

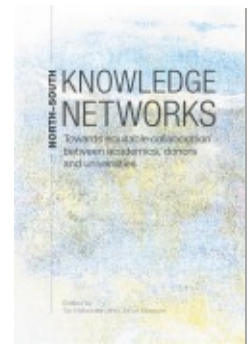


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CHAPTER 10

Knowledge generation through joint research: What can North and South learn from each other?

Ishtiaq Jamil and Sk Tawfique M Haque

Contrary to widespread opinion, co-operation between Southern regions is neither novel nor new. Centuries ago, the Egyptian, Arab and Persian empires, the Hindu and Mayan cultures, and the African kingdoms, all had dynamic centres of civilisation. Various kinds of exchanges occurred via the movement of emissaries, students, merchants, explorers and military contingents between these centres of influence. The rise of European imperialism and its expansion undermined these relationships, as the slave trade, mercantilism and capitalism progressively created the basis for contemporary inequalities between South and North. The real divisions between North and South began with the Industrial Revolution and the rise of colonialism, with the subjugation of autarchic units forcing Southern nations into economic, educational and cultural dependency (Greene 1989). So much has been lost in this process.

Contemporary scholars of post-colonial studies often refer to the strong Eurocentrism (or Westcentrism) in mainstream theories of international relations and in social and political theory more generally. Global power hierarchies seem to be stuck in post-Second World War configurations of a modern West and a traditional South. Admittedly, many social science theories originated in the West, but this does not

mean that no theorising is done elsewhere. Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), for example, is a foundational text for post-colonial studies that exposes patronising Western perceptions of the 'Orient' and other parts of the world.

Although Said's work was published decades ago, paternalistic attitudes and behaviours remain. Many academics in and outside the West are still arguing for the cultural and academic histories of the Middle East, Asia, Latin America and Africa to be properly acknowledged and studied. This kind of inclusivity, however, demands the deconstruction of prevailing discourses about ourselves and others. As Grovogui (2007) suggested, post-colonial discourse on science and knowledge should inform development theory, as well as analyses of international relations and development.

In the twenty-first century, geopolitical shifts away from bipolarity (East–West/Russia–USA) to unipolarity (US hegemony) and multipolarity (many global powers in the East and West, North and South) have occurred. Against this background, while many recipients of development co-operation still criticise the paternalism of donor agencies, power relations and normative orientations are gradually changing. According to Waltz (1990), the old configurations are moving towards a new balance of power, albeit within an anarchic system.

Of course, most of the world's wealthier states still promote their strategic foreign-policy interests through dispensing development aid (which is not necessarily the same as development co-operation) as they attempt to enhance their power and influence in other regions. Co-operation on development issues mainly serves these countries' self-interests on the international stage. Certainly, such power plays remain intrinsic to many North–South and South–South co-operation programmes. Altruistic, normative and morally motivated rhetoric about development abounds but, in the end, co-operation is still primarily a tool of foreign policy (Piefer 2014).

Nevertheless, since the early 2000s, South–South and triangular co-operation are two important and emerging forms of development-aid management that can be quite far removed from the typical 'Northern donor–Southern recipient' model. In 2008, signatories to the Accra Agenda for Action affirmed that:

South–South co-operation on development aims to observe the principle of non-interference in internal affairs, equality among developing partners and respect for their independence, national sovereignty, cultural diversity and identity and local content. It plays an important role in international development co-operation and is a valuable complement to North–South co-operation.¹

South–South co-operation allows for an exchange of knowledge and resources in the political, economic, social, cultural, environmental or technical domains, between governments, organisations and individuals. It can take place on a bilateral, regional, sub-regional or interregional basis and can involve two or more countries. Trilateral co-operation promotes partnerships between various actors including donors, multilateral agencies, public organisations, private sector, academic institutions and civil society organisations. It does not necessarily involve just three partners, but rather three groups of actors: donors, recipients and providers of technical assistance (CUTS 2005). Triangular or North–South–South co-operation usually involves two or more low-income countries in collaboration with a third party, typically a government or organisation in a high-income country that contributes its own knowledge and resources to the exchange (ITUC-CSI 2012).

It is often assumed that Southern researchers benefit most from North–South partnerships. In fact, Northern academics and research institutions also need relationships with Southern countries and institutions to facilitate the development of new knowledge. This is especially true in the fields of natural, medical and social sciences. In this regard, the local and indigenous knowledges of Southern countries remain largely ignored and untapped. Research collaborations between North and South could help unlock some of this knowledge if the challenges facing these kinds of partnerships are overcome, and if Northern researchers acknowledge that their capacities are often significantly enhanced through such partnerships. Southern researchers provide access and hands-on experience that can help Northerners to engage with different cultural contexts, and adapt their research methods to unstable or complex conditions (Bradley 2007).

This means that capacity building is not a need experienced by low-income countries alone. In many cases the policies and positions of high-income countries may not be appropriate in other countries because their policies are based on a particular perspective. Increasingly, agencies are beginning to emphasise the need for sensitisation and capacity building in high-income countries to give some perspective to researchers and other stakeholders there. Awareness is finally growing that the kinds of technical and consultancy services provided by actors from high-income countries are not always appropriate to the needs of countries in the South (CUTS 2005).

Similarly, huge gaps exist between universities and research institutions in the North and the South that are related to the very nature of scientific and technological advances (World Bank 2000). Such gaps and inequalities present a major challenge to effective and fruitful collaboration in joint research and knowledge-generation initiatives. The creation of a ‘level playing field’ for both the partners is essential.

Objective and research questions

Our objective is to assess the potentials and challenges of knowledge generation through North–South collaboration in the arena of social-science research. The questions we try to address are:

- What are the major constraints and opportunities that impact on the extent to which individual academics and institutions in the South and the North learn from one another?
- Are universities adequately prepared for North–South and South–South collaborations?
- How much does organisational culture and local context matter in research collaboration?

A brief review of old North–South partnerships

Binka (2005) has noted that, in any relationship between North and South, the Northern partner is usually considered the ‘giver’ and the

Southern partner the ‘receiver’, and the benefits that accrue to the North receive little attention. This implies that inequality is inevitable, and that research collaborations are a form of ‘scientific colonialism’, whereby the Northern collaborators dictate research agendas, methodologies and budget allocations. Wollfers et al. (1995, cited in Binka 2005) have argued that if Southern partners wish to conduct any research at all, they often have little choice but to accept the priorities and interests of Northern donors.

Although research collaborations have evolved at different times between North and South, control has generally remained in Northern hands. Too often the labour and expertise of Southern researchers is exploited during the data-collection and data-processing phases of research and then results are analysed and published in the North with no acknowledgment of the contributions made by researchers or their institutions in the South.

Binka (2005) has also argued that this trend is changing, and that Northern partners are increasingly showing a willingness to transform what were fairly dubious collaborations into ‘true partnerships’. However, a major obstacle to the evolution of ‘true partnerships’ are the huge gaps that exist between researchers and research institutions in the North and South. The World Bank’s Task Force on Higher Education and Society identified some of these as involving: laboratory facilities, equipment and supplies; the availability of well-trained teaching staff; the proportion of well-prepared and motivated students; links with the international scientific community; and access to the global stock of up-to-date knowledge (World Bank 2000).

Implicit in these differences is a range of challenges that face potential research partners. These include:

- Unequal power relations whereby the Northern partner is viewed as the ‘giver’ and expects to have more say in key decisions that need to be made.
- Incompatible goals and different opinions about working methods and processes; this issue is related to conflicting priorities, and often means that Northern agendas and preferences are imposed on the South.

- Conflicting expectations about the longevity and sustainability of research projects.
- Different levels of access to relevant infrastructure and training.
- A lack of clarity about authorship, who controls data, and how research findings will be disseminated, that leaves Southern partners feeling exploited and excluded.
- A scarcity of resources and basic infrastructure in the South that can make projects ineffective.

Reducing the gaps

The economic and geopolitical might of the North has dominated international relations for a long time. The asymmetries within the global economy are so massive that any meaningful convergence will need considerable effort and could take a very long time. Among scholars and researchers, the divergence is expressed in income levels, research budgets and patterns of specialisation, as well as in structural and institutional conditions. Nevertheless, research collaborations between North and South have the potential to create spaces in which the world's finest minds can work together to help dismantle these imbalances.

New kinds of North–South relationships are moving away from the donor–recipient dynamic into partnerships with shared ownership and decision-making (see Nossum, this volume). Interestingly, many NGOs in the North and the South have already made significant progress in forging new and more equal partnerships, transforming previously unequal relationships with donors into authentic partnerships involving mutual trust and respect, mutual accountability and shared ownership in decision-making. All parties to these relationships have helped to restructure, reskill and renew their organisations to better meet the challenges of engaging with one another on a more equitable footing, and have valuable experience to offer to North–South initiatives in the research arena.

Equal partnerships in scientific collaborations between North and South have always been a challenge. One way to address this is to

delegate management and financial responsibilities of projects to the South. This is likely to promote confidence in the South in its own capabilities to learn how to manage a project, while enhancing their confidence that their Northern partners are serious about equality. As described below (and in Nossum, this volume), the Norwegian Programme for Capacity Development in Higher Education and Research for Development (NORHED) has some experience to share in this respect.

North–South–South research co-operation: Three case studies

In this section, we provide a brief description of three projects as case studies of North–South–South co-operation in knowledge generation and dissemination. The key actors in the North are the Norwegian government (as donor)² and the University of Bergen’s Department of Administration and Organisation Theory (as the co-ordinating institution). The Southern partners are the Central Department of Public Administration at Tribhuvan University in Nepal, the Department of Political Science and Sociology at North South University in Bangladesh, and the Department of Political Science at the University of Peradeniya in Sri Lanka. The four universities have a longstanding and active relationship that aims to enhance their teaching and research capacities and to contribute to the dissemination of new research-based knowledge.

Tribhuvan University and the University of Bergen began their relationship in 1998, when two graduate students from Nepal enrolled for their MPhil in Public Administration at Bergen under a NORAD-funded fellowship programme. A partnership was established between 2007 and 2011 when a joint PhD programme was established between the two institutions, still in the field of governance and public administration. Under the auspices of this ongoing project, known as ‘Governance Matters: Assessing, Diagnosing, and Addressing Challenges of Governance in Nepal’, several PhD candidates have

graduated, some joint research has been undertaken and some publications have been produced.

From 2008 to 2012, all four institutions were involved in establishing a masters programme in public policy and governance in the Department of Political Science and Sociology at North South University in Bangladesh. Students enrolled in the programme came from Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka and the majority were junior-level civil servants. These development professionals wrote their theses on issues of policy and governance related to their respective countries. The research-based two-year masters programme draws on some of the teaching and learning methods and aspects of the core curriculum used in the University of Bergen's MPhil degree; some graduates of the Bergen course played a catalyst role in this North–South collaboration.

In 2013, the four institutions launched their 'Policy and Governance Studies in South Asia: Regional Masters and PhD Programme'. The programme aims to strengthen teaching and research capacity in public administration at all the universities involved. Staff at each institution are working together to develop and provide quality education and training researchers to conduct research of an international standard on public policy and governance.

The project has three major components. The first is educational and includes a PhD programme based at Tribhuvan University in Nepal as well as a masters programme based at the North South University in Bangladesh. The second is the promotion of evidence-based research. This is covered by post-doctoral fellowships that involve the conducting of research and surveys in topics such as accountability and trust in public institutions, post-conflict management, multi-level governance and politics, gender in governance and politics, administrative culture, and the role of NGOs in development. The third is about the publication and dissemination of research and knowledge with the aim of improving policy advocacy and extending academic networks and collaborations. The knowledge sharing and joint research, the publication of findings, and the exchange of staff and students are all significant aspects of the ongoing collaboration between these organisations.

Another important feature of their relationship was that the Southern institutions remained independent and assumed management and financial responsibilities. They are therefore empowered to make decisions and set priorities in relation to curriculum content, research topics, and the publication of research findings. The Northern partners acknowledge and value the fact that the local contexts and research priorities of the Southern institutions and countries take precedence, but also that *all* the partners, Northern and Southern, benefit from all the projects.

Between 2007 and 2015, a range of different outputs contributed to knowledge sharing between the institutions and the wider community. A few of the more significant ones are:

- Three PhD candidates graduated and 65 masters students produced theses and graduated;
- The bi-annual *Nepalese Journal of Public Policy and Governance* was renamed the *South Asian Journal of Policy and Governance* under the ongoing partnership;
- Three books, edited by individuals closely associated with the partnership have been published, namely: *Understanding Governance and Public Policy in Bangladesh*, edited by Ishtiaq Jamil, Salahuddin M Aminuzzaman, Steinar Askvik and Sk Tawfique M Haque (North South University, 2011); *In Search of Better Governance in South Asia and Beyond*, edited by Ishtiaq Jamil, Steinar Askvik and Tek Nath Dhakal (Springer, 2013); and *Governance in South, South East and East Asia: Trends, Issues and Challenges*, edited by Ishtiaq Jamil, Salahuddin M Aminuzzaman and Sk Tawfique M Haque, (Springer, 2015). Many of the contributors to these books were also linked to this partnership programme.
- Four countrywide surveys were conducted in Nepal and Bangladesh on citizens' trust in public institutions and on the idea of a citizens' charter. The survey results have also been published;
- Similar surveys on governance and citizens' trust in public institutions are now ongoing in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal;

- Special issues of two international journals have been published, namely: Administrative Culture in Developing and Transitional Countries and Contexts, *International Journal of Public Administration*, (November/December 2013); and Policy and Governance in South and South East Asia, *Public Organisation Review* (December 2013);
- Three international conferences have been convened (two in Kathmandu, Nepal and one in Dhaka, Bangladesh). In total, 120 papers were presented at these conferences, and conference proceedings have been published;
- More than a hundred journal articles, research reports and conference papers have been produced by students and faculty members involved in the programmes from Nepal, Norway, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka;
- Although difficult to quantify, there can be little doubt that the partnership has contributed significantly to expanding the academic community and research networks in the fields of public administration and governance in South Asia and beyond.

What we have learned

In terms of the preparedness for collaboration, the Southern universities were clearly not as well equipped in terms of infrastructure and has been a drawback. Library and laboratory facilities, access to electronic journals, well-trained researchers and enumerators, as well as the availability and proper use of quantitative and qualitative software, are some of the hurdles that have had to be addressed. One of the Southern institutions' academic and research activities has also been seriously constrained by electricity load-shedding and poor internet access.

Conflict, war and natural calamities have also played a role in obstructing collaboration efforts. The civil wars in Sri Lanka and Nepal, as well as periods of political chaos and unrest in Bangladesh, posed serious threats to the conducting of quality research and data collection. The earthquake in Nepal in 2015 also disrupted academic and research activities.

The level of academic competence and knowledge related to research design and methodology was not at the same level among all the partners. It was a challenge to minimise these gaps and to design research instruments suited to comparative studies across the different countries. In addition, the theoretical and conceptual understandings of Southern academics about research methodology can differ from those of many Northern researchers. Research evidence in the South tends to mostly be derived from historical accounts, secondary sources and observation methods. Many Southern researchers are both less inclined and lack the skills to manage primary quantitative data. These differences can create a level of conceptual mismatch in collaborative research.

The delegation of management and financial responsibilities has been crucial in ensuring that the Southern partners can set their own priorities for educational, research and publication activities. The launching of the MPhil and Bachelor of Public Administration programmes at the Central Department of Public Administration at Tribhuvan University is a testimony to their confidence in running and managing academic activities. Similarly, the hosting of an international seminar on 'Public Sector Human Resource Management in South Asian Countries' at Tribhuvan University in 2016 was an example of a research-related activity initiated by the Southern partners.

Organisational culture and research context

In relation to the scope for research, as well as the training necessary for knowledge production and dissemination, challenges prevail at both the individual and structural or institutional levels. In Southern institutions, few researchers have the skills and leverage to shift the system from description-based knowledge produced through essay writing to analysis-based knowledge produced through the systematic collection and interrogation of data. In some contexts, legal and/or bureaucratic barriers act to prevent the conducting of evidence-based research. At one of the Southern institutions, for example, one researcher was not permitted to conduct research for a PhD because of state-imposed regulatory and bureaucratic hurdles.

Although the Southern partners are from same geographical region and share much common history and culture, the differences between them are also quite significant. Nepal is one of the most diverse countries in the region in terms of ethnicity, language, caste and religion. Bangladesh is much more homogenous. These differences make comparative studies across the three countries more interesting, while also giving rise to some cultural and contextual difficulties.

Variations in administrative culture between North and South are also interesting. Administration in Southern institutions is strongly based on hierarchy. Symbolism and ritual are seen as important, and relationships between senior and junior academics can be described as following a kind of patron–client model. The working environment in Bergen is very different. The rule-based administrative culture that prevails in Southern institutions does not merge seamlessly with the results or outcomes-based approach of Northern colleagues.

Moreover, the Southern partners tend to take a parallel approach when trying to accommodate different preferences, that is, they pursue a range of interests and arguments simultaneously. Since official and private lives are quite often blurred, this culture of diverse interests being pursued in parallel characterises not only academic life, but almost all activity in the South. This tends to mean that attention and focus can be quite diffused, as several issues are attended to at the same time. In the North, tasks tend to be arranged according to priorities, and tackled in a more linear and sequential way, with time and resources allocated accordingly. Where Northern researchers might see the parallel approach as resulting in tasks being half done or taking too long to reach resolution, Southern researchers tend to see the linear approach as overly simplistic and dismissive of the many social implications and consequences of specific activities.

In addition, North–South collaborations provide a cultural meeting point. For example, a Northern partner will often delegate project rights and responsibilities to one or a few individuals, but the collective culture of the Southern partners makes it difficult for individuals to accept exclusive rights. Because international projects provide access to resources, they confer status and prestige, attract the attention of institutional leaders, and have the potential to eventually be a source of

institutional power. Preventing professional jealousy among peers and colleagues is a real concern, and makes the careful inclusion and accommodation of diverse interests a priority for Southern partners. On the one hand, this ensures that inclusion of a wider range of academics develops their collective commitment and research interests, and eventually fosters collective capacity building. This benefits the whole institution. On the other hand, if inclusion becomes a goal in itself, it can prevent progress, thus undermining the building of new research capacity and blocking a wide range of other positive outcomes.

For the most part, representatives of all four institutions have decided research agendas consultatively, taking into consideration the research interests and expertise of faculty members and students at each organisation. We suspect, however, that this might be an exception rather than the rule in the majority of international research collaborations.

Dissemination and publication

Many of the findings from research conducted as a result of the partnerships described here have been disseminated in the South through local and regional seminars, international conferences, and through publication in journals and books. A range of publications including *South Asian Journal of Policy and Governance* and student theses are available online.³

In general terms, the Northern partners have benefited from access to new knowledge generated through joint research and publications, but it is difficult to measure precisely how this knowledge has helped the Northern institutions. The outcome of research and innovation in the natural sciences, engineering and life sciences is universal and beneficial for all. Research in the social sciences seems more culture and context bound – its implications and usage are probably different in different contexts. Social science theories and knowledge developed in the North have filled Southern textbooks and literature for decades. It is still rare to see Southern knowledge and theories discussed in journal articles by Northern scholars or used in teaching and learning materials. The dissemination of new knowledge created through joint

academic and research projects remains limited in the North, as journals and publishers remain focused on knowledge production from the North.

Conclusions

Levels of preparedness in both Northern and Southern universities and higher education institutions are still not equal when it comes to facilitating partnerships in joint research programmes. Organisational culture and local context significantly influence the outcomes of joint research projects. Nevertheless, North South research collaborations offer both opportunities and challenges. Joint initiatives have the potential to gradually improve the preparedness of Southern and Northern institutions as they plan and carry out research together. The inclusion of cultural and contextual realities in research design has the potential to improve the quality of future research and research projects in the social sciences and help advance advocacy efforts related to evidence-based research. Our recommendations are as follows:

- Northern partners need to develop a more accommodating approach to knowledge generation by acknowledging and recognising the importance of indigenous and local knowledge in the South.
- Southern partners (faculty and researchers) need to enhance their methodological skills, while taking local cultural uniqueness into account.
- Faculty members and researchers need to realise that their active engagement in developing clear understandings of project goals plays a significant role in the sustainability of collaborative research projects. Similarly, managers and project leaders need to formulate strategies to address the sustainability and mainstreaming of project goals and activities.

Strong levels of commitment, rapport and understanding between and among Southern and Northern partners are crucial for the successful implementation of collaborative research projects. Existing

collaborations are developing deep roots and unique features that need to be carried forward by future project leaders. Key resource persons will be important in ensuring that this occurs. In this regard, trust building, mutual respect and close rapport between key persons in the North and in the South are critical for the further advancement of knowledge and capacity building in both regions. Project management and financial responsibilities entrusted to the South are crucial in enhancing their confidence and faith in their own abilities to make sound independent decisions regarding academic, research and publication priorities. At the same time, the support of institutional leaders remains crucial for the success of any long-term collaboration.

Notes

- 1 This quote is from Article 19e of the Accra Agenda for Action. The Agenda was endorsed during the third High-Level Forum of government ministers and heads of multilateral and bilateral institutions involved in development. They met in Accra, Ghana, on 4 September 2008 to attempt to accelerate and deepen implementation of the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness.
- 2 At different times, Norwegian government funding to higher education and research has been channelled via NOMA (the Norwegian Medicines Agency), NORAD (the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation) and NORHED (the Norwegian Programme for Capacity Development in Higher Education and Research for Development).
- 3 See <http://pgs-southasia.org/>

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