Rethinking **Research** Collaborative

Academics based in the global South

Resource materials to support fair
and equitable research partnerships

Introduction: Fair and equitable research partnerships

Collaborative research has become more popular in recent years, as emphasis on making research accessible and useful to different audiences has increased.

This way of working has been encouraged within the international development research sector, based on a recognition that understanding and responding to complex global development challenges necessitates knowledge held beyond the remit of a single type of actor or discipline. Academics based in universities in the global North are not only partnering with academics based in other institutions and countries, but also with actors from civil society, government and the private sector based in the global North and global South.

Recent UK-led research funding streams – specifically the Global Challenges Research Fund and the Newton Fund – have focused on making these partnerships 'fair and equitable'.

The Rethinking Research Collaborative is an informal international network of organisations – academics, civil society organisations (CSOs), international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and research support providers – who are committed to working together to encourage more inclusive, responsive collaborations to produce useful and accessible international development research.

We have identified eight principles to guide different research stakeholders in reflecting on what is needed to make research partnerships fair and equitable; underpinning them all is an emphasis on attitudes and behaviours, and the need to treat each other with basic dignity and respect. These principles are fully discussed in the introduction to this set of modules, but in summary they are:

1. Put poverty first.
2. Critically engage with context.
3. Challenge assumptions about evidence.
4. Adapt and respond.
5. Respect diversity.
6. Commit to transparency.
7. Invest in the relationship.
8. Keep learning.

This module, written for academics based in the global South, provides insights and ideas for translating these principles into practice. Five companion modules are aimed at CSOs in the global South, academics based in the global North, international NGOs, research brokers and research funders.

Our understanding of academics based in the global South

This module is aimed at academics based in the global South who are interested in fair and equitable research partnerships.

Academics based in the global South are very diverse – as diverse as the universities they work in. These range from very small to very large, from well-resourced to less well resourced, and from public to private; and they are located in very different low-income and middle-income countries, in capital cities and rural areas.

Our interviews with academics based in the global South showed that they develop as researchers in a very different world from their Northern counterparts, with access to different infrastructure, supervision and financial support. Career paths are not the same; for example, researchers often work for many years after their undergraduate degree, before pursuing part-time postgraduate study alongside their job.

Overall, universities and higher education institutions in the global South receive fewer public resources than their counterparts in the global North – all countries for which data are available that enjoy the highest expenditure on research and development (over 2.46% of GDP) are located in the global North.[1] This indicates the importance for academics based in the global South of international research partnerships and funding coming from diverse sources such as governments and international donors.

What do academics based in the global South bring to partnerships?

Academics based in the global South are key members of international research partnerships focused on development challenges. Their presence has implications in terms of ethics, academic and social impact, and sustainability.

Ethically, their participation is aligned with the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals, in which the needs and priorities of Southern countries are the driving force forging development research pathways and creating impact on poverty eradication.

Academics based in the global South are grounded in – and therefore more likely to understand – the constraints of development contexts. They also tend to be geographically closer to the types of challenges that are being studied by development

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1   UNESCO (2015) 'Research and development expenditure (% of GDP) data', https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/GB.XPD.RSDV.GD.ZS?view=map (accessed 23 July 2018).

research partnerships. Recent research found that those closely linked to a problem may be well placed to develop a solution, which challenges assumptions that researchers in the global North automatically strengthen the capacity of partners in the global South.[2]

Academics based in the global South bring not only their academic knowledge and specific epistemological positions to research partnerships, but also contextual, cultural and linguistic expertise, and access to people and places. Their presence in research partnerships reinforces the importance of valuing local experience and knowledge and giving due emphasis to the contexts where research is to be conducted; they can train UK-based academics on the theory and practice of research in their contexts. It also brings strategic relationships and knowledge of national development processes which can be important in ensuring that the research has influence.

As for sustainability, Southern research institutions and academics are well placed to contribute to long-term research agendas and work with other national and regional institutions to generate and institutionalise data systems that are contextually relevant.

Common challenges for academics based in the global South in research partnerships

Academics based in the global South experience significant challenges in being involved in international research partnerships. As noted above, their universities face numerous resource constraints. They seldom have government support with indirect costs and often have to resort to focusing on programmes that can generate revenue.[3] Some of our interviews with academics based in the global South noted that African universities get core funding for teaching, whereas UK universities get core funding for research. They are also limited by institutional barriers which include unnecessary controls, bureaucratic structures and underdeveloped research administrative infrastructure, especially in the newer universities.

While international funds and collaborations are needed to sustain these resource-restricted universities, it is organisations, universities and researchers in the global North that all too often dominate research partnerships financially and thematically.[4] For instance, in interviews, academics based in the global South noted that the setting of research budgets and themes in research calls does not always include them, and that they are often engaged at a later stage of the research process. The dominant role

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2   Lebel, J. and McLean, R. (2018) 'A better measure of research from the global south', Nature 559 (7712): 23–26.

3   Mamdani, M. (2007) Scholars in the Marketplace - the Dilemmas of Neo-liberal reform at Makerere University, 1989–2005. Dakar: CODESRIA; Muriisa, R.K. (2014) 'Rethinking the role of universities in Africa: leadership as a missing link in explaining university performance in Uganda'. JHEA/RESA 12(1): 69–92.

4   Adriansen, H.K. (2016) 'Global academic collaboration: a new form of colonisation?' The Conversation blog, 8 July, http://theconversation.com/global-academic-collaboration-a-new-form-of-colonisation-61382 (accessed 23 July 2018).

of research coordinator is often reserved for UK institutions, giving academics based in the global South inferior status as sub-contractors, collaborators or data sources, rather than as the principal investigators or co-investigators who contribute towards building new thinking and paradigms. As noted above, there is also often a belief that Southern researchers need training and capacity building, and that this training should come from the North.

Academics based in the global South also juggle a tricky balance between domestic relevance and international reputation and priorities. Should they focus on national needs or fight for recognised international positions? In both Southern and Northern universities, 'research excellence' is a hotly debated concept, with significant implications for the funding of international research partnerships dealing with poverty and inequality. While some understand 'excellence' to signify elite and high-tech research directed outwards to large business centres and worldwide networks, others note that this research may create 'islands of excellence' in a sea of national challenges.[5]

A further challenge is that North–South collaborations are considered the norm in international research partnerships – at the expense of Southern-led and South–South research initiatives, which are far less visible in the diversity of international research partnerships.[6]

These debates highlight the question of how funders of international research collaborations understand research excellence and partnership, and how this understanding in turn creates challenges for academics based in the global South to position themselves in these partnerships.

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5 Leach, M. and Waldman, L. (2009) 'Centres of Excellence? Questions of Capacity for Innovation, Sustainability and Development', STEPS Working Paper 23, Brighton: STEPS Centre, http://steps-centre.org/wp-content/uploads/leach-and-waldman-paper-23.pdf (accessed 27 July 2018); Stilgoe, J. (2014) 'Against excellence', The Guardian, 19 December www.theguardian.com/science/political-science/2014/dec/19/against-excellence (accessed 27 July 2018).
6 Examples include the South-South Tricontinental Programme, the South–South Initiative on Rural Education, the Least Developed Countries Universities Consortium for Climate Change, and international research programmes such as the South-South Exchange Programme for Research on the History of Development.

Checklist

This checklist provides you with a set of questions designed to enable you to think about fair and equitable partnership in different areas of research practice – focused specifically on your role as a broker and your engagement in international research partnerships.

As you explore the different elements of the table you might like to consider the following three questions:

- What are your non-negotiables in this area?
- What would it be helpful to know/understand about your collaborator(s) in this area?
- What would you need to discuss together?

Area of practice	Key questions
Research agenda-setting and governance	▶ **The South, before the call.** Are Southern research institutions participating in the conceptualisation of research ideas before a call for proposals is out? Is there any funding tailored for academics based in the global South to prepare and lead on a partnership? ▶ **Southern needs.** Are the research challenges and portfolios of Southern research councils and other Southern institutions being considered? ▶ **South–South collaboration.** Are there initiatives and funding to support South–South research collaboration within the partnership? ▶ **Southern costs.** Is the budget for research taking into consideration indirect costs, inflation and contingencies for Southern universities? Is the budget skewed in favour of the (coordinating) institution(s) in the UK?
Enabling and supporting research partnerships	▶ **Strengthening Southern academic institutions.** Have Southern institutions, such as research councils and publishers, been prioritised in selecting partners to take part in the research process? Is there collaboration with Southern funders? Is there a specific plan for strengthening Southern institutions and their agendas? ▶ **Collaboration agreements.** Have legally binding agreements with clearly defined roles and responsibilities been developed? Are Southern institutions adequately resourced to engage equitably with these legal processes?

Enabling and supporting research partnerships	▶ **Equitable governance.** Are the steering committee and scientific advisory boards representative of the partnership? (i.e. if the partnership is with Africa, are there any African members?) ▶ **Equitable ethics.** Which ethical protocols have been followed? Have UK ethical standards taken precedence over national standards from other participating countries? ▶ **Equitable training.** Who is giving training to whom? Are academics based in the global South giving any of the training? Have areas such as country knowledge and 'research-in-use' been considered? Are exchange programmes planned in different directions, e.g. North-to-South, South-to-North, or South-to-South? ▶ **Northern capacity building and context sensitivity.** Are the Northern academics in the partnership familiar with the culture of the area where the research is being carried out? Have UK-based researchers visited partners in the global South and the research areas, and actively engaged with the researchers there? Is relationship development supported so that mutual understanding and trust can be built?
Research design and implementation	▶ **Southern academic roles.** Do Southern academics hold principal investigator or co-investigator positions, or are they sub-contractors, collaborators or data sources? Are opportunities for doctoral and post-doctoral students equal for Northern and Southern universities? ▶ **Ongoing presence of Southern academics.** Is the involvement of Southern academics being sought at all the stages of the research? ▶ **Transparency.** Has there been transparency and agreement about the division of responsibilities and the budget? Have the potential contextual constraints on Southern partners been explicitly considered?

Research communication, access, uptake, adaptation and use	▶ **Equitable ownership of data and results.** Are the data, findings and publications from the research partnership equitably owned by all partners? Are communication outputs aimed at the global South being prioritised? What opportunities do you have to present findings in regional and global fora? ▶ **Public sharing.** Are all partners free to share findings in public? Is there agreement about when this sharing can take place, and in what formats? Have different data management expectations and legal frameworks been considered? ▶ **Southern publishing.** Is there support for research to be published in the South and if so, in which languages? Have Southern publishing and translation been prioritised in the initial allocation of resources? What support is there for Southern based academics to publish internationally?
Beyond the research	▶ **Institutional impact.** Has the partnership had any effect on developing long-term equitable relationships between Northern and Southern universities? ▶ **Learning.** Are there opportunities for Southern experiences to be fed back to their own institutions, or to UK-based academics, brokers and funders? How will you use the new skills that you have learnt? ▶ **Sustainability.** Is there a sustainability plan so that the collaboration does not finish with the end of donor funding?

Two tools to support reflection

Tool 1: Actors and influence matrix

Source: **Rethinking Research Partnerships**

What

This matrix tool explores the power that each actor in a research partnership has at each stage of the research. The tool can be used before the start of a partnership, for planning, or at the end, to assess it.

Why

The matrix can help academics based in the global South to locate themselves in the stages of a research partnership in respect to other actors, and analyse their relative power. The matrix does not assume that all partners should be involved in everything, but rather that their involvement is analysed, that the partners agree with the distribution of power, and that they have the chance to ask for more or less ownership in any stage of the research process.

How

1. Start by collectively making a list of the key actors involved in your research partnership. The list will go along the top of your matrix, and might include UK or Southern universities, funders, and international NGOs.
2. Think about the different stages of your partnership or research project and write these down the side of your matrix. These might include research design, budget allocation, data collection, data analysis and publications.
3. To complete the matrix, work as a group and think about who has the most power or influence at each moment of the process. You can use a five-point scale, with 1 indicating the least power or influence and 5 the most. You could also use a different scale, colours or symbols. In all cases, ensure that the final decision for each number, colour or symbol is collectively agreed.
4. Reflect on the matrix: did any actors have more influence or power than others – you can total the values given for each actor at the bottom of the table and compare them. Why did this happen? For each actor, did this power vary depending on the research stage, or did it stay constant? Did you agree on the power allocations?

Further discussion

If you have time, you may want to analyse different types of power such as expert power, financial power or networking power. If you have little time, you may want to limit the number of actors you analyse to two or three, for instance comparing academics based in the global North with those based in the global South.

Who influences when?	INGO			National	UK university		National university	Donor
	Management	HQ	Country office	NGO	Management	Academic		institutional
Establishing partnership	3	3		1	3	3	1	2
Proposal Development	2	4	1		2	4		3
Research Design		2	1	1		5		
Data Collection			2	4			4	
Data Analysis		2	1			4	1	
Monitoring & Evaluation		4	4	2				2
Article writing		1	1	1		5	1	
Event (research findings)	3	5			1	1		2

Tool 2: Communication onion – what evidence is shared?

Source: **Rethinking Research Partnerships**

What

The onion tool analyses research communication outputs and dissemination strategies. The exercise uses the metaphor of an onion, with many layers of skin, to help think through the different aspects of sharing and valuing evidence. The tool can be used before the start of a partnership, for planning, and at the end, to assess it.

Why

The onion can help academics based in the global South to analyse whether their evidence and ways of communicating are valued. You might reflect on the dominance of certain communication formats, languages or themes, the audiences targeted, or ownership of data and intellectual property.

In an international partnership, it is important that all partners feel represented in the final outputs and that these are adapted to and represent local, national and international needs. This includes, for instance, having outputs in languages other than English.

How

1. Think about the main ways you plan to or have communicated your research. This might include reports, policy briefs, academic journals or social media. Draw a rough pie chart reflecting the level of importance in terms of time and resources that you want to give each communications output by representing it with an appropriately sized slice of the pie. For example, in the image given, reports were the most important way of communicating research as compared to the others.

2. Draw another circle around this and extend out the pie chart divisions. In each of the segments, note how the piece of communication is to be accessed (online or offline), then draw another layer and consider the language of each output.

3. Additional layers might include the lead authors or the ownership of each communication output. You can adapt these to suit your project. Using different colours or shading might help make certain aspects more obvious.

4. Use the diagram to discuss any surprises: What formats are dominant, and which ones may be missing? Does it look like most of your communications are in one language? Do all audiences require the internet to access your communications? Who might be excluded or included? Who owns the different communication outputs?

Annotated resource guide

There are several existing resources offering support and guidance for facilitating and participating in equitable research partnerships, but none are explicitly tailored for academics based in the global South; those that are most relevant are listed below. There is a clear gap in the market for further guidance produced from the global South.

Research4Impact (2017)

Research4impact is an international networking site offering a platform for connecting people with similar research interests. The creators of the site suggest that the biggest barrier to improving research impact is relational.

Audience: The site advertises its services to three main groups, so you can sign up as an academic, non-profit or government.

Most useful: This resource may be useful for academics based in the global South to find collaborators, helping to overcome the common problem of 'usual suspects' in North–South collaborations, when researchers revert familiar 'go-to' partners after a call comes out. However, most profiles are for academics based in the global North, so it may not work as well for South–South research partnerships.

Where to find it: https://r4impact.org/

Towards Fair and Effective North–South Collaboration: Realising a Programme for Demand-driven and Locally Led Research (RAWOO, 2017)

The Netherlands Development Assistance Research Council (RAWOO) was a funding programme developed to promote demand-driven and locally led research in Ghana, supported by a North–South collaboration and Dutch researchers. The main motivation for the programme was growing recognition of the asymmetry in research partnerships – heavily skewed to the global North.

Audience: This open access academic journal article is accessible for multiple audiences, including academics, donors, governments, policy makers, practitioners and brokers, both in the global North and the global South.

Most useful: RAWOO is a good example of how a funder actively tried to challenge the dominant model – reversing power dynamics and making research projects responsive to in-country demand, rather than international and national funding agendas. RAWOO was disbanded in 2007, but remains a useful example of Southern-led research design which is especially useful for academics based in the global South who are advocating for this.

Where to find it: www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5683379/pdf/12961_2017_Article_251.pdf

See also www.die-gdi.de/uploads/media/studie_naar_research_partnerships.pdf

Building Partnerships of Equals: the Role of Funders in Equitable and Effective International Development Collaborations (UK Collaborative on Development Sciences, 2017)

This report explores the role that funders can play throughout the research lifecycle to select and build partnerships of equals. It reviews a range of funding models and illustrates them with case studies. It suggests several entry points and roles for academics based in the global South.

Audience: The report is aimed at staff in research funder organisations. Other members of the wider research for development community, including academics based in the global South, may also find the analysis useful in understanding current funder approaches.

Most useful: Some of the funding models presented are geared towards supporting academics in the global South. The report provides useful insights into the perspective of research funders, especially Chapter 3, 'Challenges and Learning'.

Where to find it: www.ukcdr.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Building-Partnerships-of-Equals_-REPORT-2.pdf

Rethinking Research Collaborative

About the collaborative

The Rethinking Research Collaborative is an informal international network of organisations – academics, civil society organisations, international non-governmental organisations and research support providers – who are committed to working together to encourage more inclusive responsive collaborations to produce useful and accessible international development research. It first came together to understand and develop principles and practice to support fair and equitable partnerships in response to global development challenges. It is planning a series of initiatives to encourage greater diversity of participation and leadership in international development research.

About these materials

These materials – an introduction, six modules and a set of case studies – provide insights and ideas to support research stakeholders to translate eight principles we have identified for fair and equitable research partnerships into practice. They were written by staff of Christian Aid's Centre of Excellence for Research, Evidence and Learning, and bring together original ideas with research carried out by the Rethinking Research Collaborative. They were funded by a grant from UK Research and Innovation (NS/A000075/1).

Contacts

Collaborative partners