



Panel PS182427: Reframing North-South Research Partnerships

Organized by Gilles Carbonnier and Tiina Kontinen

Chair: Isa Baud

Discussant: Henning Melber

The panel started with **Gilles Carbonnier's** presentation on the recent EADI policy paper "North-South Research Partnership: Academia Meets Development?" (<http://www.eadi.org/publications/eadi-policy-papers.html>) which is based on the 2-years work of the EADI sub-committee on research partnerships. The initiative of looking at the North-South research partnerships was motivated by shifts in the aid paradigm and the increasing need to address global challenges through effective, equitable partnerships involving Northern and Southern researchers alike. The report investigated how the instrumental and normative perspectives on partnerships discussed for decades in the field of international development cooperation apply in the sphere of academic North-South collaboration. He cited selected worst and best practices identified via questionnaire, interviews and literature review. Worst practices include the use of southern research resources and capacity to serve northern priorities, the lack of cultural and contextual sensitivity and mounting travel restrictions (Schengen). Best practices include the identification of truly joint research agendas, trust, clear definition of roles and responsibilities. He set a few key questions in regard to whose excellence counts, how to make use of the potentials of ICT, how to deal with partnerships on politically sensitive issues, and how to make room for effective, equitable North-South partnerships in programs such as Horizon2020.



Gilles Carbonnier

The first commentator, **Adrian Gurza Lavalle** from CEBRAP, University of São Paulo, Brasil, based on his extensive experience on different partnerships acknowledged that there has been much improvement in North-South partnerships in regard to the awareness of inequality. He pointed out how the post-developmental and global issues reinforce the need to include multiple partners such as civil society actors in struggling the common challenges. However, he reflected on the hard challenges still pertinent to research partnerships. These include the fact that development research

is driven by contradictory institutional incentives from academia (scientific results), donors and policy makers (policy relevance). The rising standards for funding often counteract with the objective of fostering genuine partnerships. For the Southern partners, entering into international publishing field includes struggle between “regional studies” and “international debates”. Often, Northern partners are essential in translating the research into international debates, which in turn, might not bear much of local relevance. He proposed two additional angles to the paper: networks and age. He distinguished between research-tested networks (based on experience of the partners and existing knowledge on the way partnership functions) and supposedly ready-to-act networks built in the last-minute requests from the Northern research institutes for particular calls. Because research-tested network is considered such a valuable asset, they also become a trap (“networks traps”) where that you continue working with the same partners notwithstanding the theme of the research. In regard to the age, the quest for successful bids often results to inclusion of well-established academics with strong CVs. We should put young researchers together to find research interests and build the research capacity of the next generation.



Adrian Gurza Lavalle

Jon-Andri Lys

Second commentator **Jon-Andri Lys** from Swiss Commission for Research Partnerships with Developing Countries (KFPE) reflected on the questions of learning. He pointed out the global imbalance in research funding where OECD countries, NICS, China, India and Brasil consume 94% of research funding. He presented the 11 principles and 7 questions published by KFPE (http://www.kfpe.ch/download/KFPE-Guide_11P7Q_E.pdf), which can be used to reflect on and avoid the pitfalls of power unbalances in global research partnerships. The particularity of N-S research partnerships lies in the intertwined but different goals: innovative research, capacity development and societal relevance and impact. The trade-off between these three cannot be avoided, but they can be reflected. He illustrated some of the guidelines for good partnership with an example of 12-year programme NCCR, which included 40 countries and over 400 researches involved. The example highlighted the importance of joint agenda setting which could take one year, the essential role of capacity building and interaction with different stakeholders in order to bring different interests together and construct ways of conflict resolution. He concluded that both scientific and non-scientific partners' agendas, including both the official narrative and the hidden agendas should be learned. Learning should be mutual and based on creative listening, mutual respect and reflection on questions such as who wins, who loses and who decides.

Discussant **Henning Melber**, a member of the EADI sub-committee of research partnerships began with reference to his own history in development research where some 40 years ago many of development researchers were engaged with critique of imperialism and power in world systems, but never thought about “ourselves as part of the problem”. The self-reflection on being part of reproducing global system has since increased. At the same time, he suggested that we should not take things as pre-determined but should have faith in our capability to step back and reflect. On the basis of his experience he made four observations: 1) in response to research calls the Northern institutions tend to have similar Southern partners with often identical letters of recommendation; 2) those who once manage to enter the game are in and other institutions tend to be continuously excluded; 3) management and the responsibility stays in the country where the funding was received and this division of labour again reproduces the dilemmas; 4) there is a tendency to support individuals rather than institutions and no evaluation of the continuation of the collaboration in forms of production of new joint proposals is made. He also suggested that the projects should have a required aspect to produce an edited volume distributed to South in addition to the peer reviewed articles required. He stressed the importance of new initiatives and concluded: “We have to pursue the same goals with differing but complementing responsibilities and transcend borders not only geographically but also mentally and beyond narrow disciplinary confinements, while paying respect and give recognition to diversity and otherness when seeking and establishing common ground. Last but not least, despite all these demanding aspects, we should never compromise on quality, but rather re-define the criteria for meaningful quality.”



Henning Melber and the speakers

The four contributions invited a lively discussion with the audience. The idea of promoting funding for partnership building was strongly supported and some existing mechanism of two-staged funding were cited. The opportunities brought by new initiative such as Future Earth (<http://www.futureearth.info/>) and the existing schemes of joint African and EU funding such as CAAST-net and ERAFRICA were mentioned (<http://www.caast-net-plus.org/>, <http://www.erafrica.eu/>).

The question of need to separated research partnership and capacity building and the need to redefine quality in a number of ways was raised since the current academic standards do not correspond with the capacity building and policy relevance aspirations. More inter- and transdisciplinary approaches associated with capacity-building were suggested.

In regard to the changing power constellations in North-South relations it was pointed out how Southern partners have sometimes hostile attitudes towards their Northern partners due to their

past experiences, and how especially the younger generation would like to have their “own show” without dependency from their Northern partners and the paternalism attached. In connection to the current international trends the effects of the results-based management were criticized. They tend to stress the instrumental aspects of partnerships and lessen the room for partnerships based on social capital. In addition, it was reminded that the results of the public funding should be public and not property of the international publishers.

At the end, *Isa Baud* draw together four lessons learned from the panel which could be pushed forward by the EADI subcommittee and others: 1) Issues of regulatory frameworks for the possibilities of network building including funding available; 2) Institutional reflection and learning on the partnerships; 3) Question of evaluation processes for redefining quality including the considerations on what counts quality publishing, and 4) Establishing global research networks that build on social capital.

On the basis of the discussion the action points for the future work of the EADI sub-committee of research partnerships include:

- Having a closer look of the new funding initiatives and their potentialities
- Continuing the discussion in different fora and advocating for funding for partnership building and networking
- Keeping the agenda of re-defining the quality in partnerships in development research without giving up the quest for high quality
- Expanding the perspectives on research partnerships, for example including the aspect of protection in the politically sensitive research subjects

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