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Research-implementation organizations – defining a new SD actor?

KFPE Annual Conference: Decolonizing Swiss Research Collaborations

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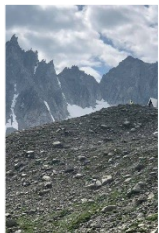# Background and rationale

The role of HEI in SD

Academia/ research for SD

Education

Operations & services

Research

Outreach & Partnerships

Gap Academic/research institutions that have a separate mandate for project implementation services: research-implementation institutions

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Study series on RIOs

2020 Swiss institutions

2021 African institutions

2022 Funders' perspective

Output

Objective Create a common baseline for discussion for institutions and funders

Saric et. al. Sustainability (2021)13:9626; Saric et. al. Sustainable Development (2022)1-16; https://www.swisstph.ch/en/research/research-governance

Participating entities

Research institutions

- **Participants** Director-level representatives and researcher-implementers
- **Switzerland** 23 participants from 18 institutions/centres/groups
- **Africa** 42 participants from 22 institutions and 13 countries

Funders

- 12 representatives from 5 funders

Outcomes: institutions

Description

Type
- Universities or affiliated institutions
- Universities of Applied Sciences and Arts
- National research organizations
- International research organizations

Structure
- Separate R&I by department/division
- Organize R&I activities and staff around themes/projects
- Supporting units for implementation activities
- No formalized structure for implementation

SWOT analysis

STRENGTHS
Research positively impacts development and project implementation
High job satisfaction
Comprehensive teaching and training of multi-skilled SD professionals

OPPORTUNITIES
Excellent and broad career and job opportunities
Model is liked by governments and international donors

WEAKNESSES
Difficult to achieve balance and high-level performance in both areas
Complex institutional/personal management and resource-intense
Lack of clear identity/definition, and therefore, lack of recognition

THREATS
Strong competition from three areas
Lack of hybrid career path and jobs in academia & research
Difficult to get staff with necessary double-competency

Outcomes: funders

Perception

- Low recognition as separate multipurpose actor
- Not generally included in strategic discussions
- Examples of «go-to» actors that are RIOs for certain funders/countries/domains
  + *"They do everything right."*
  + Well-connected with international expert networks/publications
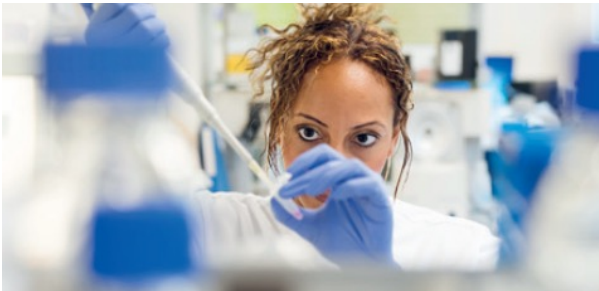 - Lack of capacity

Projects

- Projects with a research component
- High technical complexity and specialist knowledge
- Projects with a strong community outreach aspect
- Projects that demand a high level of trust
- Niche domain

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Research-Implementation Organization (RIO)

Definition

Organizations with mandates for i) research; ii) teaching; and iii) project implementation/ development assistance services

i. Track record of international publishing; governance framework includes regulations on good research practice & integrity

ii. Ability to offer degrees and continuing education and training courses

iii. Institutionalization of implementation activities: explicit mandate and supporting structures & procedures in place to carry out services as PI institution; institutional contracting

iv. Established work practices across mandates

Suggested way forward

«Institutions and funders are encouraged to use and work with the RIO label to enhance the standing of those institutions, their operations and significance for SD globally»

For institutions

- Communicate your organizations profile and added value for SD
  - Contributions to implementation
  - Teaching and training centres for SD workforce
  - Host mixed-type research careers and jobs
  - National program memory
- Review your processes and operations

For funders

- Include RIOs when mapping national actors
- Consider RIOs for certain types of projects
- Offer long term schemes and instruments that provide sufficient time and resources to
  - cover the whole innovation−implementation cycle
  - fill institutional capacity gaps

Acknowledgement

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