

Rethinking Research Collaboration in Response to Global Challenges: A Partners' perspective on 'fair and equitable' research partnerships

In 2018, the [Rethinking Research Collaborative \(RRC\)](#) implemented a programme of strategic research and capacity strengthening funded by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) through the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) that aimed to improve policy and practice in research collaboration. It generated new data and practical tools informed by the perspectives of three key groups of 'research partner': academics and practitioners based in the global South and UK-based international brokers and NGOs.

The project took a systemic approach to understanding collaboration, arguing that:

Research partnerships do not exist in isolation. They are part of a complex knowledge-for-development ecosystem, which includes research agenda-setting and governance alongside production, communication, uptake, adaptation and use. So it's important to rethink fair and equitable collaboration across that whole system. This will allow us to respond to locally defined development agendas, to map and incorporate the relevant actors, to utilize the myriad of knowledge and skills that actors bring, and to take an adaptive and learning-oriented approach to collaboration.

This approach has implications for how we understand the impact of research that is funded through the Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) budget. The RRC argues that it is not enough to start with research and consider how to translate it into policy or practice. Rather, research should be situated within existing development activities and theories of change of development practitioners based in the global South.

[Eight principles were identified](#) to support engagement with the politics of partnerships:

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.

To support the translation of these principles into policy and practice, [a series of resource materials](#) for developed and targeted to 6 key GCRF stakeholder groups: i) UK-based research funders; ii) UK-based academics; iii) UK-based capacity support providers; iv) UK-based INGOs; v) academics based in the global South; and vi) civil society based in the global South.