

The Involvement of Southern Researchers in EU-funded Research

Introduction

North-South partnerships in development research have been the norm for over 35 years. It is argued that southern participation in development research helps to ensure that:

- research priorities will better reflect grassroots concerns;
- there will be better and more relevant problem definition and research questions; and
- there is a higher chance of recommendations being taken up for policy and practice.

In spite of these arguments, little is known about how North-South research partnerships are formed. How do southern researchers get to be involved in EU-funded research? How can the participation of southern researchers in EU-funded research be further strengthened? To answer these questions, we need an understanding of the factors that influence and shape partnership formation.



The purpose

This study explores the mechanisms by which southern researchers participate in EU-funded research and makes recommendations about how to increase their involvement and status in such research.

Headline facts

- Most North-South partnerships are formed between researchers known to each other, (usually northern researchers partnering with southern alumni) or between those who have met at events such as conferences;
- Personal contact will almost always be the driving factor behind partnership formation above other considerations such as research capacity, geographic location and others;
- Research uptake of development research is thought to be more certain where southern researchers are involved in the research and have ownership over the research direction and implementation;
- Most northern researchers would reject a partnership involving people they do not know;
- Donor or funding agency requirements can and do influence the nature of North-South research partnerships, particularly the issue of who is partnered with;
- North-South research partnerships can often be asymmetrical in their power relations and favour northern partners;
- The research priorities and methods adopted in these partnerships are often those that resonate with northerners' cultural and scientific traditions;



- Doubts exist about whether capacity development undertaken within North-South research projects can foster genuine scientific capacity capable of underpinning national scientific systems in the south;
- In conclusion, though good practice in managing partnerships is largely known and available, the incentive structures in place mean that many research partnerships do not adhere to this good practice.

Recommendations

The following recommendation is made to increase southern participation in EU-funded research:

- Assuming flexibility on the part of funding agencies, the easiest way to increase participation of southern researchers in EU-funded research is to make it possible for applicants worldwide to apply in their own right by removing the requirement for a North-South partnership

In the absence of such flexibility, the following recommendations are made to increase southerners' involvement and status in EU-funded research:

- The research participants should collectively agree the mission, values and goals of the partnership
- The research participants should recognise and build on individual strengths while quickly confronting aspects of the partnership that need improvement
- Power should be balanced equally among participants and resources distributed equitably according to workload
- Communication between participants should be clear and open and the research management should be easily accessible at all times;
- A consortium agreement outlining norms and processes should be agreed at the project's inception so that all participants are clear about their roles and responsibilities;
- Credit for the project's successes should be attributed equally;
- Publication rights should be agreed equitably; and
- There should be recognition that partnerships need to be nurtured; they take time to develop and evolve over time.



Further information

This is one of a series of SPLASH fact sheets available on the SPLASH website www.splash-era.net

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