. Additionally, it would be useful to have further in-depth studies into B2B collaborations by productive sectors such as manufacturing, service, agriculture, trade, or other areas of interest to countries SSA.

References

Ahmed, F., Patterson, P. and Styles, C. (1999). The Determinants of Successful Relationships in International Business. Australasian Marketing Journal, **7**, pp. 5–21.

Amponsah, S., Okada, Y. and Stanislawski, S. (2019). Partnership, Innovation, Commitments and Gains of the Poor Business in Inclusive Ghana: Multiple Case Studies. Journal of Business Diversity, **19**, pp. 10–21.

Archer, N. P., Maheshwari, B., Kumar, V. and Kumar, U. (2006). Optimising success in supply chain partnerships. Journal of Enterprise Information Management, **19**, pp. 277–291.

Batmanabane, V. and Kfouri, J. (2017). Qualitative data collection: Interviews. Available at: https://lms.su.edu.pk/download?filename=1588528363-interviews-jk-vb-v7-march-1.pdf&lesson=22717

Belz, F. M. and Binder, J. K. (2017). Sustainable entrepreneurship: A convergent process model. Business Strategy and the Environment, **26**, pp. 1–17.

Boateng, K. (2020). Local content and the continental free trade agreement: How local SMEs can fully participate. Ghana: Invest in Africa and Mastercard Foundation Masterclass. C Available at: hrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://appghana.com/uploads/growthub/Local%20Content%20&%20AFCTA.pdf

Corsten, D. and Kumar, N. (2005). Do Suppliers Benefit from Collaborative Relationships with Large Retailers? An Empirical Investigation of Efficient Consumer Response Adoption. Journal of Marketing, **69**, pp. 80–94.

Das, T. K. and Teng, B.-S. (1998). Between Trust and Control. Developing Confidence in Partner Cooperation in Alliances. Academy of Management Review, **23**, pp. 491–512.

Dyer, J.F., Kale, P. and Singh, H. (2001). How To make Strategic Alliances Work. MIT Sloan Management Review, **42**, pp. 37–43.

Flick, U. (ed.) (2018). The SAGE handbook of qualitative data collection. London: Sage. doi: https://www.doi.org/10.4135/9781526416070.

Fukui, S. (2019). Economic development in developing countries and the future of trade agreements, Japanese Journal of Agricultural Economics, **21**, pp. 50–55.

Ganesan, S. (1994). Determinants of long-term orientation in buyer-seller relationships. Journal of Marketing, **58**, pp. 1–19.

GEPA (2020). 2019 Report on analysis of non-traditional export statistics. Accra. Available at: https://www.gepaghana.org/export-statistic/gepa-annual-report-2019-full-version-2/ (Accessed: 12 May 2020).

Gil-Pareja, S., Llorca-Vivero, R. and Martínez-Serrano, J. A. (2019). Reciprocal vs nonreciprocal trade agreements: Which have been best to promote exports? PLoS ONE, **14**, pp. 1–15.

Glavee-Geo, R., Burki, U. and Buvik, A. (2020). Building Trustworthy Relationships with Smallholder (Small-scale) Agro-commodity Suppliers: Insights from the Ghana Cocoa Industry. Journal of Macromarketing, **40**, pp. 110–127.

Grossman, G. M. (2016): The Purpose of Trade Agreements, in Handbook of Commercial Policy, pp. 379–434. doi: 10.1016/bs.hescop.2016.04.016.

Gulati, R. (1995). Does Familiarity Breed Trust? The Implications of Repeated Ties for Contractual Choice in Alliances. Academy of Management Journal, **38**, pp. 85–112.

Hayes, A. (2020). Comparative Advantage, Investopedia. Available at: https://www.investopedia.com/terms/c/comparativeadvantage.asp (Accessed: 12 May 2020).

Kim, D.-Y., Kumar, V. and Kumar, U. (2010). Performance assessment framework for supply chain partnership. Supply Chain Management: An International Journal, **15**, pp. 187–195.

Knight, S. (2013). Interview guide preparation and use, Office of Faculty Excellence Presentation: Formulating In-Depth Interview Questions, pp. 1–4. Available at: http://core.ecu.edu/ofe/StatisticsResearch/KNIGHT Preparing Interview Guide.pdf (Accessed: 12 May 2020).

Kuratko, D. F. (2014). Introduction to Entrepreneurship. 9th edn. South-Western, Cengage Learning.

Lambe, C. J., Spekman, R. E. and Hunt, S. D. (2002). Alliance Competence, Resources, and Alliance Success. Conceptualisation, Measurement, and Initial Test. Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, **30**, pp. 141–158.

Lawrence, A. T. and Weber, J. (2017). Business and Society. 15th edn. New York: McGraw-Hill Education.

Lincoln, Y. S. and Guba, E. G. (1986). But is it rigorous? Trustworthiness and authenticity in naturalistic evaluation. New directions for program evaluation, 30 (1986), pp. 73–84.

Liu, C-L. E. (2012). An investigation of relationship learning in cross-border buyer-supplier relationships: The role of trust. International Business Review, **21**, pp. 311–327.

Liu, X. (2016). Trade agreements and economic growth. Southern Economic Journal, **82**, pp. 1374–1401.

Loconto, A. (2014). Sustaining an enterprise, enacting sustainabiliTea. Science, Technology, & Human Values, **39**, pp. 819–843.

Mockler, R. J., Dologite, D. G. and Carnevali, N. M. (1997). Type and structure of multinational strategic alliances: the airline industry. Strategic Change, **6**, pp. 249–260.

Mofokeng, T. M. and Chinomona, R. (2019). Supply chain partnership, supply chain collaboration and supply chain integration as the antecedents of supply chain performance. South African Journal of Business Management, **50**, pp. 1–10.

Mpinganjira, M., Roberts-Lombard, M. and Svensson, G. (2017). Validating the relationship between trust, commitment, economic and non-economic satisfaction in South African buyer-supplier relationships. Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing, **32**, pp. 421–431.

Mutala, A. M. (2014). Trade agreement between Europe and Africa: Ghana and the Economic Partnership Agreements in Perspective. University of Ghana. Available at: http://ugspace.ug.edu.gh (Accessed: 12 May 2020).

Ngowi, A. and Pienaar, E. (2005). Trust factor in construction alliances. Building Research & Information, **33**, pp. 267–278.

Noble, H. and Heale, R. (2019). Triangulation in research, with examples, Evidence-Based Nursing, **22**, pp. 67–68.

Nwokocha, V. C. and Madu, I. A. (2020). Strategic Alliance and Its Influence on the Performance of Small- and Medium-scale Enterprises in Enugu State, Nigeria. Global Journal of Emerging Market Economies, **12**, pp. 199–216.

Onyango, O. J., Onyango, M. B., Kiruri, S. N. and Karanja, S. N. (2015). Effect of Strategic Supplier Relationship Management on Internal Operational Performance of Manufacturing Firms: A Case of East African Breweries Limited, Kenya. International Journal of Economics, Finance and Management Sciences, **3**, pp. 115–124.

Osei-Assibey, E. (2015). Export Promotion in Ghana. Available at: http://includeplatform.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/GTF-Export-Promotion-in-Ghana-SR-formatted.compressed.pdf (Accessed: 12 May 2020).

Parkhe, A. (1993). Strategic Alliance Structuring. A Game Theoretic and Transaction Cost Examination of Interfirm Cooperation. Academy of Management journal, **36**, pp. 794–829.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). Two Decades of developments in qualitative inquiry: A personal, experiential perspective. Qualitative Social Work, **1**, pp. 261–283.

Pesch, R. and Bouncken, R. B. (2018). The double-edged sword of cultural distance in international alliances. Cross Cultural & Strategic Management, **24**, pp. 33–54.

Sambasivan, M., Siew-Phai, L., Mohamed, Z. A. and Leong, Y. C. (2013). Factors influencing strategic alliance outcomes in a manufacturing supply chain: Role of alliance motives, interdependence, asset specificity and relational capital. International Journal of Production Economics, **141**, pp. 339–351.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A. (2009). Research methods for business students. Fifth Edition. Pearson Education Limited.

Schmitz Whipple, J. and Gentry, J. J. (2000). A network comparison of alliance motives and achievements. Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing, **15**, pp. 301–322.

Shanka, M. S. and Buvik, A. (2019). When Does Relational Exchange Matters? Social Bond, Trust and Satisfaction. Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing, **26**, pp. 57–74.

Smith, J. B. and Barclay, D. W. (1999). Selling Partner Relationships: The Role of Interdependence and Relative Influence. Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management, **19**, pp. 21–40.

Spekman, R. E., Forbes, T. M., III., Isabella, L. A. and MacAvoy, T. C. (1998). Alliance Management. A View from the Past and a Look to the Future. Journal of Management Studies, **35**, pp. 747–772.

The World Bank (2021). GDP (current US$) Data, World Bank national accounts data, and OECD National Accounts data files. Available at: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?end=2020&start=1981(Accessed: 12 May 2020).

Turner, D. (2019). Beginners guide to coding qualitative data, YouTube. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lYzhgMZii3o (Accessed: 12 May 2020).

World Population Review (2021). 2021 World Population by Country, 2021 World Population by Country. Available at: https://worldpopulationreview.com/ (Accessed: 28 September 2021).