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Rethinking **Research** Collaborative

Promoting fair and equitable research partnerships to respond to global challenges

Research findings
September 2018

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UK Research and Innovation is a new body which works in partnership with universities, research organisations, businesses, charities, and government to create the best possible environment for research and innovation to flourish. We aim to maximise the contribution of each of our component parts, working individually and collectively. We work with our many partners to benefit everyone through knowledge, talent and ideas.

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Executive summary

Working in partnership is increasingly encouraged within the international development research sector, with initiatives such as the UK government's Global Challenges Research Fund and the Newton Fund promoting the idea of 'fair and equitable partnerships'.

In 2018, the Rethinking Research Collaborative designed and implemented a UKRI-funded project that aimed to improve policy and practice related to research collaboration through the generation of new data, learning exchanges and practical tools informed by a 'partners' perspective' from academics and practitioners based in the global South and UK-based international brokers.

This report presents findings from the project, and provides a background to a set of practical resources that different stakeholder groups can use in research partnerships.

It identifies eight principles for different stakeholder groups to apply to engage with the politics of partnerships.

Principles

1. **Put poverty first.** Constantly question how research is addressing the end goal of reducing poverty through better design and evaluation of responsive pathways to development impact.

2. **Critically engage with context(s).** Consider the global representativeness of partnerships and governance systems and commit to strengthening research ecosystems in the global South.

3. **Redress evidence hierarchies.** Incentivise intellectual leadership by Southern-based academics and civil society practitioners and engage communities throughout.

4. **Adapt and respond.** Take an adaptive approach that is responsive to context.

5. **Respect diversity of knowledge and skills.** Take time to explore the knowledge, skills and experience that each partner brings and consider different ways of representing research.

6. **Commit to transparency.** Put in place a code of conduct or memorandum of understanding that commits to transparency in all aspects of the project administration and budgeting.

7. **Invest in relationships.** Create spaces and commit funded time to establish, nurture and sustain relationships at the individual and institutional level.

8. **Keep learning.** Reflect critically within and beyond the partnership.

Introduction

> "If [UKRI] could foster genuine research collaborations over the medium to long term through its funding modalities, this would offer transformative potential for research. To make this possible, [UKRI] needs to consider the way the entire research funding pipeline is structured and how research collaboration can be strengthened at each point." (Practitioner based in the global South, interview)

International development often involves partnerships between different types of organisation, working across different sectors, and frequently across different geographical locations. This way of working is increasingly encouraged within the international development research sector with an added emphasis on combining different disciplines. Academics based in universities in the global North are not only partnering with academics based in other institutions and countries, but also with civil society, government actors and the private sector based in the global North and global South.[1]

Recent UK-led research funding streams (specifically the Global Challenges Research Fund – GCRF; and the Newton Fund - NF) have increasingly promoted the idea of 'fair and equitable research partnerships'; and UK based academics are encouraged to include academic partners from the global South and civil society practitioners in their research projects.

This focus on partnerships recognises that different individuals and institutions bring varied relationships, knowledges, skills and perspectives to the research. By working together in partnership people can collectively develop deeper understanding. Such collaborations offer new ways of approaching development challenges, and of thinking about poverty and development. They can generate insights and evidence to inform development practice and policy, to contribute to poverty eradication; and bring about more just and equitable societies. However, for these partnerships to achieve these aspirations there is a need to pay attention to what is meant by 'fair' and 'equitable' in practice.[2]

This report presents findings and recommendations from a project funded by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) in 2018, designed and implemented by the Rethinking Research Collaborative. The project aimed to improve policy and practice related to research collaboration through the presentation of new data, learning exchanges, and provision of practical tools.

The Rethinking Research Collaborative

The project team was composed of representatives from Christian Aid (Kate Bingley, Karen Brock, Hilary Cornish, Kate Newman, Kas Sempere), INTRAC (Rachel Hayman, Sarah Lewis), Praxis (Sowmyaa Bharadwaj, Pradeep Narayanan), and the UNESCO Chair programme in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education (Budd Hall, University of Victoria, and Rajesh Tandon and Wafa Singh, PRIA). It was coordinated by the Open University (Jude Fransman). All are part of the Rethinking Research Collaborative (RRC), an informal international network of academics, civil society organisations, international NGOs, and research support providers who are committed to working together to encourage more inclusive, responsive collaborations to produce useful and accessible development research.

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[1] In this study 'global North' refers broadly to those higher income countries, with a relatively developed higher education sector, that have greater levels of global political and economic influence. 'Global South' refers to lower and middle-income countries – listed as such by the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) - that tend to hold less power and have less developed research systems. We recognise that these are contested terms that mask inequalities within regions and countries across both groups.
[2] The use of the term 'equitable' rather than 'equal' is an acknowledgement of imbalance in the financial realities of different partners, which means that they are rarely equal and are unlikely to become so. We can, however, strive for greater equity in partnerships.

The project

The project aimed to bring to the fore a 'partners' perspective' on fair and equitable research partnerships in response to global challenges. It sought to offer a deeper understanding of persistent bottlenecks in partnerships that risk undermining the international development goals[3] of research initiatives such as the GCRF[4] and the NF; and to offer strategies to address these.

In particular the project aimed to address the limited voice of practitioners and academics based in the global South in the governance, design and implementation of UK-funded international development research. As well as including existing participants in GCRF and NF programmes, this also included actors who are either not currently engaged or who drop out early in process.

The project targeted three types of 'partner': academic institutions based in the global South; civil society organisations based in the global South; and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and international organisations providing research capacity building or playing a brokering role between the other partner groups and UK-based academics/research funders.

Objectives	What we did
To model a fair and equitable research partnership and generate reflexive learning.	Designed a collaborative process and reflected on the nature of participation throughout the process. Our experience is shared as part of the resources.
To gather qualitative research into partner experiences of participation through the lens of 'fair and equitable partnerships'.	Rapid data collection over three weeks, reaching out to individuals, networks and organisations in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe. Substantive responses were received from 59 people from 25 countries and regions. 15 people took part in webinar group interviews; 19 in individual interviews; and 25 made written contributions (see Annexes 1-3).
To draw on existing evidence-informed frameworks to identify barriers to and opportunities for fair and equitable participation in research.	Data analysis was guided by the iterative framework adapted from the ESRC seminar series: *Evidence and the Politics of Participation in Academic-INGO Research Partnerships for International Development*.
To convene a roundtable bringing international experts with decision-makers on UK research policy to establish principles for best practice, identify capacity needs for different stakeholder groups, and develop policy recommendations.	Thirty-four people attended a one-day round table on 27 April hosted by UKCDR, including: UK-based research funders and policymakers; UK-based academics and university administrators; research brokers and capacity building providers; INGOs; members of the RRC from Praxis, PRIA, University of Victoria, Africans Rising (headquartered in Senegal) and SEPHIS (headquartered in Brazil).
To consolidate existing resources on supporting best practice for different stakeholder groups.	Reviewed and synthesised resources on partnerships, identifying best practice and tools for partnerships targeted to different groups – see Annex 4.
To develop training modules for each stakeholder group responding to the principles of best practice.	New resources were produced for six stakeholder groups, including guidance checklists, targeted tools and resources, audio and written case studies.

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[3] See ICAI (2017) review: https://icai.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/ICAI-GCRF-Review.pdf
[4] http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/funding/gcrf

Reflections on the data

Data were collected rapidly over a period of three weeks, with three research partners taking responsibility for data collection and preliminary analysis:

- Praxis targeted civil society practitioners based in the global South
- UNESCO Chair (PRIA and University of Victoria) targeted academics based in the global South
- INTRAC targeted practitioners from UK-based INGOs and research capacity building providers based in the global North.

To identify participants we reached out within our own networks and shared possible contacts; samples were therefore purposive and based on existing relationships. Originally we anticipated using primarily webinars and group interviews, but many individuals were not available to join joint sessions and respondents were therefore offered three options: webinar, individual interview, or written response. Some responses were very detailed, while others were very brief. An overview of the data will be submitted to the UK Data Service.

We deliberately targeted a mix of people who could be potential research partners. Therefore some knew about and had been involved in recent GCRF or UKRI-funded international development research schemes (see Table 1). Others were less or not at all engaged with UKRI-funded schemes, but had been involved in other UK-government funded research (e.g. through DFID programmes) or research collaborations funded by other governments or donors.

Table 1. Knowledge of UKRI research schemes

Actor type	Knowledge of UKRI-funded schemes	
	Yes	No
Academics based in the global South	50%	50%
Civil society in the global South	17%	83%
INGOs and brokers	82%	18%

As well as providing some detailed qualitative data on the perceptions and experiences of these groups, the process also served as an awareness-raising exercise with several respondents commending the consultation.

> "I would like to laud the effort of RCUK to take this initative of reaching out to agencies/NGOs like us to find out what we have to say. It is always helpful to provide Southern agencies a platform to amplify their voices on global forums." (Practitioner based in the global South, written input)

Reflections on the resources

The review of existing resources drew on the knowledge of the roundtable participants, as well as the RRC advisory group and our broader networks to identify a large number of resources that could be built on or reworked. The review was limited to those resources available in English and published after 2012. Some international resources were included (e.g. those developed by funders and brokers in Australia, Canada, the Netherlands and Switzerland). However, due to the strategic nature of this project to inform UKRI policy, most of the resources were focused on the UK's research and development policy and funding context. While there are many generic guides on research partnerships, few have focused specifically on academics and practitioners based in the global South, or brokers. A summary of the resources is in Annex 4.

Summary of the findings: challenges and opportunities

Annexes 1, 2 and 3 provide a detailed synopsis of the data gathered through group and individual interviews as well as written contributions, divided into three respondent groups: academics based in the global South, practitioners based in the global South, and UK-based INGOs and or brokers.

We used a common framework for data collection and analysis, posing questions around experiences, opportunities and obstacles within different dimensions of the research system (see Figure 1). We also asked respondents for suggestions and recommendations for UKRI.

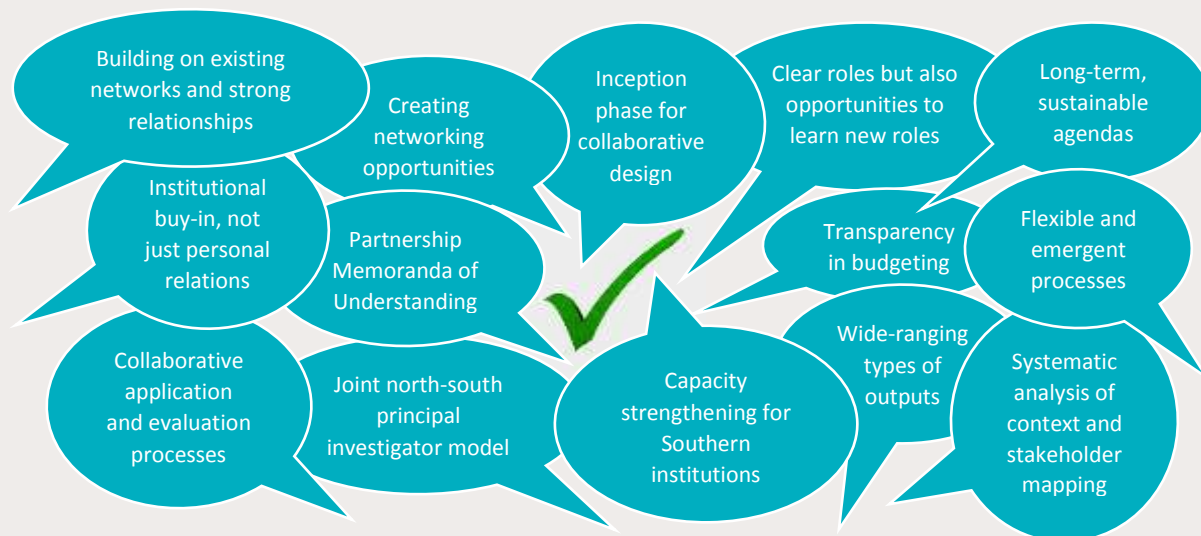**Figure 1. The research framework**
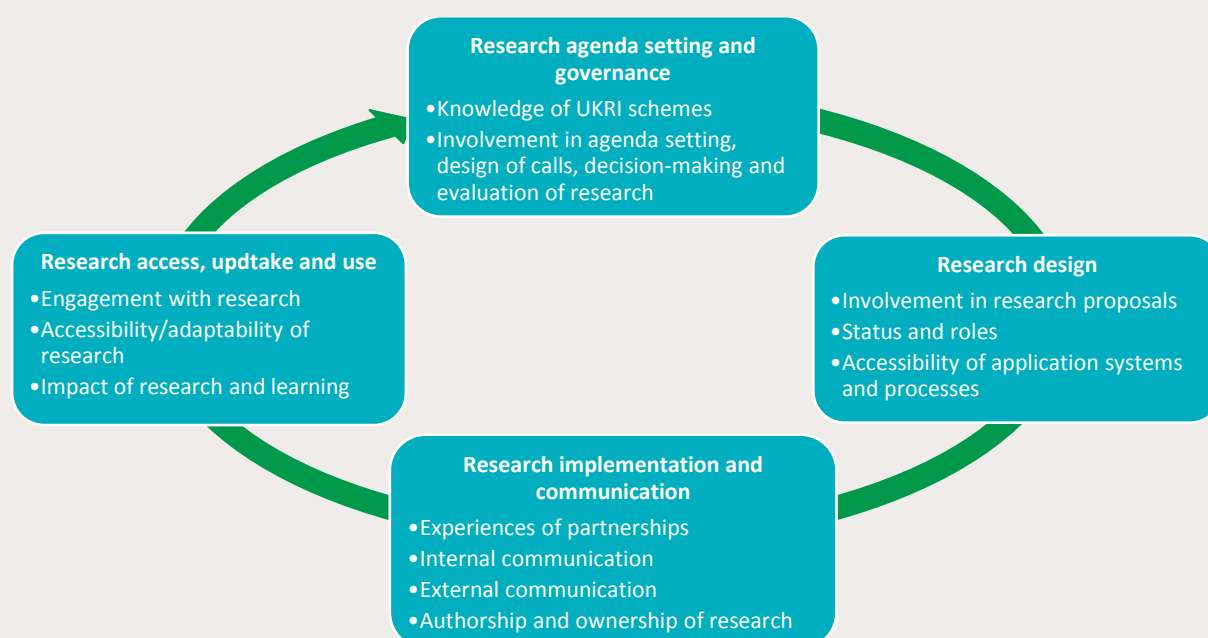
Preliminary findings from the primary data collection were presented at the roundtable and discussed with representatives from the six stakeholder groups. While the data were consolidated to provide a clear overview of the findings, there was some variation across the different partner groups. The most significant of this was the differing degrees of power (as measured by access to resources, research capacity and degrees of participation) across the partners. While the UK-based INGOs and brokers had frequently taken the decision not to participate in research partnerships (53% of respondents), very few of the Southern-based academics (14%) and none of the Southern-based practitioners had refused the offer to participate. One civil society practitioner based in Africa noted: "As a researcher based in the global South with a very difficult funding environment, it is not really an option to choose not to be involved in a research collaboration if there is a relatively good prospect of funding." Other trends and variations can be observed in the data in Annexes 1-3.

The roundtable discussion raised new insights and ideas, including from UK-based research funders and academics. When we combined the data from these sources, we identified a lot of good practice and ideas for 'what works' to facilitate fair and equitable partnership.

What works...

Systems and structures

- Building on existing networks and strong relationships
- Creating networking opportunities
- Inception phase for collaborative design
- Clear roles but also opportunities to learn new roles
- Long-term, sustainable agendas
- Institutional buy-in, not just personal relations
- Partnership Memoranda of Understanding
- Transparency in budgeting
- Flexible and emergent processes
- Collaborative application and evaluation processes
- Joint north-south principal investigator model
- Capacity strengthening for Southern institutions
- Wide-ranging types of outputs
- Systematic analysis of context and stakeholder mapping

Values and ways of working

- Responding to practice-based agendas
- Valuing local culture and language
- Passion, honesty, respect, humility
- Mutual respect for the different skills that partners bring
- Shared values and visions
- Involving communities and local groups
- Good communication
- Constant learning and reflection
- Recognition of each other's restrictions
- Setting criteria for saying yes or no to a partnership

Several issues in terms of 'what works' to foster fair and equitable partnerships cut across the different respondent groups, notably the value of existing networks and strong relationships; the importance of humility, respect and honesty; the benefits of responding to context and involving communities and local groups in all dimensions of research; and the importance of stakeholder engagement throughout framed by a strong understanding of pathways to development impact.
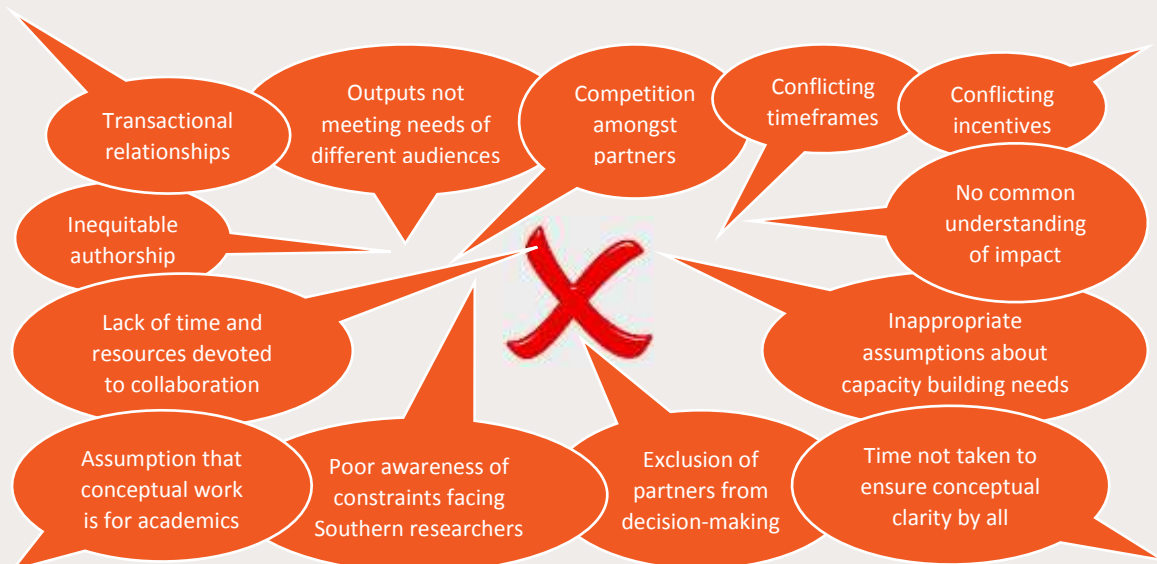
... and what doesn't

The data also revealed many approaches, systems and structures that undermine fair and equitable partnership. Many were the direct opposite of 'what works' above, such as lack of clarity in roles, lack of transparency, research not addressing the concerns of communities, and relationships being over-reliant on personal commitment if not institutionalised. However, additional obstacles were also raised which are important to emphasise. These can be divided loosely into challenges within a partnership that could be resolved by the partners themselves, and challenges within the research funding system that require action by funders and institutional leaders.

Systemic barriers

- IP held by UK academic
- Incompatible procedures between institutions
- Lack of awareness of funding opportunities
- Exclusion of partners from project leadership
- Funding models not attuned to Southern reality
- Research agendas determined by UK academic interests
- Lack of respect for different knowledges and concepts of impact
- Unequal access to funding opportunities
- Academic lead wants to hold onto the money
- Tight timeframes of calls
- Expectation of data being stored in UK repositories
- Inaccessible application and reporting

"Partnerships seem more designed to meet the strategic objectives of UK funders and institutions; UK laws and regulations are sometimes expected to filter through and be complied with by African institutions [without consideration of constraints around, e.g.] data sharing, access to information; weak African institutional policy frameworks and bureaucracy; immigration laws etc." (Academic based in the global South, written input)

Weaknesses within partnerships

- Transactional relationships
- Outputs not meeting needs of different audiences
- Competition amongst partners
- Conflicting timeframes
- Conflicting incentives
- Inequitable authorship
- No common understanding of impact
- Lack of time and resources devoted to collaboration
- Inappropriate assumptions about capacity building needs
- Assumption that conceptual work is for academics
- Poor awareness of constraints facing Southern researchers
- Exclusion of partners from decision-making
- Time not taken to ensure conceptual clarity by all

"We have discussed potential bids with around nine universities/institutions though none resulted in either a successful bid, or a submission in which we retained the role initially proposed. In one instance we were due to be a partner … but when the bid went to the director/institutional management there was a clear wish to keep those roles in-house and we were dropped." (INGO, written input)

Setting principles for fair and equitable partnerships

For all its benefits, partnership itself is never a neutral good. Different motivations, experiences, skills and incentives all contribute to influencing power relations external to the partnership and the dynamics within the partnership itself.

Many recommendations and suggestions emerged from the data and discussions of this project. From these we identified the following eight principles which can be applied by different stakeholder groups to engage with the politics of partnership and to help with developing fair and equitable partnerships.

1. Put poverty first

International development research that is funded as part of the UK's Official Development Assistance (ODA) commitments has to have an impact on poverty. To live up to this principle, partners need to constantly question how the process and activities of the research are addressing the end goal. This requires a consideration of whose knowledge and agendas count and greater attention to research uptake and use long after initial funding might end. This might involve better considered pathways to development impact (with potential learning from the monitoring, evaluation and learning practices of development practitioners and use of existing data systems). Research governance through agenda-setting and evaluation should also reflect this principle.[5]

> "Research becomes meaningful only when it helps the communities… it is extremely important to reflect on what constructive purpose the research is serving in light of the larger societal context and how it is contributing in making the world a better place to live." (Academic based in the global South)

> "Partnerships for research are more needed in today's world, where diverse people across the globe share common concerns and interests that they aspire to share and tackle in collaborative frameworks." (Practitioner based in the global South)

2. Critically engage with context(s)

A commitment to this principle requires conscientious analysis of the contexts of research governance, implementation and use. This should include a systematic mapping of the relevant stakeholders, as well as consideration of the representativeness of both partnerships and agenda-setting/evaluation committees and review colleges. Some assessment should also be made of the national and regional inequalities that might be exacerbated by an over-reliance on partners from higher income countries and capital cities. Funding should respond to the realities of institutions in the global South, which may be more under-resourced than UK-based counterparts.

Finally, capacity-strengthening initiatives should build on analyses of context to develop sustainable responses grounded in existing national and regional institutions. This might involve granting more

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[5] Lebel, J. and R. McLean (2018) 'A better measure of research from the global south', *Nature* **559**, 23-26. Available from: https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-018-05581-4 [last accessed 24 July 2018]

power to regional funders such as the Alliance for Accelerating Excellence in Science in Africa (AESA) and funding more national and regional networking and agenda-setting events.

> "If the [UKRI] could foster genuine research collaborations over the medium to long term through its funding modalities, this would offer transformative potential for research. To make this possible, [UKRI] needs to consider the way the entire research funding pipeline is structured and how research collaboration can be strengthened at each point." (Practitioner based in the global South)

3. Redress evidence hierarchies

To live up to this principle, funders, brokers and partners should recognise that different stakeholders (including those from different academic traditions as well as other development professionals) will have different expectations as to what 'quality evidence' means to them. This influences whose knowledge is valued, how research is designed and implemented, what types of research outputs are produced and which audiences are considered. Clarity about evidence preferences at the start of the process will enable productive discussions across a range of issues throughout the partnership process.

A conscious effort should be made to redress evidence hierarchies by incentivising intellectual leadership by Southern-based academics and civil society practitioners and engaging communities across all dimensions of research. Existing networks grounded in community-based research (such as the UNESCO Chair's Knowledge for Change initiative and Africans Rising's People's Assembly can provide existing mechanisms for this).

> "Academics from developing countries remain sources of data rather than of new thinking and paradigms." (Academic based in the global South, webinar)

> "Leadership should not be determined merely by geography or history, but by the capabilities and experience of those involved. Researchers in the global South should not be constantly put in the position of providing data for those in the UK to analyse and publish." (Practitioner based in Africa, written input)

4. Adapt and respond

International development activities rarely follow neat paths, and research is no exception. To live up to this principle, every actor should take an adaptive approach that is responsive to context; constantly review and renegotiate all the research parameters. Funding initiatives to support this might include seed-corn funding to test ideas and partnerships, a mandatory inception phase for co-creation, multi-stage budgeting and bridge or follow-on funding. Within partnerships, flexibility is dependent on good communication and this might be improved by opportunities for face-to-face interaction.

> "It was VERY important for African partners to have significant input into the initial design of the proposal, including the budgeting. The budget could have been very inappropriately designed and distributed without this input. There is a wariness about proposals in which LMIC partners are brought in too late with too little information provided. There needs to be a genuine willingness from the partner in the UK to amend the study design and budget based on input from the LMIC partners. This could be amended further during the ongoing

implementation of the study based on further input during monitoring and evaluation findings." (Academic based in the global South, written input)

5. Respect diversity of knowledge and skills

To live up to this principle requires time to be taken at the outset to explore the knowledges, skills and experiences that each partner brings and contributes to making the partnership greater than the sum of its parts. All contributions should be made explicit and be respected. Time should be taken to understand the institutional contexts of each partner with physical visits to the different institutions if possible. Researcher development initiatives should also consider a range of alternative skills for fair and equitable partnering that goes beyond traditional academic skill development and takes into account different languages and types of representation.

> "Creative and participatory methods are best suited to engaging communities because they allow for different forms of knowledge to be recognised, and because they open the possibility for communities to make use of the research process, themselves." (Practitioner based in the global South, written input)

6. Commit to transparency

To live up to this principle, put in place a code of conduct or memorandum of understanding that commits each partner to transparency in all aspects of the project administration and budgeting; and that sets out clearly the rights of all partners regarding acknowledgement, authorship, intellectual property and data use.

> "The entire grant process should be carried out in a structured, organized and transparent manner. Aspects like budget and funds disbursal should be free from ambiguities to avoid any conflicts later on. There should also be flexibility in how and where the money flows, to avoid any stakeholder exerting undue rights over research funds." (Academic based in Asia, written input)

> "Our overall experience has been of a limited wish of universities to engage with NGOs, if they believe the work can be done in-house. In part I think this reflects the economy of the grants – namely that they want to retain as much of the income within the UK's HE sector." (INGO practitioner, written input)

7. Invest in relationships

Strong relationships are the backbone of effective partnerships but take time to develop. Living up to this principle requires significant investment in creating spaces for new partnerships to emerge and for existing relationships to develop and sustain through funded time for meaningful communication. Relationships also benefit from an institutional, as well as individual, commitment and partner organisations should be encouraged to develop longer-term collaborations which might include research, teaching and/or knowledge exchange.

> "The level of effort and time to bring the researcher team together with the implementing team to speak similar language, to understand each other, is exhausting. All additional costs have to be covered, and the practitioners have to be fully involved in conceptualization, design, methods development, etc. So having a model where your costs are capped or you

are even expected to contribute your own resources doesn't work." (INGO practitioner, webinar)

"Strong collaborations take time to build as they require trust and mutual understanding beyond the alignment on paper presented for bids. This means that research collaboration, to be meaningful, should be over the medium to long term." (Practitioner based in the global South)

8. Keep learning

Taking a learning approach enables partners to challenge and subvert traditional knowledge hierarchies and create opportunities to do things in new and different ways. To live up to this principle requires constant critical reflection and learning within and beyond the partnership. It also requires learning and capacity building to extend beyond individual partners to their organisations, as well as to research funders and policymakers. Funders might help promote a learning culture by including a narrative section on learning in reporting systems and creating spaces to 'learn from failure'.

"[The lead partner] organised monthly reflection meetings and quarterly planning meetings where partners share the work and challenges. These helped inform the shared decision making system." (Practitioner based in Asia, interview)

Conclusions

Many participants in this project valued UK-funded research schemes – the opportunities for funding not available elsewhere, access to infrastructure and capacity development, and opportunities for practitioners to influence disciplines and teaching.

> "Opportunities have included access to highly specialised research laboratories, benchmarking with best/proven practices, mentors and supervisors in the UK, improvement of research ecosystems (funding, environment, career development for researchers, and so on) within the continent and training of future generations of scientists." (Academic based in Africa, written response)

The project demonstrates an interest in fair and equitable research partnerships that spans many different actors involved in international development policy and practice. There is a wealth of experience to draw on, both good practice to replicate and lessons to be learned from poor practice.

However, there is also a risk that if some of the long-standing and entrenched obstacles in the way of fair and equitable partnerships are not tackled, then opportunities will be missed as potential partners turn away from UKRI-funded research and UK-academic led research as a viable vehicle for supporting their collaborative work.

Through this project we witnessed a global, collective appetite to tackle these obstacles. We hope that the principles presented here, and the targeted resources produced for each stakeholder group from this research, go some way to assisting in that endeavour.

Annex 1. Data analysis (civil society based in the global South)

1. Data description

Data collection involved one webinar-focus group discussion with three participants based in Asia, five interviews and ten written reflections. Together these datasets included 18 respondents from civil society organisations or networks based in 11 countries (Bangladesh, Cambodia, Egypt, Ghana, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Senegal, South Africa and Tanzania) and three regional network organisations and/or social movements working across Africa (Africans Rising for Justice, Peace and Dignity), the Horn of Africa (Pamfork) and Asia (Community World Service Asia).

2. Awareness/participation in UK-funded partnerships

15 respondents had not heard of the GCRF or the Newton Fund (83%). A further two (based in South Africa and India) were aware of the programmes but had not participated, while the final respondent (based in Cambodia) was aware of the programmes and had participated both in peer review and as a partner in a successfully funded project. The participating partner said: "the experience was rewarding but the expectations and time requirements were too high." Ten respondents (56%) had also participated in UK-funded research partnerships with funders including UK AID, DFID, the Commonwealth Youth Programme, the British High Commission and internally funded by UK-based universities and UK-based INGOs.

Of those who had participated in UK-funded partnerships; one had played a contracting role while two were classed as 'Research Anchors', a further two as Co-Investigators, and four as 'Partners'. Five were involved in proposal development (56%); seven in research design and implementation (78%); five in analysis and writing outputs (56%); five in capacity building of members of the research team (56%); four in budget development and/or negotiation (44%) and four in project management (44%). One partner described an additional role as "being an interlocutor; in particular supporting the main actors to parse the theoretical framework so they can relate it to their lived experience."

None of the respondents had chosen not to participate as a partner in a UK-funded research partnership. As one respondent based in South Africa said: "As a researcher based in the global South with a very difficult funding environment, it is not really an option to choose not to be involved in a research collaboration if there is a relatively good prospect of funding."

Finally, three of the respondents praised this initiative and UKRI's efforts to elicit a partners' perspective: "I would like to laud the effort of RCUK to take this initiative of reaching out to agencies or NGOs like us to find out what we have to say. It is always helpful to provide Southern agencies a platform to amplify their voices on global forums."

3. Experiences in UK-funded partnerships – key messages

The respondents offered several examples of positive experiences in UK-funded partnerships.

- These included recognising the benefits of UKRI research funding and motivations to participate in schemes and partnerships, such as:

- **Better funding opportunities.** As one respondent noted, funding provides "overall larger budgets for research and funds for research topics and themes that would be difficult to be funded at the same level through national sources."
- **Learning and capacity strengthening** were identified by 60% of respondents as a key benefit of engaging in partnerships (for example, the opportunity "to work jointly with a renowned British research institution" and "address research questions … through research rigorous methodologies." The ability to learn, reflect and adapt was also seen as a key ingredient of successful research partnerships.
- Respondents also said they had benefited from "**opportunities to network** and collaborate with organisations from diverse countries … learn how different circumstance in differing partners' settings where action research is carried out influence results and impact … share lessons learned with others and appreciate differences … [and] travel to other countries and gain new insights from such instructive travel experiences."
- Around 90% of respondents said they had benefited from **strong and sustained relationships** and flagged good communication, trust and ideally a history of working together as key for successful partnerships. One partnership had benefited from reciprocal exchanges between researchers and practitioners to improve understanding of each others' context.
- Finally, the **opportunity to influence disciplines or subject areas** and link research with teaching was also identified as a benefit of partnerships. As one respondent based in India observed, "working with Faculty from these institutions is valuable not only in terms of the opportunity to research collaboratively and learn from each other, but also because the research can be applied directly in educational spaces. The same Faculty that have collaborated on this project have also expressed an interest in applying it in teaching…the research now has an opportunity of contributing to enhanced understanding of business and human rights issues within businesses."

Respondents also attested to positive experiences in partnerships, including:

- **Good communication,** which was seen as essential with respondents benefiting from monthly and quarterly reflection meetings and regular comprehensive updates.
- **Basic respect** was also seen as an underrated positive influence. As one respondent said: "It was very enriching and empowering because even though we were junior partners, we were never treated as that. It's largely to do with attitudes and that defines how we treat each other with dignity and respect."

Respondents also identified several barriers to participation, including:

- **Inequitable access to funding opportunities**. As one respondent noted, "we just don't seem to have the contacts, social networks and even the 'language' needed to engage. We understand the context and can do a better job [than many UK-based or international organisations] but we don't go to the same cocktail parties and don't have the networks that the other 'usual' agencies do."
- **Exclusion from project leadership**. Another respondent suggested that "leadership should not be determined merely by geography or history, but by the capabilities and experience of those involved. Researchers in the global South should not be constantly put in the position of providing data for those in the UK to analyse and publish."
- **Exclusion from decision-making**. Several respondents also felt excluded from decisions: "Many of the key decisions about the research focus [e.g.] which partners to involve, how research will be framed … are taken by the UK-based partner. As a researcher in the global

- South, treated as 'providing case study data', rather than having a more influential role in setting the agenda for research, we were not as involved as we would have liked to be."
- **Lack of clarity/transparency about roles and responsibilities**. Respondents also argued for more transparent practice: "We needed a specific ToR. We had created the idea but… our role was all very conceptual and not on paper … it got delayed but till today, we don't know about the report. (Research happened but hasn't reached where it should have)."
- **Lack of transparency about budgets.** Three participants also noted that this was a key area of exclusion in the partnerships they had been involved in.
- **Lack of awareness of the constraints and realities of working as a researcher in the global South.** Respondents also argued that UK-based funders and academics were often ignorant of conditions in southern-based contexts, for example, one stressed that "the level of precariousness in institutions here is much greater than in the UK."
- **Conflicting timetables.** Respondents also noted that academic and funding schedules often conflict with practice-based agendas and policy opportunities: "Framing of research needs to be based on a more realistic assessment on whether the time is right for a specific kind of data point and message."
- **Conflicting understandings**. Another issue related to the lack of space given to practitioner understandings or even theories. As one respondent noted: "The partnership has been consultative and collaborative from the onset … Having said that, and while understanding the imperatives and the constraints behind it (including the ogre of submitting a competitive proposal to a given deadline), the concept of 'intersectionality' came out of the blue. The concept opened up the horizon for reflecting on the central challenges of participatory development, but it may, conversely, also have constricted them. This might have been avoided if there had been more time (that ogre again!) to interrogate the concept. In particular, translating it not only linguistically but also intellectually to make it accessible to our main participatory research actors was a challenge. This in turn limited their ability to enrich the concept."
- **Conflicting audiences.** Respondents also recognised the inequitable involvement of practitioners in the selection/prioritisation of key messages when there are many different audiences, with implications for the appropriateness of different types of research output.
- Several respondents had also struggled with the **inconsistency of 'research quality'** across different approaches to research/competencies/data validation across large consortia.
- Finally, most of the respondents stressed the **inadequate compensation** allocated for partners' time as well as institutional overhead costs

In response to these barriers, respondents had the following recommendations:

- Around 80% of respondents highlighted the importance of **understanding and responding to the ultimate beneficiaries of the research**. This included conducting a 'stakeholder analysis' and 'power mapping' at the start of the research to identify on-the-ground' target groups and clarify their relationships with the research partners and then incorporating the needs and priorities of these groups 'into research design/communication/evaluation and generating useful outputs for these groups. As one respondent suggested: "Begin the collaboration from the onset with the most affected, the so-called 'beneficiaries' of change. Involve them in the ideation, in the definition of the research question/s." Another proposed that "Academicians might also see themselves as 'development doctors', not PhDs but MDs – and begin to move into the direction medicine is taking…: to preventive rather than curative and holistic rather than prescriptive approaches." And a third suggested that

stakeholder analysis could be used at the earliest stage of proposal design to identify the very partners in the partnership: "Partners (academia) are not always ideal ... If the modality

- of stakeholder analysis was adopted while choosing partners, we may have a better combination of agencies involved."

- **The sustainability of both research and partnerships** was also highlighted. Respondents were critical of short-term collaborations: "Strong collaborations take time to build as they require trust and mutual understanding beyond the alignment on paper presented for bids. This means that research collaboration, to be meaningful, should be over the medium to long term." Another respondent suggested: "The commitment from both sides of the partnership makes the programme last over a long time [so] commitment of co-funding from both sides is often useful." And another argued that in many challenge areas, more longitudinal research is needed and academics are often not best-placed to support this. Instead a community-based or CSO researcher "could be engaged/embedded for at least five to 10 years and teams should be attached for a long term rather than project-to-project (we just lose time and energy if that a person leaves)."

- Respondents also recommended **more cyclical approaches to funding**. "I would have liked to have more roles established for initiating ideas for future work, building on own

- achievements and offer these to donors for financing, rather than vice versa, waiting for announcements and requests for proposals from donors." This also has implications for building the capacity of funders to learn from research and to channel research findings into new cycles of agenda setting: "If the RCUK could foster genuine research collaborations over the medium to long term through its funding modalities, this would offer transformative potential for research. To make this possible, RCUK needs to consider the way the entire research funding pipeline is structured and how research collaboration can be strengthened at each point."

- Respondents also identified a need for **better promotion of research funding**, with some arguing for a regionalised strategy: "RCUK need to approach different institutions for creating more awareness, [through] regional research committees."

- **More funded time** was also seen as fundamental to develop shared understandings and ways of working and accommodate learning/capacity building as well as the flexibility to adapt the research and develop more appropriate outputs. Some practitioners also said they would appreciate salaried time to contribute to joint publications. This also implies the need for more opportunities for face-to-face engagement or "more synthesis workshops along the collaboration course to further enhance learning and exchange of experiences."

- Respondents agreed that UKRI should encourage **innovation in measurements of impact,** asking them to "Consider process-related impacts as well as those that occur after the input has been delivered. Support research approaches that seek to assess the kind of 'hard-to-measure' value that has been ignored, or marginalised, by policy thinking historically."

- Another request was to **improve the accessibility of application and reporting systems** by minimising "bureaucratic hassles" for under-resourced partners.

- Some respondents also felt that UKRI might play a stronger role in supporting the **consistency of data.** One partnership funded by USAID had particularly benefited from their data quality assessment approach.

- Others proposed that there should be a **limit to the number of partners in a consortium**, noting an increase in tokenistic inclusion of multiple partners in bids and stressing that it often wasn't worth their investment where they were 'bit players' in a large consortium.

- Finally, several respondents suggested that **better use should be made of "modern tools"** for collaboration and data collection; including "electronic tools and remote/web-based servers."

Annex 2. Data analysis (academics based in the global South)

1. Data description

Data were collected from 22 academics based in 16 countries in the global South as well as two transnational academic network organisations. Webinar-focus group discussions were held with four academics based in Africa (Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda); a further three interviews were conducted with academics based in Ghana, South Africa and Uganda; and four written reflections were collected from academics based in Ghana, South Africa, Zimbabwe. Responses also came from 11 academics based in nine countries in Asia (India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Indonesia, Hong Kong and Taiwan): seven of these were elicited through Skype interviews while a further four contributed written reflections.

Additional written reflections and organisational statements were collected from two academic network groups: the African Academy of Sciences (representing scientists across Africa) and the South-South Exchange programme for the History of Economic Development (SEPHIS), representing social science and humanities scholars from across Africa, Asia and Latin America.

2. Awareness of and participation in the GCRF, Newton Fund and other UK-funded partnerships

Seven of the Asian and four of the African respondents had not heard of the GCRF (50%). Of the remaining respondents, one Asian and two African respondents had heard of the programme but had not had the opportunity to participate (with nine or 41% having participated in either GCRF or Newton Fund events – including information and networking events, Global Engagement Meetings, the Salzburg Global Seminar, review panels – or funded projects). Experiences in these events were generally positive. One Asia-based respondent who had been involved in peer review panels and design/consultation workshops said: "The process established by the RCUK for designing and evaluating research calls is, in my view one of the best models I have seen or engaged with. The process they have established in terms of identifying research priorities, in bringing large number of selected peers/scholars together leads to rich deliberations … identification of peers/scholars selected to serve in GCRF peer review panels is based on published literature or the latter's work as PI/Co-PI in earlier projects. Therefore, the process is objective and neutral and there is an effort to eliminate all kinds of barriers or biases, so that the correct and the deserving proposal get endorsed. So, yes, more or a less a perfect model."

Others said that their involvement in review panels was "rewarding," "informative about national research needs for different countries" and strengthened their capacity to engage with research funding. However, two further respondents who had participated in events said their involvement felt tokenistic and that they could have been better briefed. As one said: "We were only brought in during the workshop as facilitators without understanding much about what need to be achieved at the end of the workshop. It would be more meaningful and effective if discussion and brainstorming sessions be made prior to the workshop for a better understanding of what needs to be achieved at the end of the event." Finally, one African respondent said that while there was interest in applying to the Newton Fund amongst colleagues, those in some of the "younger" African universities were not able to obtain the necessary institutional support and therefore were excluded from applying.

Another respondent also suggested that applications were often only supported from more senior researchers, potentially fuelling inequalities within the African HE sector.

In addition to funding through the GCRF and Newton Fund, respondents also reflected on their experiences in partnerships funded by other UK sources (including AHRC, ESRC, British Academy,

Commonwealth Fund and DFID) as well as the EU, Ford Foundation (US) and IDRC (Canada). Within these research partnerships, respondents played a variety of roles: most commonly 'Co-Investigator' (CI) or 'partner'/'collaborator' but also 'contract researcher', 'research administrator', 'Co-Principle Investigator' (Co-PI) and 'advisory board member'. The majority of partners had been involved at least to some extent in research design, data collection/analysis and dissemination of research, with many also involved in proposal development, feedback to participants and use of findings. One respondent applauded their involvement, saying: "I was fully involved in all the listed activities through written submissions to the PI, weekly Skype group calls and frequent telephone conversations with the PI." Another respondent stressed how vital their involvement in the initial proposal development had been: "It was VERY important for African partners to have significant input into the initial design of the proposal, including the budgeting. The budget could have been very inappropriately designed and distributed without this input. There is a wariness about proposals in which LMIC partners are brought in too late with too little information provided. There needs to be a genuine willingness from the partner in the UK to amend the study design and budget based on input from the LMIC partners. This could be amended further during the ongoing implementation of the study based on further input during monitoring and evaluation findings."

However, fewer respondents were involved in proposal development (41%) and budget development and negotiations (23%), with some feeling particularly excluded from both design and coordination of the project. One respondent stated: "I would have liked to be fully involved in the development of the proposal, including deciding on the main focus and objectives of the research, the budget and determination of expected outcomes as well as assignment of roles of the participants in the project."). And none of the respondents were directly involved in reporting back to the funders. As one respondent said: "we had minimal involvement in proposal development because the main content of the proposal has been prepared by the UK Principle Investigator. I feel my involvement in the programme is mainly due to the study site being based in the tropics." Another respondent said that although there had been opportunities to input into research design there had been "not much use of concerns from this end – the agenda was pre-determined." Others also felt their roles were limited to "arrangement of local logistics during the research visit or field sampling in the host country." Several respondents also said that the formal dissemination (i.e. writing of peer-reviewed articles) was mainly conducted by the UK-based academic partner.

Only three respondents (14%) had taken the decision not to participate in a UK-funded research partnership. One respondent commented: "I am all for collaborative research because it's very enriching academically and experientially" while another saw it as a useful capacity building opportunity "for the younger scientists to be involved and be trained." Reasons for deciding not to participate included lack of clarity in UKRI calls, lack of outreach, lack of time and capacity (including adequate expertise in the research area) and partnerships imposed by the institution rather than those grounded in existing relationships: "We have previously been wary of calls where the involvement is 'top-down' – i.e. senior management in a UK institution wishes to create a partnership with a LMIC institution via their equivalents in that institution. While this may be a nice concept, in practice there need to be academics/researchers/research managers on the ground who already have or wish to develop a relationship with equivalents at the other institution. There need

to be academics on the ground who will drive the development of a proposal and then, if awarded, deliver on it enthusiastically. It is nigh impossible for institutions to carry out this sort of thing unless it is investigator-led, or has some sort of very active champion willing to drive the work."

3. Experiences in UK-funded partnerships – key messages

Positive experiences included the following:

- Several respondents applauded **UKRI's commitment both to research for development and to fair and equitable partnerships** as a rare example of funders taking steps to tackle engrained power relations.
- **Generation of relevant/responsive knowledge.** Most respondents highlighted the potential of research partnerships to cross-fertilise ideas and generate new knowledge. Several respondents also stressed the importance of this building on local experiences (at community level) and informing responses with potential global application and crucially, with community knowledge integrated into all stages of the research process and wider agenda-setting/evaluation.
- **Opportunities for learning and capacity building.** Respondents listed their own learning as well as opportunities to train students (either in their own countries or the UK with some going on to study in the UK.) Partnerships adopting a community-based research (CBR) approach were also credited with building the capacities of communities and other stakeholders, contributing to better uptake, adaptation, use and ultimately impact.
- **Strong and sustained relationships.** Several respondents mentioned the positive "rapport" between partners while others highlighted the emergent nature of individual and/or institutional relationships "that develop as collaterals over the research process."
- **Individual and collective 'passion'** was also cited as a key ingredient for effective partnerships: "not only should the topic be motivating and creative, but the partners should share their motivation, passion and be willing to take on additional workload along with the regular functions."
- **The chance to develop new networks** was also recognised as a major contribution of UKRI funding: **"**there was no existing network in the area of urban development until RCUK supported our initiative on sustainable cities. So, it also played an important role in creating useful networks across the world."
- **Institutional buy-in and leadership** was seen as an important counterpart to personal relationships with the potential to mitigate issues like staff-turnover and sustain momentum between grants.
- And finally, responents cited **access to infrastructure** including highly specialised research laboratories in the UK as a key benefit for respondents.

Respondents also identified several barriers to participation, including:

- **Inequitable participation in decision-making.** Many respondents described being excluded from research agenda-setting and evaluation process, decisions about which partners to include in consortia, application development, research implementation and communication. Participation in decision-making was closely linked to allocation of funds but in two cases, budgets initially allocated to partners were reduced once funding was awarded. Most of the respondents listed lack of transparency around budgets and decision-making processes as a major barrier to fair and equitable partnerships.
- **UK-defined research agendas.** Respondents also noted that research agendas often reflected UK-interests (including those of individual academics or research centres) rather than

- important but neglected Southern priorities ("for example, non-communicable diseases and yet this is now reaching epidemic proportions in Africa").
- Respondents also identified different types of **knowledge hierarchies,** for example, "academics from developing countries remain sources of data rather than of new thinking and paradigms." This can result in transactional rather than collaborative partnerships and also has implications for equitable recognition/authorship and intellectual property/ownership of data.
- **Exacerbation of national or regional inequalities** was also mentioned as a potential risk of partnerships since funding is currently skewed in favour of higher-capacity countries, regions and institutions, exacerbating existing inequalities between universities and academics.
- **Insufficient time and funding.** Almost all of the respondents cited this as a key constraint to meaningful participation in research, with many respondents claiming that allocation of resources was inequitable: "if research is supposed to be for development then the majority of that funding should go to stakeholders working in developing countries."
- **Inappropriate funding models.** Respondents, and particularly those based in Africa, noted the practice of reimbursement as not viable for some Southern universities, with scientists having to use their own money to start the research and be reimbursed later by UK-based institutions. Participants also stressed that lack of consultation in budget development often resulted in insufficient resources for Southern partners, with individuals often covering their own costs for internal travel and research expenses. Respondents also observed that the shift from smaller pots of funding to large, international and interdisciplinary grants meant there are fewer opportunities for Southern-based academics to lead projects, access adequate resources and participate meaningfully.
- Another implication of larger grants/consortia identified by respondents was the **heightened stringency of procedures** (and often overseen by so-called independent consultants such as Price Waterhouse Coopers who do not appreciate inequalities across contexts).
- **Funding restrictions,** for example, 30% caps on budgets for non-UK based academics (e.g. ESRC) and sometimes even greater restrictions on what can be allocated to civil society organisations (e.g. Bhabha-Newton Fund) were seen to further inhibit equitable participation and especially community engagement.
- A related constraint was that **British policy and legal frameworks are not always suitable for Southern contexts.** Respondents noted the expectation to comply with practice driven by UK laws (around e.g. data sharing) that might directly contradict obligations of African institutions. Other UK laws such as those around immigration and visa regimes also constrained travel and in some cases determined the participation of certain nationalities rather than appropriateness for the research.
- **Conflicts between partners.** Respondents listed conflicting motivations and interests (e.g. furthering an academic career versus contributing to social change), cultures/languages, career-paths/professional contexts and generational differences (with younger generations more interested in collaboration/impact and older generations more schooled in traditional academic approaches). Lack of understanding of these differences (and especially of Southern research contexts) was seen as a key barrier to successful partnerships.
- **Reliance on relationships rather than institutional buy-in**. Some respondents also critiqued the over-reliance on "relationships between a handful of people, whose commitment and participation may not be guaranteed in the long run" and exploitation of individual good-will.
- Respondents mentioned **lack of capacity** as an obstacle both to accessing funds and equitably participating in research. At the same time, they critiqued the assumption that "it is always the African partners who are in need of training" when funders might also build their own capacity to develop more inclusive application processes and UK-based researchers

- might develop their capacity to understand Southern contexts. A key issue was that capacity developers are located in the UK when 'shifting the centre of gravity' to African funders might provide opportunities for more responsive capacity development.

Respondents had the following recommendations:

- **Context is crucial.** Research collaborations should foreground locally defined needs, priorities and practices at all stages from agenda-setting and design to implementation, communication and use. Respondents stressed that global challenge research is not just an intellectual exercise or an opportunity to "feather nests" but should be grounded in a fundamental commitment to social development. Working with local communities and organisations in a sustainable manner is then crucial. This might involve site-based needs assessments to identify research priorities; ensuring adequate understandings of cultural contexts and engaging local collaborators to promote, adapt
- (translate) and make better use of findings. Several respondents noted that CBR (i.e. working with long-term existing partnerships between local universities and their communities) can be an effective and sustainable way of achieving this. Others suggested that more open funding calls (rather than restricted themes) could capture new and under-researched topics.
- **Knowledge hierarchies should be addressed and the capacity of local research funders strengthened.** Respondents noted that a commitment to sustainability and responsiveness also implies a commitment to promoting and nurturing community-based and academic knowledge from the global South. This also has the potential to expand British disciplinary knowledge by integrating alternative perspectives, priorities, understandings and practices. But respondents stressed that if this is to be realised, more GCRF grants should be managed directly by academics in the global South and more effort should be made to promote South-South knowledge/capacity building networks. This might also involve funding more conferences and seminar series led by Southern academics to strengthen intellectual capacity and develop new research agendas. Respondents also stressed the need "to shift the centre of gravity of research funding" to the global South and move away from "helicopter science." This has implications for capacity building with Southern-based research funders better placed to identify and understand regional capacity needs and responses.
- **Better global representation.** Linked to these previous suggestions, respondents also called for better global representation, including some analysis of which countries and regions were represented through funding calls (and to what extent stakeholders based in these areas were participating). Some suggested that UKRI might support the development of more inter-country and cross-country networks. This would also serve to support agenda setting, stakeholder mapping and capacity building.
- **Flexibility, adaptability and space for emergent innovation.** Respondents stressed that global challenge research tends to unfold in complex contexts (often involving humanitarian crises). Where funding doesn't support time to negotiate these contexts properly or flexibility to respond to unpredictable events, it is unlikely that research will extend far beyond the more risk-adverse/accessible 'usual suspect' contexts that limit global representation (see above). Moreover, collaborative research often generates unexpected outcomes that can remain untapped if funding does not support iterative or adaptive practice. A possible response to this could be staggered or multiple-stage budget development. Respondents did, however, acknowledged that greater flexibility might require funders to perform more stringent checks on capacity/potential of the partners in the very beginning.
- **Time to nurture personal connections.** Trust, understanding and shared interests/agendas/values were seen as key ingredients of fair and equitable partnerships.

Respondents proposed that greater investment should be made in the invaluable practice of relationship-building through networking opportunities (especially within countries and regions and building on local capacity) and making an inception/co-creation phase a mandatory part of new projects. Respondents also noted that good communication is a key

- aspect of good relationships, though "an ongoing challenge is how to engage all partners fully without feeling like they are being 'spammed' with emails on every small decision." In response, several respondents highlighted the importance of verbal conversations and face-to-face exchange. Another suggestion was: "having the UK investigators visit the partner institutions in the LMICs and engage with the researchers there actively: if you haven't been there and 'seen it for yourself', it is difficult to appreciate the challenges. There may also be hesitation on the part of LMIC partners to explain some of the very basic/practical challenges faced due to concern for these issues perhaps making the UK partners less willing to collaborate (e.g. if you face basic service delivery challenges, internet challenges, security challenges, how much of this do you highlight if you think the funder/collaborator may be less likely to work with you?)."
- Linked to the issue of good communication was the importance of **clarity and transparency** including clear allocation of roles/responsibilities and good leadership. Respondents emphasised in particular the importance of transparent budgets, as this was a key area many had been excluded from.
- **Equitable ownership of data.** Another widely cited issue was around ownership of the research through authorship of publications (with the lead author commonly the UK-based PI), intellectual property (commonly held by the UK-based institution) and the submission of data in UK-based repositories such as the UK Data Service. Respondents wondered if instead, participating countries could take ownership of their country findings and publications, with the UK-based organisation taking ownership of the inter-country overview.

In response to the suggestions listed above, respondents proposed that fair and equitable participation could be supported by funders in the following ways:

i. Better promotion of funding opportunities (drawing on regional networks informed by more systematic stakeholder mapping).

ii. More seed-corn and follow-on funding (supporting networking, allowing partnerships to be trialled and new partners brought in).

iii. More contextually appropriate funding mechanisms (e.g. budgets that factor in inflation/contingencies which may be more volatile in developing countries and consider indirect costs were institutions have less public funding).

iv. Simplification of application and reporting systems (and/or providing training for oversees partners to navigate systems like Je-S and ResearchFish) and compensating time spent on reporting and processes such as collaboration agreements and due diligence.

v. Making collaboration at the application stage mandatory (e.g. "part of the application form to be filled by the non-UK partners and submitted together with the application to ensure that the non-UK partners are aware of the project and the commitment expected").

vi. Clearer evaluation mechanisms ("we've experienced frustration with trying to provide M&E plans to a level the councils want, yet can get confused as to what it is they actually want") with better consensus from partners ("we need to have a process of collective signing off of the success criteria … the objectives cannot be said to have been achieved unless all parties agree.").

Annex 3. Data analysis (INGOs and research brokers)

1. Data description

Data collection involved one webinar-focus group discussion (with eight participants), four interviews and five further written reflections. Together these datasets included 17 respondents from 10 international organisations based in the UK and Ireland, and four UK-based broker/capacity-providing organisations working nationally in the UK and internationally.

2. Awareness/participation in UK-funded partnerships

Only three respondents had not heard of the GCRF/Newton Fund (18%), with three aware of the programmes but not having participated. Four respondents had attended awareness raising and/or networking events for the GCRF. One webinar participant who had attended a Global Engagement Event said they went "with aim of meeting/connecting with Southern research institutes … [but was] surprised to see peers from UK universities, not a huge number from Southern research institutes. Those that were there were from a huge range of disciplines but the focus and agenda was forcing us to develop proposals together which people weren't ready to do … Selection hadn't been thought through. The participant list came just 2 days before the event, which wasn't helpful." Another webinar participant who had attended a similar event in another region agreed.

Eleven respondents had been involved in GCRF-funded applications as either 'Co-Investigators', 'Partners' or '(Sub) Contracted Researchers' (and in one case as a technical consultant advising on bid development but not actually a partner), with six noting that they had been approached by multiple academic applicants since the launch of the GCRF. As one respondent said "we have discussed potential bids with around nine universities/institutions though none resulted in either a successful bid, or a submission in which we retained the role initially proposed. In one instance we were due to be a partner … but when the bid went to the director /institutional management there was a clear wish to keep those roles in-house and we were dropped." Five further respondents spoke of being used as a tokenistic "add-on" or approached at the last minute by UK-based academics and with limited input into the application.

The participants in this group also mentioned experiences with other funders of research partnerships, including DFID, Wellcome Trust, Irish Aid and USAID.

Box 1: INGO partner experiences in research review

Last June I was approached to be part of a moderator panel for an AHRC led 'network plus' bid – which was a bid for around £3m. When I was approached I was told there would be 8-10 shortlisted proposals and it would involve one-day preparation time and three days in panel. I was offered expenses and an honoraria fee of £450.

In actual fact, 12 proposals were invited for interview; each proposal included over 100 pages of information including six moderator comments and the PI response to those. And it took me a good week to read the material. It was the first time I had done anything like this and there was no support offered, so it was overwhelming and intimidating. I turned up at the panel, and the chair was lovely, as were the other panel members, but no one made any effort to explain expectations to me; I don't think anyone had considered what it might be like as a practitioner to be in that space. There was no real introduction of who we each were or the skills we brought, or clarification as to whether I was there as 'the practitioner' and should comment extensively on the practice-based elements, or if each panel member was to be expected to contribute across the whole discussion. Being the only practitioner among a group of four academics meant it was quite difficult to get my voice heard, again not because they weren't listening, but because I was speaking a 'foreign language' and there was no one else on the panel who could respond from their experience and build with me.

As a practitioner, although I have a good academic training, my day-to-day is not focused on academic endeavour, I rarely write or read academic materials. So the leap from my practice to reading the academic proposals was enormous and probably slowed my reading speed and my ability to pick up salient points quickly, it also made it hard to judge the quality of proposals from a research perspective. I felt that more time should have been given to forming the panel and sharing what we each brought, and assigning roles and so on. I felt that the academics needed to be trained on 'understanding impact' (more recently in another event we talked about 'bureaucratic impact' on one end of a continuum and 'real world change' at the other and discussed different conceptions of impact along the way) and on practitioner perspectives and engagement with research; I felt that as a practitioner I needed basic training on what the role and expectation should be; I needed to be clear about my space for operation – how much could I challenge a tender which was academically tight, but seemed naïve in terms of impact and unnecessary in terms of practice – was I there in a token position or to really challenge, were the bids really considering impact, or just academic quality with a bit tagged on the end, and so on; and we should have had proper time allocated both before the panel and afterwards to reflect on process.

In terms of participation in funded research projects, nine respondents (53%) had taken the decision not to participate in a partnership after being approached. The following reasons were given:

- **Lack of time** to respond to tight deadlines for calls.
- Proposal was not closely enough aligned to the **organisation's strategic priorities.**
- **Insufficient budget allocation** or changes to budget (three respondents mentioned the 80% FEC as a deterrent to participation).
- **Lack of capacity** – either at main office or country level – to adequately engage with the application stage.

- **Nature of the call criteria** meant they couldn't take a leadership role as PI (or even sometimes CI) even when the partnering academic organisations were supportive of them taking these roles.
- **Too many organisations involved** and budget/roles therefore too diluted to be meaningful for individual partners.
- **Stringent ethical boundaries** which in some cases discounted certain academic research approaches.

3. Experiences in UK-funded partnerships – key messages

Positive experiences included:

- Respondents highlighted the positive nature of those partnerships that **responded to practice-based agendas** and that focused on impact beyond dissemination of research findings (i.e. 'research into action').
- Respondents also highlighted the importance **of existing networks and strong relationships** as essential for working well together, ensuring trust and being able to turn around rapid research applications.
- While some found investment in proposal development to be a waste of time when funding was unsuccessful, others argued that **collaborative application processes** had created a space for sharing ideas and negotiating common values and interests as well as 'testing the compatibility' of different partners. The suggested that ideally, this would be funded through seed-funding or networking/proposal development events such as 'sand pits'.
- Respondents also lauded funded research that included a compulsory **inception phase** with a funded coordinator. One respondent felt it should also be a requirement by funders that all partnerships have a 'research-into-use' plan from the outset. This could be negotiated in the inception phase through the use of tools such as stakeholder maps and outcome maps. INGOs and brokers/capacity providers are well placed to facilitate this. Others emphasised the importance of face-to-face meetings as well as regular virtual communication.
- Models that **included joint Principle Investigators from the UK and global South** (with INGOs playing a brokering role between Southern-based academics and civil society) were also seen to have been more successful, though respondents acknowledged that this absorbed a lot more time.
- Respondents also highlighted projects that generated **wide-ranging outputs and outcomes**, including toolkits, training manuals with opportunities for engagement often before the research has ended: "though this is harder to write up it is crucial for influencing policy; engagement in a process matters more than the write-up."
- Respondents also lauded efforts to **involve 'on-the-ground' communities** and civil society groups not just as data sources but also as vehicles for knowledge use and crucially as advisors on how knowledge should be used.
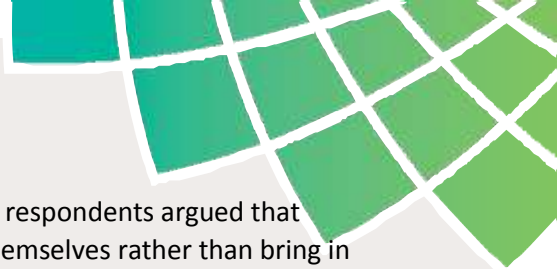
Respondents also identified several barriers to participation, including:

- **Insufficient time and resources for meaningful collaboration:** If research partnerships are to be genuinely meaningful and lead to real on-the-ground impact "the level of effort and time to bring the researcher team together with the implementing team to speak similar language, to understand each other, is exhausting. All additional costs have to be covered, and the practitioners have to be fully involved in conceptualisation, design, methods development, and so on. So having a model where your costs are capped or you are even expected to contribute your own resources doesn't work."

- Related to the above, respondents critiqued **transactional relationships** shaped by funders' definitions of 'partners' as those who make financial contributions: "we were shocked on the day of submission to get an email asking us 'how much money are you putting in?'"
- **Inappropriate methods/appropriate** that are determined by the profiles of individual academics or their specialist units rather than by appropriateness to the specific needs of the challenge area.
- The **assumption that conceptual/theoretical work is exclusively academic** and exclusion of practitioners from these activities and/or from contributing to peer-reviewed articles.
- **Involvement of multiple partners as small players in a large project. "**It is hard to staff and feel you can properly contribute if you have only 20 days a year budgeted over a three to five-year project. It is inevitable that it is not going to be full priority and momentum is also lost when you dip in and out of it." Respondents suggested, however, that this can be offset if the project builds on existing relationships or responds to ongoing, shared agendas, which link to ongoing work.
- **Impossibly tight timeframes for grant applications** and lack of notice of calls so INGOs often have to wait to be approached by universities as opposed to defining a proposal themselves.
- **Conflicting incentives/approaches/schedules.** "Academics have strong incentive to publish in top journals so want to follow rigid methods and keep results secret; review process can be really lengthy and this goes against everything we need as practitioners – especially when they are not even open access publications."
- **Authorship and ownership** (including intellectual property) granted exclusively to the UK-based academic/university with implications for onward distribution of research as well as attribution of impact.
- **Political economy of research funding.** As one respondent noted, **"**I think our overall experience has been of a limited wish of universities to engage with NGOs, if they believe the work can be done in-house. In part I think this reflects the economy of the grants – namely that they want to retain as much of the income within the UK's HE sector."

Respondents had the following recommendations:

- **Learn from the partnership experiences of INGOs.** Respondents noted that many INGOs already have tried-and-test models of working with partners in the global South through their broader development work. This includes understanding of contexts, responsively generated needs and priorities, experience working remotely and with multiple types of organisations, infrastructure and systems to support remote working, experience brokering collaborative work and experience generating a diverse range of targeted outputs.
- **Make better use of existing INGO data systems.** Respondents argued that more could be done with "solid high-quality monitoring/evaluation data and rapid analysis of that … So more natural creep and control with a phased approach [to refine the research] over time. That would potentially open up space for high-scale pieces of research at national level, assuming you can match with financing for big programmes. Research might not provide the capital but aligning it to other institutional funding mechanisms could be a way to go."
- **Better understanding of the complexity of impact pathways.** Several respondents argued that academics often equate dissemination of findings with impact and lack awareness of the complexity of evidence-informed change: "There is an invisibility of the structures necessary to affect change, for example, if you want to submit research at side event in UN meeting, to be able to apply for the side event you have to have status in the UN and interest of a number of country delegations so that you can get rooms. This doesn't happen overnight. A lot of infrastructure is needed for effective advocacy as well as longer-term

- relationship building with decision makers." At the same time, respondents argued that there was a tendency for academics to take on impact work themselves rather than bring in external expertise: "There is something of a 'how hard can it be' style to thinking – so [impact is seen as] an easy 'bolt on'… The fact that so many big development projects have failed to deliver their potential 'impact' over the years seems to have been missed."
- **Stakeholder engagement is pivotal.** Respondents suggested that this often only happens when it is an explicit requirement set out by funders. "We would like to see that expected from outset [and more thought about] how to engage the stakeholder from outset … Better guidance around that from both sides would be good."
- **Better recognition of the time and cost of meaningful collaboration** and better compensation (including for relationship-building and learning as well as travel, admin and so on).
- **Question the centrality of UK-based academics.** Some INGOs (and consultancy firms/think tanks) are completely bypassing UK-based or Northern academics to work directly in partnership with academics from the global South. Different types of expertise, facilities and infrastructure will be necessary for different types of research but the supremacy of UK-based academia should not necessarily be taken for granted and funders/academics should carefully consider their value-added.
- **New sources of funding specifically for practitioner-led consortia.** Respondents suggested that in order to take advantage of practitioner expertise (and provide fair and equitable access to research funds) there should be new funding calls targeted specifically to practitioners that don't require the same level of writing or time.
- **Transparency** and explicit recognition of different incentives and objectives of different partners was seen as vital, with some respondents arguing that transparent practice (including around budget) should be made mandatory by funders.
- **Flexible/adaptive research design and funding** was a recurring suggestion, with respondents arguing for more dedicated funds for negotiating collaboration and learning.
- **More networking opportunities** to develop new collaborative agendas, generate key research questions and start to form new partnerships as well as to improve understandings of the other sector.
- **Consider the importance of research that may not be ODA-ble** but can have an impact on the success of ODA. For example, research on donor processes, delivery systems, organisational structures and internal incentives is ineligible as this requires studying donor activities that are situated in non-ODA countries (i.e. in donor capital cities).
- **Engage more explicitly with the political economy of the GCRF.** Some respondents suggested that some UKRI agendas (e.g. encouraging 'new entrants' into the development sector, promoting REF-driven incentives, institutional competition, and so on) is at odds with its stated aims of achieving genuine impact. They argued that without a preparedness to grapple with that tension at a strategic and operational level, the GCRF is doomed to achieve less than it ought to.
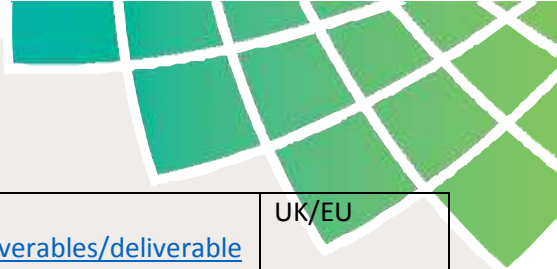
Annex 4. Consolidation of existing resources

REFERENCE	TYPE OF RESOURCE	URL	COUNTRY
Africa Oxford Initiative (forthcoming) Ethical Partnership Guide	• Guide	TBC	UK
AHRC (forthcoming) Research Community Guide	• Guide	TBC	UK
Brouwer, H., et al (2016) The MSP Guide: How to Design and Facilitate Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships (Practical Action Publishing)	• Book	http://www.mspguide.org/sites/default/files/case/msp_guide-2016-digital.pdf	Netherlands
Carbonnier, G., and Kontinen, T. (2014) North-South Research Partnership: Academia Meets Development? (European Association of Development Research and Training Institutes)	• Working paper	https://www.eadi.org/typo3/fileadmin/Documents/Publications/EADI_Policy_Paper/EADI_policy_paper_Carbonnier_Kontinen_FINAL.pdf	EU
CCIC-CASID (2017) Next-Generation Leadership: New Models for Canadian Collaboration in International Development	• Literature review • Database	https://ccic.ca/what-we-do/next-generation-for-development/	Canada
Christian Aid/Open University (2017) Rethinking Research Partnerships: Discussion Guide and Toolkit	• Discussion guide • Case studies • Analytical frameworks	http://rethinkingresearchpartnerships.com https://www.christianaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/2017-10/discussion-guide-ngo-academic-research-oct2017_0.pdf	UK
COHRED (2017) Research Fairness Initiative	• Assessment and reporting tool	http://rfi.cohred.org/rfi-evidence-base	UK
Connected Communities/Facer and Enright (2016) Creating Living Knowledge: The Connected Communities Programme, community university relationships and the participatory turn in the production of knowledge	• Report	https://connected-communities.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Creating-Living-Knowledge.Final_.pdf	UK

ELRHA (2015) Guide to Constructing Effective Partnerships	• Guide • Research matching service • Promotional video	http://www.elrha.org/ep/the-online-guide-for-effective-partnerships	UK
ESRC (2016) Guidance for Collaboration	• Webpage containing short guides and links to resources on collaboration	https://esrc.ukri.org/collaboration/guidance-for-collaboration/lessons-for-collaborative-research	UK
Hall, B., et al. (2015) Strengthening Community Research Projects: Global Perspectives (University of Victoria, Canada)	• Book	https://dspace.library.uvic.ca/handle/1828/6509	Canada, India and UNESCO
Impact Initiative (2017) The Social Realities of Knowledge for Development	• Edited collection • Impact lab • Learning guide	http://www.theimpactinitiative.net/socialrealities	UK
INASP (2016) Approaches to Developing Capacity for the Use of Evidence in Policy Making	• Report	https://www.inasp.info/publications/approaches-developing-capacity-use-evidence-policy-making	UK
INTRAC/Hayman (2018) Sustaining Civic Action Through Respectful Partnership and Responsible Exit: Event Summary	• Report based on webinar event	https://www.intrac.org/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Sustaining-Civic-Action_Nov-2017_Event-report.pdf	UK
KFPE (updated 2014) A Guide to Transboundary Research Partnerships	• Guide • Video testimonials	https://naturalsciences.ch/uuid/564b67b9-c39d-5184-9a94-e0b129244761?r=20170706115333_1499301166_3898d31d-7a25-55d7-8208-d9cbeada1d05	Switzerland
Lebel, J. and McLean, H. (2018) A Better Measure of Research from the Global South (*Nature* 559: 23-26)	• Comment piece describing new evaluation initiative	https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-018-05581-4	Canada
Leege, D.M., and Mcmillan, D.E. (2016) Building More Robust NGO-University Partnerships in Development: Lessons Learned from Catholic Relief Services (*Journal of Poverty Alleviation*	• Journal article	https://www.crs.org/sites/default/files/tools-research/journal-article-building_more_robust_ngo-university_partnerships_in_development.pdf	USA

and International Development 7 (2))			
Mougeot, L.J.A (ed.) (2017) Putting Knowledge to Work: Collaborating, Influencing and Learning for International Development (Practical Action Publishing: IDRC)	• Edited book	https://idl-bnc-idrc.dspacedirect.org/bitstream/handle/10625/55964/IDL-55964.pdf	Canada
NESTA (2013) Development Impact and You	• Toolkit	http://diytoolkit.org/media/DIY-Toolkit-Full-Download-A4-Size.pdf	UK
RAWOO/Kok et al. (2017) Towards Fair and Effective North–South Collaboration: Realising a Programme for Demand-driven and Locally Led Research	• Journal article (2017) • Partnership resources (2006)	https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5683379 https://www.die-gdi.de/uploads/media/studie_naar_research_partnerships.pdf	Netherlands
Research for Development Impact Network (2017) How to Partner for Development Research	• Guide • Case studies • Learning hub • Tools on effective and ethical research and evaluation	https://rdinetwork.org.au/news/introduing-new-research-partnerships-guide https://rdinetwork.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/How-to-Partner-for-Development-Research_fv_Web.pdf	Australia
Research4Impact (2016) Good Practices for Successful Collaboration	• Research matchmaking tool • Good practice guide	https://www.r4impact.org/mission https://www.r4impact.org/sites/default/files/r4i_good_practices1.pdf	USA
Shucksmith, M. (2016) InterAction: How can academics and the third sector work together to influence policy and practice	• Report	http://d1ssu070pg2v9i.cloudfront.net/pex/carnegie_uk_trust/2016/04/LOW-RES-2578-Carnegie-Interaction.pdf	UK
Stevens, D., et al. (2013) Cracking Collaboration between NGOs and Academics in Development Research	• Journal article • Working paper	https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09614524.2013.840266?journalCode=cdip20 https://www.intrac.org/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Academic-NGO-Collaboration-in-International-Development_September-2012.pdf	UK
Tandon, R., et al. (2016) Knowledge and Engagement: Building Capacity for the Next Generation of Community-based Researchers	• Report	https://dspace.library.uvic.ca/handle/1828/7989	Canada, India and UNESCO

Trust Project (2015-18) Ethical Research Partnerships	• Global code of conduct for funders • Fair research contracting online tool • Compliance and ethics follow-up tool	http://trust-project.eu/deliverables/deliverables-and-tools	UK/EU
UKCDS (2017) Building Partnerships of Equals	• Report	http://www.ukcdr.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Building-Partnerships-of-Equals_-REPORT-2.pdf	UK

Rethinking Research Collaborative

About the collaborative

The Rethinking Research Collaborative (RRC) is an informal international network of academics, civil society organisations, international NGOs, and research support providers who are committed to working together to encourage more inclusive, responsive collaborations to produce useful and accessible development research. RRC first came together to understand and develop principles and practice to support 'fair and equitable partnerships' in response to global development challenges. Going forward, the collaborative is planning a series of initiatives to encourage more diverse participation and leadership in the field of international development research.

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Collaborative partners