

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS OF R2HC PARTNERSHIPS REVIEW

BACKGROUND: ABOUT THE REVIEW

Since the establishment of our R2HC programme in 2013, the scale and reach of the programme has grown significantly, gaining recognition and credibility, having supported more than 60 academic-practitioner collaborative research projects.

We commissioned [this review](#) to gain an understanding of the opportunities and challenges to fair, equitable and effective partnership working in academic-humanitarian research collaborations, by examining the experiences of R2HC-funded research teams within the wider discourse on research partnerships.

The methodology comprised a review of literature relating to research partnerships, reports from R2HC grantees and our own records. This was supplemented by key informant interviews with a purposive sample of fourteen people from universities in the global north and south and from international and local non-governmental organisations, representing research partnerships operating across a range of countries and disciplinary areas. Interviews provided insights into the nature and dynamics of research partnerships. As the sample was not large, the findings provide an indicative rather than conclusive overview of our broad experiences of partnerships on the R2HC programme.

The Review was commissioned by Elrha's R2HC Programme and conducted by Kate Bingley, Centre for Excellent in Research Evidence and Learning, Christian Aid.

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE REVIEW

- Effective, fair and equitable partnerships between academics and humanitarian practitioners do not materialise without consciousness and intent. Strong partnerships take dedicated time and effort to build, manage, maintain and nurture.
- All actors in a research partnership, including the research funder, have a role to play in building and strengthening partnerships.
- Individuals play a critical role in contributing to the success or failure of a research partnership, sometimes more significantly impacting the partnership than the institutions in which they sit.
- Individuals with hybrid identities cutting across categories/constructs such as 'academia' and 'practice' can play an important role in building bridges and mediating relationships within research partnerships and beyond.
- Grant-holders (Principal Investigators (PIs)) have a responsibility to convene, lead and manage partnerships in a way that honours the expertise and contributions of all partners, and is conducive to reflection and learning.
- Funders can do more to support effective, fair and equitable partnerships, including working to address power imbalances and increasing support for Southern-led research.

- Funders should consider increasing funding and support for ‘partnership building time’, including collaborative evaluation, reflection and learning for research teams. This can enable team members to establish productive dialogue and provides time for partners to share their findings in more accessible ways, drawing on the expertise and relationships of all team members, including communicating findings more widely in the South.
- Through increasing individuals’ capacity for partnership and promoting the findings and knowledge generated more widely, partnership practice across the humanitarian health sector can be strengthened in the longer term.

KEY ACTIONS ALL STAKEHOLDERS INVOLVED CAN TAKE (PIs, FUNDERS, RESEARCH PARTNERS):

- Establishing ways of working that encourage trust, empathy, honesty, openness and flexibility among partners, with each partner being clear on ‘non-negotiables’.
- Discussing roles and responsibilities openly; explicitly recognising and acknowledging different strengths, skills and opportunities each partner’s collaboration brings to the table
- Valuing the knowledge and expertise of in-country partners in processes such as research design and data analysis. This can enhance the research by generating better quality data and more relevant findings, in part because it likely increases the possibility of meaningful engagement with local/affected populations.
- Focusing on quality of interpersonal relationships and communication.

KEY ACTIONS WHICH THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR COULD LEAD ON:

- Creating a space for mutual learning, which can help to break down assumptions and ensure knowledge and experience from all team members are effectively harnessed
 - Agreeing with partners a code of conduct (or ‘ways of working’ agreement), to serve as a reference point for accountability across the partnership—share this with the donor/funder
 - Where evaluation of a humanitarian intervention or approach is concerned, ensuring continued buy-in of the intervention ‘implementing partner’ including making sure that the timeframes for the research and intervention align.
 - Being aware that academics are not always trained as a matter of course in project and partnership management; proactively taking steps to address any skills gaps on the research team in these areas, including for themselves
 - Being aware of and addressing underlying power dynamics inherent in project decisions (for example in relation to attendance at conferences, authorship, or types of research outputs to be produced) particularly when the research team comprises actors from both the global South and North. This can ensure that all stakeholders have equal access to knowledge and other benefits arising from the research project, such as career advancement and exposure.
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