

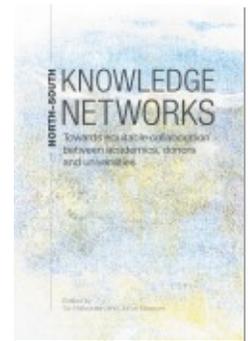


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North-South Knowledge Networks Towards Equitable Collaboration Between

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Preface

Tor Halvorsen and Jorun Nossun

This book emerged out of a workshop held at the University of Bergen in June 2015 with participants from a number of the projects within the Norwegian Higher Education and Development (NORHED) programme. A number of other academics who are interested in how development aid can promote higher education and research have also contributed to the book.

The topic of academic collaboration between South and North is not new. However, during the workshop it became clear that, as the academic world becomes more and more marked by competition, it is time to rethink academic collaboration, in relation to what space it can claim in programmes such as NORHED's.

In our call for papers to be presented at the workshop, we indicated that the NORHED programme builds on ideas about true knowledge societies being based on the notion of gift societies that can operate at national and international (or post-national) level.

To quote our call for papers, we hoped to bring together academics who

choose to collaborate across borders and boundaries in the interests of improving knowledge as we wish and think best.

We use publications from wherever we can get them, and publish what we know openly. We stand on one another's shoulders, and we all contribute. The well-known 'regulars' on curriculums all over the world are so because they build on the undercurrent of researchers. Lesser-known researchers appear in the often very long lists of references of articles or books. Thus, the academic community is like a gift-society, where we constantly exchange bits and pieces of knowledge, or create networks for a more systematic structuring of these gift-relations for the benefit of all.

Our call for papers however also noted that

this gift-society is however easily distorted. It is influenced by competitive forces from the outside and misplaced social ambitions on the inside. These undermine and transform the gift-relations on which academic knowledge-production depends. Today, this can be observed in the ways universities are being transformed for competition. Knowledge resources increasingly become tools for promoting this competition. The academic honour that was earlier driving the exchanges of knowledge (gifts), and which constitute a *raison d'être for all academic work*, is transformed into organisational resources for promotion of one's own position. What determines this position is reputation gained from external evaluations, external rating, systems of ranking, and all kinds of citation and other measurable quantities of production. Rankings seem to be more discussed by professors than their latest books. Resources are spent on the so-called 'best', who are isolated in centres of excellence where they are unable to live up to their gift commitments. This takes an extra toll on the 'next-best', to the degree that they may vanish: the pool of knowledge diminishes. In such a scenario, universities develop strategies to enhance reputation, important in external evaluations, which give access to resources. Within these strategies, collaboration with universities that may

improve one's perceived standing in society becomes important. Collaboration must be justified as a tool for better positioning oneself in competition for resources. Such strategic choices contradict the gifts exchanged between academics in open public space.

Many of these thoughts are elaborated on in the first chapter by Göran Hydén, in which he develops a taxonomy of types of academic collaboration. Hydén shows that this is a complex world, with many competing models. Hydén also offers a number of suggestions as to how such programmes should work today, and explains why he favours the re-instatement of gift-society types of exchange, arguing that 'higher education and research in low-income countries needs continued support but on terms that are different from the standard approaches adopted by the OECD donor cartel in the past' (this volume: p.30).

In Chapter 2, the focus shifts to South Africa's Square Kilometre Array (SKA), a bilateral astronomy project. John Higgins shows how government officials justified this huge and costly project, not in terms of the opportunities it provides to extend and enlarge academic knowledge worldwide, but with reference to the practical spin-offs and benefits that can be capitalised on in the competitive academic world. Thus, the proper links between theory and the empirical world, which should underpin such huge projects, have been lost. Higgins explains why current higher education policy is limiting and damaging, both in South Africa, and across the world, and why the relationship between curiosity and innovation must be reaffirmed and encouraged.

In Chapters 3 to 6, higher education in Uganda is in the spotlight. In Chapter 3, Eren Zink shows how social identities and job prospects strongly influence how Ugandan PhD students navigate international academic landscapes. Having studied how a variety of programmes move people around as they seek to gain their PhDs, he shows how so-called sandwich programmes enable PhD candidates to maintain their status at home, while gaining exposure to international research institutions and networks.

In Chapter 4, ABK Kasozi discusses the scarcity of research in Ugandan universities, the role of donors in setting research agendas,

and the danger that this represents to the integrity of academics and universities. Acknowledging that funding is crucial, Kasozi argues that donor programmes should be directed towards the building of solid partnerships between academics at the micro level, thus strengthening both disciplines and faculties. In many ways, Kasozi supports the ideas behind the NORHED programme, insisting that when knowledge develops within relations of mutual exchange, both parties are better able to understand one another and are then more likely to find ways to work around the problems generated by globalisation to their mutual benefit.

In Chapter 5, Mahmood Mamdani, based on his experience at Makerere University and of numerous donor programmes, invites discussion about the role of the state in governing public universities. He is critical of how the Ugandan government legitimises its tight rein on the university, controlling its leadership structure yet failing to fund or manage the institution adequately. Pointing out what donor money and international collaboration *can't* do, he highlights some of the issues his own research institute has faced in building research capacity and postgraduate training. As he observes, more important than how much money an institution has, is how its money gets used.

In Chapter 6, Maria Musoke and Ane Landøy present an example of how relations between university libraries can enhance the quality of these crucial departments. In many ways, this collaboration can serve as a model for wider academic co-operation, and shows how productive a *mutual* exchange of resources and expertise can be.

In Chapter 7, Johnson Muchunguzi Ishengoma moves us to Tanzania. His concerns are of a more general kind: how the contemporary development-aid framework enables donors and Northern research institutions to impose their values on research agendas globally, and on North-South research collaborations in particular. Like NORHED, Ishengoma is critical of overly simplistic ideas about capacity building, and points out that far more is at stake – whose knowledge counts, and what should be researched, for example. He questions the power asymmetries inherent in much donor-funded research, and outlines what he sees as characteristics of effective North-South collaboration.

Recounting an incident of brutal repression at the University of Malawi, Joe Mlenga describes in Chapter 8 how the state seeks to control all knowledge development, fearing that its own power will be undermined by independent research and teaching. As Mlenga notes, the risks are high for those promoting academic freedom, but without it, no institution can really claim to be a university.

In Chapter 9, Fadwa Taha and Anders Bjørkelo take the case of Sudan to show how strict state and ideological control of higher education has undermined universities, academic research, curriculum content and much international networking. The authors see the future of tertiary education in Sudan as bleak, and their chapter serves as a reminder that any overly simplistic ‘decolonisation programme’ can lead to a stripping away of knowledge, to the great detriment of the local and the wider worlds.

Ishtiaq Jamil and Sk Tawfique M Haque debate the complicated relations between the ‘donor North’ and ‘recipient South’ in Chapter 10, highlighting the conflicts between the altruism of academic co-operation and the strategic interests of state and economic actors. Based on years of their own of experience with several projects, the authors offer a well-grounded argument in favour of academic co-operation, showing that it can be beneficial for all parties, and offer all partners access to new knowledge that is relevant to their own contexts, as well as to the global challenges we face. Post-colonial domination can thus be transformed into post-colonial learning that is entirely new. The authors suggest a number of ways of organising North–South interactions so as to make collaborations more rewarding for all.

In Chapter 11, Jorun Nossun draws on her experience of North–South collaborations in the higher education and research sector to discuss the challenge of creating equal partnerships. Noting that many donors seem to be giving up on trying to strengthen institutions in lower-income countries, and now prefer to drive aid exclusively via Northern institutions, Nossun considers how academic collaboration can be organised to secure high(er)-quality linkages between academics in, for example, Norway and East Africa. She insists that it is possible, albeit far from easy, to unite donor and academic interests to the

benefit of both, and ultimately also to the benefit of the world's least-resourced communities.

In the final chapter, Tor Halvorsen argues that universities are entering a new phase of development that has the potential to transform relations between academics in the South and the North. Explaining why the massive environmental challenges facing the world require the building of 'universities of democracy', Halvorsen argues that the aim of universities must be to build knowledge exchanges and strengthen the academic community in ways that undermine neoliberalism's already crumbling hegemony and destroy the dominance of the 'knowledge economy' in universities and research agendas.

Taken together, the chapters in this book attempt to contribute to the debate about how development aid can and should be a tool for improving knowledge societies, based on a 'gift-oriented' understanding of how academics can work together. We invite readers to take up the discussion in their own institutions, pointing out how donor programmes such as NORHED can contribute to improving collaborations and capacity development among researchers.

The NORHED programme, as Nossun shows in Chapter 11, emerged after a long process of trial and error. Various Norwegian actors have a long history of co-operation with universities in the South. The University of Bergen, for example, recently celebrated its 50-year-old relationship with the University of Khartoum. Several inter-governmental and development-aid programmes have evolved out of this and other experiences with academics in developing countries, creating a financial base for long-term research and teaching collaborations between universities in Norway and a number of countries in the South (see Hydén, this volume).

In 1999, Norway's Ministry of Foreign Affairs developed a strategy for offering higher education support to developing countries while working closely with the Norwegian academic community. The research and education ministries have supported similar initiatives, and the university sector has gradually come to value North–South collaborations for contributing to and improving their internationalisation strategies. The Research Council of Norway has, over the years,

supported projects with the explicit purpose of strengthening collaborative research with universities in the South.

The NORHED programme builds on all of this, but also represents something new. Firstly, it has taken the bold step of putting actors in the South in the driving seat – finally putting into practice an idea that has been discussed in development circles for decades. In terms of project content, administration and budgets, the so-called Southern partners are in control. In principle, the partner in Norway is (re)-funded by their Southern partner/s.

Secondly, the units of collaboration are universities themselves, and within these, the academics propose their own projects. Project leaders thus emerge from within the academic environment, define their own needs, and contribute, ideally at least, to strengthening academic knowledge and resources within the institution they are affiliated to. Funding is not directed specifically towards the governance and general development of the sector, but instead seeks to grow institutions by strengthening education quality and research, and the relationship between them.

Thirdly, the NORHED programme provides a framework that is based on input from the South as well as from actors in Norway. Above all, this framework values and seeks to promote what is too easily forgotten in contemporary times: the link between teaching and research. NORHED's focus is on the quality of scholarship and academic work, particularly in masters and PhD programmes. This is based on the view that universities cannot improve unless the candidates that these universities educate can make the most of their research opportunities, and thereby ensure the development of high-quality research staff.

Capacity building is defined as supporting those who enter universities so that they can use their time and talent to push themselves as much as possible. This too presupposes the engagement and a high level of skill among their professors. Research collaborations supported by NORHED makes it possible for researchers to fully dedicate themselves to their studies, and ensures that they are trained by scholars who are themselves active researchers with international credibility. The support given to emerging academics invites and encourages them to constantly expand and traverse the borders of academic knowledge.

It follows from this that the NORHED programme acknowledges the status and autonomy of the academic community. Its support validates the notion that academic knowledge matters, and that the voices of scholars are worth hearing. The hope is that the programme will be able to strengthen links between academics and society and that the professors and their students will be able to provide evidence-based advice to those who ask, but also, and much more importantly, reach those who do not ask and do not want to hear. Again, the programme seeks to promote respect in society for scholarship, and particularly of the critical kind that presupposes academic freedom.

Fundamental to the framework is the concept that knowledge is socially embedded in three ways; that is, how you educate, what you educate and who you educate matters. Historically, all over the world, this embeddedness has prioritised the male world. This will gradually change at universities to the degree that parity is achieved between the genders. In Norway, for example, labour-market and educational reforms, combined with strong women's movements, have transformed how knowledge is gathered and communicated, who has access to universities, and what is taught to ensure and promote gender equality. In most countries, gender bias towards men reproduces itself in politics and culture, and the world of work generally offers few incentives to change this. Women's liberation movements are resisted. The most crucial agent of change in this context is the re-embedding of knowledge and the academic sector in programmes that are sensitive to issues of gender and identity. Prioritising the recruitment of women is obviously a basic precondition for projects supported by NORHED. Thus, instead of just reflecting social values, the NORHED programme is aware that universities are institutions of culture and belonging, with significant social influence and impact, and aims to contribute to the ability of universities to strengthen value systems. If universities are to play this role, their independence and academic freedom must be unquestionable.

Like most education, one of the aims of the programme is to help create a more skilled workforce. However, this is not based on a narrow idea of utility-based qualifications, but rather on reflective knowledge,

ensuring that education for work and education for democracy go together.

Compared to a number of other donor programmes NORHED's goals build on ideas about development rarely seen today. Other programmes have, for example, *political* goals such as building better leaders, *functional* goals relating to promoting economic growth, *pedagogical* goals producing better students or *social* goals of spreading enlightenment and promoting middle-class values.

Instead, the NORHED programme seems to be based on a more organic idea. By accepting that knowledge is embedded within a social context, NORHED projects aim to shape this context through the ways in which staff are recruited, how research problems are defined and prioritised, etc. It is also accepted that different cultures need to grow 'their own trees' (as noted by Mamdani in Chapter 5 of this volume), and nurture seeds in their native soil, where the climate allows them to grow. At the same time, the international collaborations and partnerships that are intrinsic to the programme promote the awareness that trees can be grown in many ways and for many different purposes, and that through academic openness, knowledge and skills about how to plant and cultivate entire forests can be created and shared.

This 'organic garden' model builds on what is already there, while also welcoming change by strengthening the ability to build knowledge networks that may develop new and shared theory. The seemingly idealistic presuppositions underpinning the NORHED model will no doubt face challenges as the programme is implemented.

This is not the first book to raise these topics. Nor will it be the last. We hope this book will inspire both critical reflection and new ideas, perhaps even improved practice, and thus form part of an ongoing dialogue.

This book would not have been published without the detailed comments and suggestions provided by our anonymous peer reviewers and the work of freelance copy editor Mary Ralphs. We are thankful for their efforts. We are also grateful for the suggestions and support of our publisher, Francois van Schalkwyk and his team at African Minds.