Improving the Conversation around Knowledge for International Development

How to cite:
Collaboration between Higher Education institutions (HEIs) and INGOs (International NGOs) is invaluable. As the co-convenors of the Rethinking Research Partnerships initiative (Dr Jude Fransman of the Open University, and Dr Kate Newman of Christian Aid) explain, collaboration can lead to the production of ‘responsive, actionable, practical research that balances rigour with relevance and incorporates the interests and voices of research mediators and end-users into agenda setting and research processes and products’. Partnerships can also build research capacity for all participants and their institutions, by revealing new forms and types of knowledge, ways of working and communication.

At the same time, however, there are a number of barriers to effective collaboration between HEIs and INGOs. These include conflicts between the agendas, schedules and ways of working of the different partners – though Newman and Fransman argue that valuing difference through the idea of ‘productive tensions’ is vital to partnership working. Collaboration can also be constrained by the way research tends to be funded, with short-term, tightly controlled and scheduled projects not leaving enough time for genuine co-production of research, flexible design and learning. Fransman and Newman insist that partnerships are not a given good and can ignore, reproduce or even exacerbate inequalities if assumptions about which types of evidence and expertise count are not addressed. This is why understanding the ‘politics of evidence’ in, around and through partnerships is so important as it determines who gets to participate and how.

**Impact Objectives**

- Understanding how assumptions about evidence shape research partnerships and determine who participates and how
- Exploring the potential for better participation in partnerships to contribute to the generation of more relevant, responsive and rigorous evidence

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A new project, *Rethinking Research Partnerships: Evidence and the Politics of Participation in Academic - International NGO (INGO) Research Partnerships for International Development*, explores pathways to more productive collaborations, investigating the relationship between the nature of evidence and the distribution of participation in partnerships and can ignore, reproduce or even exacerbate inequalities if assumptions about which types of evidence and expertise count are not addressed. This is why understanding the ‘politics of evidence’ in, around and through partnerships is so important as it determines who gets to participate and how.

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Innovative solutions to research partnership challenges

Accountability agendas are mounting pressure on academics to show their research is actionable and on INGOs to demonstrate effectiveness and rigour which contributes to the drive to research partnerships.

Project Insights

FUNDING
Economic and Social Research Council

COLLABORATORS
Open University, UK • Christian Aid, UK • Institute of Development Studies • ActionAid International • International HIV/AIDS Alliance • London School of Economics • University College London • Voluntary Services Overseas • Practical Action • Oxfam • University of the West of Scotland • International Planned Parenthood Federation • London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine

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Jude Fransman is a Leverhulme Research Fellow at the Open University’s Institute of Educational Technology. She has led several academic projects on the ‘politics of research’ and has conducted research for NGOs and international organisations including UNESCO and the OECD.

Kate Newman is the co-head of Christian Aid’s ‘Centre of Excellence for Research, Evidence and Learning’. She has worked in the international development sector for the past 20 years, in both academic and practitioner settings.