

Pathways to impactful and equitable partnerships in Research for Development: A co-created, action-learning initiative

CONCEPT NOTE

Research partnerships for global development

International research partnerships are increasingly a go-to strategy of funding mechanisms, including those in the global development sector. More specifically, collaborations between stakeholders in the Global North and South are expanding. At the same time, there is growing recognition that successful research partnerships strive for equity, inclusion and mutual respect, and that power dynamics are a key element in determining how collaboration works in practice. Whilst there are growing debates about how research partnerships ought to be implemented so that they become more equitable and impactful, there is the risk that current narratives on equitable partnerships do not account for the priorities of stakeholders based in the Global South.

Most of the new wave of debates are currently driven by organizations in the Global North. In fact a recent scoping review of guidance on these types of collaborations confirms this (Voller et al. 2022¹). The authors' final review included 22 papers out of which only 6 had some participation from authors or institutions in the Global South.

¹ Voller, S., Schellenberg, J., Chi, P., & Thorogood, N. (2022). What makes working together work? A scoping review of the guidance on North–South research partnerships. *Health policy and planning*, 37(4), 523-534.

As the authors acknowledge, "Northern perspectives dominate the guidance and further exploration of what matters to Southern stakeholders is needed" (p. 532). If a new wave of efforts to create equitable and impactful research in development is driven only by priorities and narratives from institutions in the Global North, there is a risk that momentum gained in these current debates will not be transformative.

Partnerships involve multiple stakeholders, and everyone's perspectives should be considered. But can this occur when there are power imbalances between those involved? We believe that to enable frank conversations that can lead into new ways of implementing partnerships a careful and thoughtful process needs to be implemented in which there is enough space to account for diverse points of view, before trying to reach a consensus.

Our approach

In this context, Southern Voice is leading a research project, in collaboration with the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) and with the support of Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC). Its aim is to **understand and respond by exploring how imbalances in power relations within research partnerships and collaborations involving institutions in the global North and South can be meaningfully addressed, identifying the incentives and the means to drive change towards more inclusive and equitable arrangements.** Key questions to be addressed include:

- How can a more meaningful consideration be given to the perspectives, expectations and needs of multiple stakeholders in North-South research partnerships when there are power imbalances between those involved?
- How can open and honest dialogues be established that generate new ways of implementing North-South research partnerships?

- What incentives can be put in place to drive positive change towards more equitable, inclusive research partnerships involving those in global North and South and which actors and institutions are in a position to influence the change and to translate this learning into action?

Southern Voice will draw upon its wide network of experts in the Global South for their depth of knowledge and scientific expertise. IDS will play a key role in the project as a learning partner and connector to the institutions in the Global North.

The current project has two phases:

Phase I: Southern Voice and IDS are engaging in parallel and independent tracks, undertaking reviews of the literature and carrying out exploratory research working with stakeholders in global South and North respectively, to identify the divergence and convergence in perspectives among stakeholders, guided by the above questions.

Phase II: Southern Voice and IDS will bring together both the ideas and actors identified in the first phase to co-create on an action and research agenda to enhance research for development impact by improving the implementation of North-South partnerships.

In summary, our main activities include:

1. Mapping key actors and the knowledge they have produced that can inform a discussion on impactful and equitable knowledge systems.
2. Identifying core issues, among both Global North and South stakeholders that hinder us from having impactful partnerships.
3. Exploring desirable futures for research for development and the potential pathways to achieve these.

4. Crafting an enabling environment for these pathways within and outside the systems to support the idea of an equitable future for research for development.
5. Co-creating thought leadership on an equitable research for development field. We will offer mutual learning, and useful concepts and practices for participants in the process, and for a wider public good.

At the end of the process we aim to have an action and research agenda to improve research partnerships in global development. We will also foster a community of experts invested and committed to advancing such an agenda from their own positions and roles within the system.

Engagement

We hope to create various opportunities to discuss the issues and the way forward with other stakeholders. In the process, we will offer mutual learning, and useful concepts and practices for participants and for the wider community. We are particularly interested in gathering knowledge from stakeholders based in the Global South and North. We look forward to collecting both written material and having frank discussions on the challenges and opportunities faced by stakeholders and the wider community.

If you are interested in the project, please contact Andrea Ordóñez (andrea@southernvoice.org) or Geetika Khanduja (geetika@southernvoice.org) from Southern Voice. At IDS you can reach out to Peter Taylor (p.taylor@ids.ac.uk) or Erica Nelson (E.Nelson@ids.ac.uk).