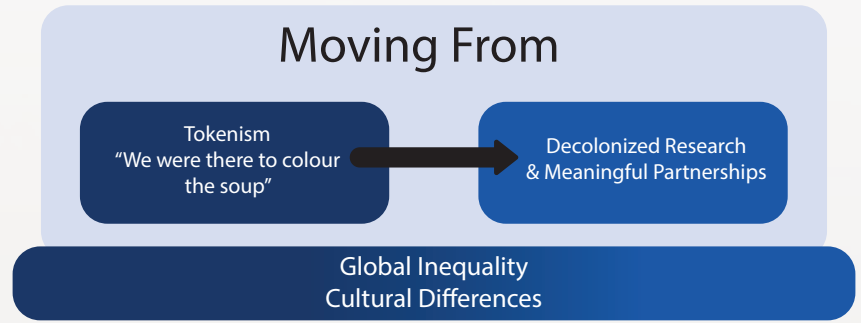


From Tokenism to Meaningful Partnerships

North-South research partnerships are a critical means of advancing global health research. However, research partners from the Global South have described feeling they were included to fulfill funding requirements, and offered only token roles, saying “we were there to colour the soup.” Despite good intentions, researchers from the Global North often fall into patterns of tokenism.



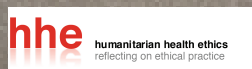
What follows are key lessons learned from our experiences of and data collected from two elrha-r2hc funded studies: (1) Aid when there is 'nothing left to offer': A study of ethics & palliative care during international humanitarian action, and (2) Isolation, quarantine, and research in Ebola management: A comparative study of stakeholder perceptions and experiences. These reflections point to possible strategies to move toward the goal of authentic partnerships during humanitarian health research. It reflects the reality that the overwhelming majority of transnational partnerships are collaborations in which researchers from Global North countries partner with researchers from what are essentially “research site” countries in the Global South.



Partnerships focusing on humanitarian research occur in the context of cultural differences, as well as historic, structural, and resource inequalities between partners from the Global North and South. Histories of colonization, racism, and past negative research experience are the landscape in which we build research partnerships, and complicate attempts to make them fair.

We identified four interconnected themes based on these studies and our experiences of transnational research partnerships: Time & Sustainability, Communication & Transparency, Power & Ownership, and Capacity Engagement. Each of these themes involves pitfalls that can pull research teams back into patterns of tokenism while at the same time offering opportunities to build more authentic partnerships. Here we describe pitfalls that can arise during the inception, implementation and dissemination phases of a research partnership, and recommendations to address them. This framework was inspired by the Canadian Coalition for Health Research Partnership Assessment Tool (2009). [https://www.ccghr.ca/resources/partnerships-and-networking/partnership-assessment-tool/]

The way we act in relation to these structures can help to change them, even if the change is slow and incremental. A single project or partnership will only have the ability to make small changes, and to act on one or a few sets of structures, but that can contribute to change over time. It is important to consider not only how we do research, but what the goals of research are, who gets invited, which roles partners play, and what outputs are considered valuable.



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