

# The Involvement of Southern Researchers in EU-funded Research

## Introduction

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

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

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



## The purpose

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

## Headline facts

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



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

## Recommendations

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

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

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

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



## Further information

This is one of a series of SPLASH fact sheets available on the SPLASH website [www.splash-era.net](http://www.splash-era.net)

If you would like to receive the quarterly SPLASH newsletter 'Making a SPLASH', please contact [era-net@dfid.gov.uk](mailto:era-net@dfid.gov.uk)