



## **DEFINING AND EVALUATING EQUITABLE PARTNERSHIPS: A RAPID REVIEW**

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**TOMORROW'S CITIES WORKING PAPER 003**

March 2020

<http://dx.doi.org/10.7488/era/817>



Tomorrow's Cities is the UKRI GCRF Urban Disaster Risk Hub

## About Tomorrow's Cities

"Our mission is to reduce disaster risk for the poor in tomorrow's cities."

Tomorrow's Cities is the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) Urban Disaster Risk Hub – a five-year global interdisciplinary research hub.

Our aim is to catalyse a transition from crisis management to multi-hazard risk-informed and inclusive planning and decision-making, for cities in low-and-middle income countries.

Globally, more than two billion people living in cities of low-to-middle income countries are exposed to multiple hazards such as floods, earthquakes, landslides, volcanoes and fires, which threaten the cyclical destruction of their lives and livelihoods. With urban areas expanding at unprecedented rates, this number is expected to reach four billion by 2050.

Failure to integrate multi-hazard disaster risk into urban planning and decision-making presents a major barrier to sustainable development, including the single greatest global challenge of eradicating poverty in all its forms.

But this global challenge is also major opportunity: as ~60% of the area expected to be urban by 2030 remains to be built, we can reduce disaster risk in tomorrow's cities by design.

We are one of [12 UKRI GCRF Hubs](#) funded by a UKRI Collective Fund Award, as part of the UK AID strategy, putting research at the heart of efforts to deliver the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

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## Abstract

Equitable partnerships are central to the GCRF portfolio overall, the interdisciplinary hubs, and specifically to the Tomorrow's Cities Hub. Achieving the Hub's aim of catalysing a transition from crisis management to multi-hazard risk-informed and inclusive planning for cities in low-and-middle income countries, is not possible without working through equitable partnerships with a diverse set of actors. Simply delivering the results of multi-hazard risk research is not sufficient to tackle the intractable challenge of risk governance. It requires working directly with decision makers, planners, civil society and communities within cities and beyond, and doing so in a way that builds ownership of the process as much as the outcomes of the research, so that the research can directly inform decision making and city planning processes.

While the term is now gaining popularity in research circles, the idea of equitable and effective partnerships has long been part of development discourse. What equitable partnership means in practice, however, is difficult to determine as there are manifold and contested meanings of "partnership" and "equity." A clear definition or even principles remain hard to pinpoint.

Despite there being no commonly agreed criteria of what makes a partnership equitable, the review identified common features across discussions of effective (equitable) partnerships that we argue should inform how the Hub builds, maintains and evaluates partnerships, including:

- Acknowledge principles of equality, mutuality, reciprocity, and respect. This incorporates recognising and ensuring a mutual understanding of differences between the partners and how these differences can influence the partnership. This includes differences based on cultural and contextual backgrounds, including varying capacities, priorities, timeframes, organisational incentive structures and other practices.
- Acknowledge and make power differences explicit, including that funding flows affect relationships and create power asymmetries. Funding and benefits that people get from the research need to be made explicit and equity in decision making can help address power differences. Power also influences which types of evidence and knowledge are valued and consequently how research is designed and implemented and the type of outputs that are produced for which audiences. Equitable partnerships challenge hierarchies of evidence and knowledge and are inclusive of local and Indigenous knowledges.
- At their core, partnerships are built on interpersonal relationships that are based on mutual trust. Transparency and accountability are important aspects of building this. Open communication between all partners throughout the partnership lifetime is key. Trust is one of the fundamentals of well-functioning partnerships and takes time to establish through regular, open communication.

- Engage with the context that shapes the partnership and create space for mutual learning so that the partnership can adapt to the changes in the external context. This requires bringing partners into how success is valued and evaluated and enabling learning across all to inform adaptation. This includes the global funding context within which partnerships are formed.

There is a dearth of evidence of how working in equitable partnerships support development impact and a lack of specific assessments of implementation and contextual differences of equitable partnerships. This highlights a unique opportunity for Tomorrow's Cities to contribute to the emergent research topic of evaluating equitable partnerships in large-scale research for development programmes. As we note in the review, existing definitions are mainly based on ideas and research by researchers from the Global North, which adds an opportunity for the Hub to shift this trend and build equitable partnerships through leadership of colleagues in LMIC of operation. Starting points for what to focus evaluation on are to consider how the partnership is performing on the design, systemic and relational dimensions, in terms of recognition, procedure and distribution. Going beyond the "usual suspects" and opening up opportunities for those other than existing national and institutional partnerships is also seen as a potential key factor in measuring the equity of a partnership.

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# 1. Introduction

The Tomorrow's Cities GCRF Interdisciplinary Hub is a large multi-partner research for development collaboration responding to the global challenge of urban disaster risk. It is one of twelve signature investments of the GCRF that collectively represent a significant ambition of using excellent interdisciplinary UK research, to directly address global challenges as laid out in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)<sup>i</sup>. The main purpose of this ODA funded research, therefore, is to improve the lives and livelihoods of marginalised populations in the Global South. For Tomorrow's Cities the focus is marginalised people most at risk of disasters in urban settings.

## 1.1 Partnerships in research for development programmes

While newer to the UK research funding ecosystem, research for development programmes have been funded directly through ODA spend (via DFID now FCDO) for some time. In a 2016 review of UK development research investments<sup>ii</sup>, partnerships with development actors in the research process was identified as crucial to supporting achievement of the SDGs. Similarly, a recent review of how impact is generated in ESRC-DFID funded research, highlights networking and partnerships (Georgialakis & Rose, 2019). The same review suggest that impact pathways are more complex and involved than much of the “research in to use” field has historically acknowledged them to be (ibid). Moreover, learning from over 20 years of practice of agricultural “research for development” programming (where the term was first coined) (Horton & Mackay, 2003; Douthwaite et al. 2016; Thornton, 2017) identifies interactions between researchers and other actors in the process of achieving complex social change as mechanisms for achieving impact (Temple, 2018).

The development outcome orientation of research in research for development programmes, therefore, represents a departure from the still dominant and largely linear view of impact pathways as the use of products of excellent research in knowledge exchange or engagement activities that then facilitate impact downstream (UKRI, 2018). The shift implies that researchers should work in collaboration with development actors to together achieve research excellence in the service of development impact. It requires appreciation for knowledge production with and through collaborations with non-research actors, focusing our attention on the process through which knowledge is generated as much as the publishable outputs that are generated.

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<sup>i</sup> See more on the GCRF Interdisciplinary hubs here: <https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/UKRI-22102020-GCRF-Hub-booklet-June-2019.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> DFID Research Review, 2016, p.8. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dfid-research-review>

## 1.2 Partnership definitions according to UKRI-GCRF

Given this context, it is not surprising that working in partnership is one of the six outcome areas identified in the GCRF theory of change (Barr et al., 2018). UKRI, however, provides more specificity on the outcome area as building *equitable* partnerships. While no definition of equitability is prescribed, UKRI does offer guidance suggesting they are characterised by transparency, joint ownership, and mutual responsibility and benefits for all partners.<sup>iii</sup> This echoes what is well acknowledged already in development discourse, where working in partnership has long been valued, and now with an increasing focus on the quality of relationships between institutions in the so called Global North and Global South, identifying characteristics such as mutual responsibility and benefits for all partners (Robb 2004; Brinkerhoff 2002 cited in Carbonnier & Kontinen, 2014; Dodson, 2017). The literature broadly agrees that partnerships are important yet implementing the concept of equitability in practice remains difficult, especially as the allocation of funding can contribute to unequal decision-making and division of labour (Carbonnier & Kontinen, 2014; Dodson, 2017). This is one of the central challenges of understanding how to practice equitable partnerships in a research for development project, with funding flowing from the UK to a range of partners across the world.

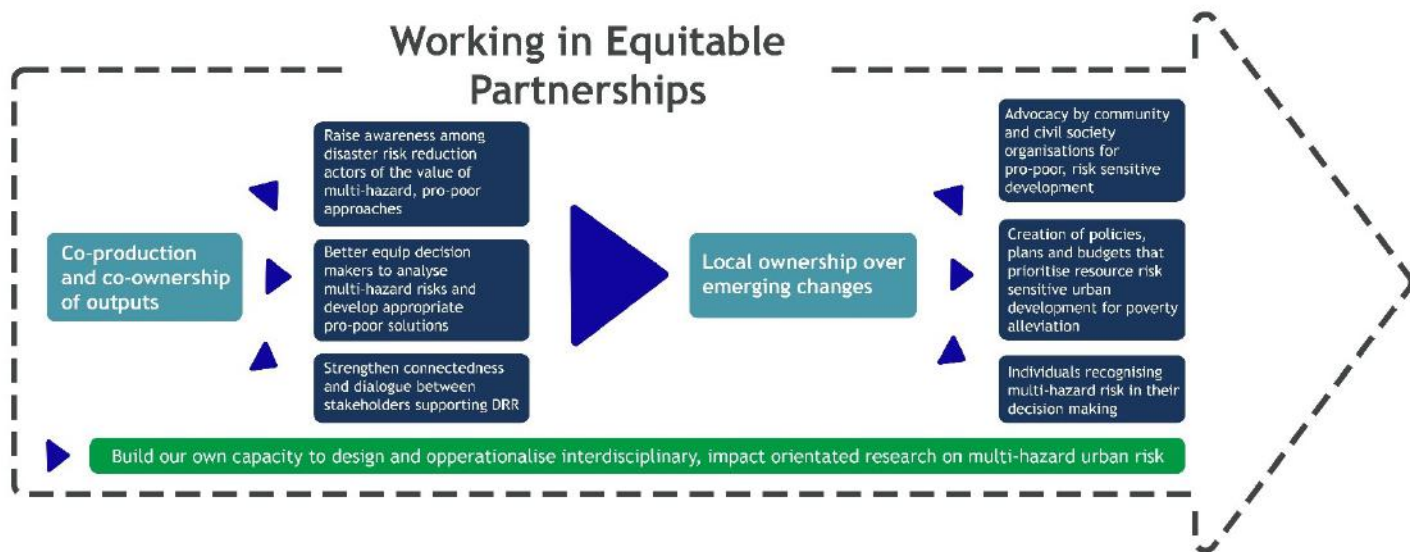
## 1.3 The role of equitable partnerships in Tomorrow's Cities impact pathways

In Tomorrow's Cities, working in equitable partnerships underpins critical assumptions in the Hub's intended impact pathways. Figure 1 shows the centrality of how working in equitable partnerships (which is an ongoing process, as illustrated by the outside arrow) is assumed to support both external outcomes in disaster risk reduction landscape – dark blue outcomes (through co-production of outputs and research and local ownership of changes – light blue outputs) and builds internal capacity to work in ways to support these external outcomes (our own capacity to design and operationalise interdisciplinary, impact oriented research on multi-hazard urban risk supporting impact beyond the focal cities – green outcomes).

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<sup>iii</sup> UKRI, Equitable partnerships. <https://www.ukri.org/about-us/policies-standards-and-data/good-research-resource-hub/equitable-partnerships/>

Figure 1 The Process of working in equitable partnerships



Despite the importance that both the GCRF and Tomorrow’s Cities place on the concept of equitable partnerships, there is no formal definition of equitable partnerships or elements that can be used to assess the functioning of the partnerships in the Hub. The lack of a clear definition of equitable partnership is a challenge both for motivating our work with partners, and evaluating our achievement. The rapid review on equitable partnerships presented in this paper aimed to support a Hub definition and consequently the evaluation design. The review focused on two aspects of equitable partnerships in challenge driven (ODA funded) research: First, exploring what is meant by (equitable) partnerships (including principles and the existing guides). Secondly, looking at how previous (equitable) partnerships have supported development outcomes and impact and have been evaluated. In conclusion we offer some suggestions for how Tomorrow’s Cities might respond to both the opportunities and challenges highlighted through the review.

### 1.4 Method outline

This literature review took place in July 2020 and is a result of 10 days of desk-based research exploring the publicly available recent evidence on equitable partnerships. Hence, literature is limited to that available up until July 2020. The review aims to explore how “equitable” partnerships are defined, and how to evaluate them, and materials that discuss either or both aspects have been included.



Literature searches were focused on several databases and websites: Learning for Sustainability<sup>iv</sup>; Better Evaluation<sup>v</sup>; Rethinking Research Collaborative<sup>vi</sup>; and Equitable research partnerships - resources (EndNote) put together for a LSHTM Webinar: Power and priorities: equitable partnerships in Agriculture, Nutrition and Health<sup>vii</sup>. Evidence and analysis were further identified by searching in general search engines (e.g. Google and Google Scholar), and through reference tracking and reviewing the citations of relevant studies (“snowballing”). A variety of keywords were used, limiting the search to publications from 2005 onwards, in English and available online. Keywords included “equitable,” “partnership\*,” “practice,” “evaluation,” “cross-sector\*,” “disaster preparedness”. These brought up a number of results; given time and access constraints, the results were scanned through for the most relevant titles and descriptions with the criterion for inclusion being: their focus on equitable or cross-sectoral partnerships/ collaborations, the presence of multiple countries and partners, a focus on evaluation techniques, a focus on challenge driven issues. Inclusion of more recent literature was also prioritised as it was thought these would capture and build on previous research and findings. The search strategy evolved as it was discovered which terms were most productive. Both academic and grey, practitioner-based literature was included. Given the limited time and scope of the study, it was not possible to manually review all of the results that the search process returned, so quick scanning of titles and abstracts, keyword searches within documents and good judgement were also utilised. Using this combination of approaches is an efficient and effective way of covering the broadest range of materials quickly and helps mitigate the risks of any single approach failing.

A total of 35 documents form the core basis of this review (these are denoted in the reference list by \*), accepting that there is a larger body of literature on development research partnerships more broadly that were not part of the review. This review also recognises that there are many different types of research partnership (and terminology covering these). Consequently, in this working paper, we first briefly explore different terminology, actors, and types of partnership. Mostly the term “partnership” is used throughout this report, but other terms such as collaboration are used as well, although it is acknowledged that these may have different meanings to different people. We focus mainly on challenge driven or development outcome oriented (ODA funded) research, that link multiple countries, partners, and sectors. Evidence and research is expanding around research partnerships, although attention to equitable research partnerships specifically is more limited but growing. For example, the *European Journal of Development Research* in its latest issue (July 2020) has published articles on “Development Research Partnerships”. Another recent contribution is from the *New Directions for Evaluation* special Issue on “Evaluating Community Coalitions and

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<sup>iv</sup> <https://learningforsustainability.net/partnerships/>

<sup>v</sup> <https://www.betterevaluation.org/en>

<sup>vi</sup> <https://rethinkingresearchcollaborative.com/>

<sup>vii</sup> <https://anh-academy.org/academy-news-events/event/webinar-power-and-priorities-equitable-partnerships-agriculture-nutrition>

Collaboratives.”<sup>viii</sup> It is hence emphasised that this review is not systematic, nor exhaustive, and provides only a snapshot of this large, complex, and growing research area.

## 2. Defining (equitable) partnerships

This section explores the literature around defining equitable partnerships, although this is somewhat limited, and so it also looks more broadly at research partnerships in general. It highlights the different terminology and challenges associated with research partnerships and explores the upsurge in guidance and principles in recent years. Finally, it draws some commonalities from these discussions of (equitable) partnerships.

### 2.1 Terminology and challenges in research partnerships

This sub-section explores the diverse forms that collaboration can take and the array of terminology that is now used to describe these partnerships and the actors involved. There are also a number of challenges associated with research partnerships that are highlighted (see Box 1).

#### 2.1.1 Types of collaborative models, partnerships and actors

“Partnership” has become central to development thinking and practice. However, there are a growing number of other terms being adopted to describe different types of multi-stakeholder collaborative models, e.g. alliance, association, consortium, network among others (see Table 1 below for Tennyson’s (2018) definitions and comments on each term). The word “partnership” is used to describe a wide range of relationships and is often not defined or commonly understood by those who are operating as partners (Tennyson, 2018).

**Table 1 Different terms used for collaborative models**

Term	Definition
Alliance	A relationship among people, groups or states that have joined together for mutual benefit and/or to achieve some common purpose, whether or not there is an explicit agreement between them. An alliance can be quite loose and informal in character.
Association	An organisation of people with a common purpose that has a formal structure. Like an alliance but between individuals rather than organisations and more fixed/formal in character.
Coalition	A form of alliance, especially a temporary one, between persons, factions and/or states. Used less in relation to collaborative approaches

<sup>viii</sup> <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/toc/1534875x/2020/2020/165>

	to sustainable development and more often associated with military intervention and / or peacekeeping.
Consortium	A combination of institutions working together in order to undertake operations that require larger-scale resources/capital. Increasingly used by the international Non-governmental organisation (INGO) sector as a vehicle for working together to tackle a major crisis/issue.
Forum	A place of assembly for people to meet for the discussion of questions of public interest. This definition comes from the Greek notion of the marketplace, but is used nowadays to describe a far more committed, on-going, membership-driven arrangement. The focus is on creating and maintaining space for dialogue, interaction, and controversy.
Network	Any netlike combination of filaments, lines, veins, passages. This is the “loosest” of the collaborative models –increasingly used interchangeably with “platforms”. The key feature of networks is that there is no-one “in-charge”.
Partnership	An on-going working relationship between people or organisations where risks and benefits are shared. Some partnerships are more transactional in nature while others emphasize deeper relationships that have transformative intent . T

Source: Adapted from Tennyson, 2018: p.6.

The Guide ‘*How to Partner for Development Research*’ by Winterford (2017) highlights that “partnership” and “collaboration” are often used interchangeably, but that there is a difference. Winterford (2017: p.6) defines each term as:

- Collaboration can be understood as a process to engage multiple parties to come together to address a defined purpose which could not be achieved by working alone.
- Partnership may be a more formal arrangement and often resources from each party are shared (co-mingling) to achieve shared objectives. Collaborative practice is a key ingredient to partnership. Within a partnership, shared benefits can be realised but also risks are shared across all the parties.

Different types of research partnerships and collaborations are discussed in the literature. Exact definitions and differences between these terms are not always clearly delineated, and there can be overlaps in the use of different terms (with some people using them interchangeably). They can also mean different things to different people. Below are some of the definitions and characteristics from the literature reviewed, but should not be taken as conclusive definitions:

- Cross-sector partnerships are defined as relatively intensive, long-term interactions that take place on a range of levels between organisations from at least two sectors (business, government, and/or civil society) aimed at

addressing a social or environmental problem that cannot be addressed by one of the partners working alone. (Clarke and Crane, 2015: p.303; Allen et al., 2019: p.4)

- Multi-stakeholder (-actor) partnerships are defined as a semi-structured process of interactive learning, empowerment and participatory governance that helps people to work together on a common problem over a shorter or longer time. The process allows the partners to collectively innovate and be resilient in navigating emerging risks, crises and opportunities. (Bouwers et al., 2016: p.14).
- Multi-sectoral partnerships are defined as “as voluntary but enforceable commitments between partners from different sectors (public authorities, private services/enterprises and civil society), which can be temporary or long-lasting. They are based on the common goals of gaining mutual benefit, reducing current and future climate risk and increasing climate resilience” (Surminski & Leck, 2017: p.967). These have traditionally been in relation to complex health issues but have recently been associated with the field of disaster risk reduction and climate adaptation.
- Transdisciplinary collaborations: are defined as “research processes that support mutual learning across disciplinary divides and knowledge domains, with the goal of producing shared knowledge around a common problem. A central feature of transdisciplinary approaches is collaboration and mutual learning among diverse stakeholders who share a commitment to tackling complex social and ecological problems.” (Cundill et al., 2019: p.2).

In addition to the above, there are also multiple types of actors, organisations and stakeholders who are referred to as “the partners” in a research partnerships. Actors and stakeholders can include academics, researchers, policy makers, practitioners, community people, among others. Partners can also be organisations, which include academic institutions, government, NGOs, and civil society organisations (CSOs). Partners have also been classified as NGO, academic, Southern, Northern, donor, recipient, researcher and/or practitioners. Other terms used to describe types of partnerships/collaborations include: NGO-academic; South-North; donor-recipient; researcher-practitioner.

In sum, while there are various definition of partnerships the central idea many, predominantly from the Global North, cohere around is that partnerships are a group of multiple types of actors working together in an ongoing relationship (whether short or long-term, formal or informal) towards a shared goal or on a common problem and to more or less extent share risks, benefits and resources, potentially with an element of mutual learning.

### 2.1.2 Defining equity

Equity, like partnerships, has many definitions. McLean and Behringer (2008) use the definition of equity put forward by Lezotte (1984 cited in McLean & Behringer, 2008: p.6) when discussing equitable partnerships. Lezotte (1984 cited in McLean &

Behringer, 2008: p.6) argues the need for equal access, participation and outcomes to achieve equity. Following this, measuring participants' access to the programme, varying rates of participation by different partners, and the outcomes by partners could indicate the equity of a partnership (McLean & Behringer, 2008). Despite how well a partnership has been established, it will not last unless it can be shown that it is successful, so an effective evaluation process will be key (McLean & Behringer, 2008).

The Ecosystem Services for Poverty Alleviation (ESPA) programme identified three core dimensions as constituent factors of equity (ESPA, 2018: p.2):

- **Recognition:** Who has a say in designing, planning and implementing the research project? How are the various partner priorities, incentives and practical constraints factored into this?
- **Procedure:** Are there clear and transparent procedures for accountability and for everyone to have a voice?
- **Distribution:** Is there agreement on responsibilities and cost? Is there agreement on how the expected benefits of the partnership will be distributed?

Overall, we identify a lack of Southern voices in the research partnership literature, especially when it comes to “equitable partnerships” and who is defining what equity means and for whom. This should be acknowledged when considering the plethora of guides and studies developed to help steer the establishment, implementation, and dissemination of research partnerships.

Carbonnier and Kontinen (2014) find that entrenched behaviour and enduring practices (such as pressure to rapidly publish results in English language disciplinary journals, power dynamics, funding constraints and pressures, time constraints) still affect the quality and effectiveness of research partnerships (see Box 1). Partnerships should be understood as “embedded in a web of power relations” (Carbonnier & Kontinen, 2014: p.15). Power dynamics can relate to a number of different aspects, including access to funding, access to knowledge and expert networks, influence on agenda setting, influence on research priorities, outcomes and what kinds of research are valued, defining what counts as expertise and excellence (Carbonnier & Kontinen, 2014; Grieve & Mitchell, 2012). Indeed, the very notion of ‘knowledge’ itself is contested and defined largely by the global power of research which some have termed a new form of colonialism (references). This is one of the biggest challenges to building equitable partnerships, and one

#### Box 1: Key challenges of research partnerships

- Asymmetric power relations
- Unequal funding issues
- Knowledge hierarchies
- Divergent priorities and incentives
- Bureaucratic barriers
- Schedules and capacity
- Different timeframes
- Constraints to participation (language, access)
- Alternate definitions and understandings (language)

Sources: Carbonnier & Kontinen, 2014; Fransman & Newman, 2019; Shucksmith, 2016

that is a significant constraint within the context of UK research funding and the GCRF infrastructure as a whole.

Grieve and Mitchell (2020: p.518) highlight that it is important to recognise that the obstacles (and benefits) faced by those involved in a research partnership will depend on the nature of the sector they represent (either as academic, NGO or policy actors) and the national context they operate within. Furthermore, motivations (and priorities) for collaborating are not necessarily consistent across an organisation (Fransman & Newman, 2019). Gunasekara (2020: p.503) discussing knowledge hierarchies inherent in South-North partnerships, adds that another area of negotiation (along with unequal power dynamics that determine division of labour) is often “a tussle over concepts that underpin research, which may have different meanings or no meaning at all in the local context.” She contends that both these issues stem from South-North inequality amongst researchers and academics. She shares her experiences as a researcher (of 15 years) based in the global South, and argues that these unequal “power dynamics not only reinforce the extractive nature of research, but also undermine different ways of knowing and registering that are not part of dominant intellectual toolkits [or considered “legitimate” information and knowledge] in the global North” (Gunasekara, 2020: p.503).

Based on Gunasekara (2020: p.503) and Carbonnier and Kontinen (2014: p.16) we suggest that key aspects of equitable and effective South-North research partnerships include:

- Long-term commitments, mutual interests and shared benefits based on a research [and development] agenda that is jointly negotiated.
- Explicitly addressing power relations and considering basic contextual issues and cultural sensitivity are also key.
- Explicitly identifying, discussing and agreeing on how to navigate knowledge hierarchies.

## 2.2 Equitable partnerships

To try to address the challenges associated with research partnerships, there has been an upsurge in recent years of research and initiatives focused on providing principles and guidelines for effective and/or equitable partnerships. In this sub-section we look at partnerships as emergent research relationships, with a focus on equitable aspects specifically. However, there are no commonly agreed criteria of what makes a partnership “equitable” (ESPA, 2018).

### 2.2.1 Meaningful and equitable partnerships in GCRF

Grieve and Mitchell (2020) explore whether GCRF funding criteria are likely to yield partnerships which are “meaningful and equitable” drawing on qualitative data from three workshops in Ethiopia, Rwanda and the UK to examine GCRF funding criteria from the perspectives of African-based research partners. Overall, Grieve and Mitchell

(2020: p.515) find that “GCRF criteria do address many of the familiar historic concerns of African partners,” although they may still unintentionally reproduce structural inequities within the South. Key tensions and challenges in relation to equity highlighted in the discussion include (Grieve & Mitchell, 2020: p.525):

- Varying capacities and priorities and mutually compatible timeframes: Given the different position-based priorities and timeframes of key stakeholder groups (i.e. practitioners, policy actors and researchers) there are clear equity implications for the ways in which these are negotiated and resolved in any particular partnership.
- Expanding opportunities for partnership beyond the usual suspects: Previous research has shown clear winners and losers at the national level when it comes to participation in international research collaborations, with opportunities usually going to those with existing track records (Mitchell et al. 2018; Rose et al. 2019 cited in Grieve & Mitchell, 2020: p.525). This is a challenge for more ‘emerging’ African institutions without the international profile. Thus “The extent to which GCRF opens up new opportunities beyond existing national and institutional partnerships [the usual suspects] will be a measure of equity for this research programme” (Grieve & Mitchell, 2020: p.525).

### 2.2.2 UKRI/RRC: Promoting fair and equitable research partnerships

The Rethinking Research Collaborative (RRC) is an informal international network of organisations committed to working together to encourage more inclusive and responsive collaborations to produce useful and accessible international development research (RRC 2018). The RRC designed and implemented a UKRI-funded project that aimed to improve policy and practice related to fair and equitable research collaboration informed by a “partners’ perspective” from academics, civil society organisations, international NGOs, and research support providers based in the global South and UK-based organisations (Fransman et al., 2018). The project also aimed to address the limited voice of practitioners and academics based in the global South in UK-funded international development research. The project undertook primary data collection through a survey, interviews, and roundtable discussions to explore “what works” to facilitate fair and equitable partnerships. They divided the data into three respondent groups: academics based in the global South, practitioners based in the global South, and UK-based INGOs and/or brokers. Several key cross-cutting findings (across the respondent groups) in terms of “what works” include: the value of existing networks and strong relationships; the importance of humility, respect and honesty; the benefits of responding to context and involving communities and local groups in all dimensions of research; and the importance of stakeholder engagement throughout framed by a strong understanding of pathways to development impact (Fransman et al., 2018: p.7).

The RRC highlights that “partnership” and “research” are both political and exist in specific contexts. Recognising this political nature, they argue, is central to understanding fair and equitable partnerships. In particular the term “partnership” obscures a jumble of complex power relations (e.g. structural, social, material, personal and linguistic (jargon)). Importantly, “these influences will determine whose knowledge, skills, agendas and values are prioritised” (RRC, 2018: p.3). Ignoring differences between partners (such as priorities, schedules, capacities) or assuming that partnerships are equal can obstruct ways of working and their transformative potential. Such a power aware view of partnerships should also refocus on realistic expectations, given that any new relationship is build upon long standing and deep structural inequalities that are not easily transformed. Furthermore, dynamics in any partnership will shift depending on the specific time and context, and the mixture of partners involved (RRC, 2018). The project found that when considering fair and equitable research partnerships, “it is necessary to consider the entire research system and mobilisation of knowledge into practice and policy beyond the research” (Newman, Bharadwaj & Fransman, 2019: p.26). As part of the RRC project, Fransman et al. (2018: p.2) identify eight principles for stakeholders “to apply to engage with the politics of partnerships”:

1. Put poverty first. Constantly question how research is addressing the end goal of reducing poverty through better design/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.<sup>ix</sup> Clarity about evidence preferences at the start of the process will enable productive discussions across a range of issues throughout the partnership process. Efforts should be made to redress evidence hierarchies by incentivising 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.

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<sup>ix</sup> Evidence hierarchies are different to traditional knowledge hierarchies. Evidence hierarchies are concerned with recognising that different stakeholders “will have different expectations as to what ‘quality evidence’ means to them. This influences whose knowledge is valued, how research is designed..., what [...] research outputs are produced, and which audiences are considered” (Fransman et al., 2018: p.10).



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. Taking a learning approach enables partners to challenge and subvert traditional knowledge hierarchies and create opportunities to do things differently (p.12).

### 2.2.3 NGO-Academic partnerships

There is an increasing push for NGOs and academics to collaborate from their respective 'impact' agendas; with academics facing increasing demand from research funders to demonstrate impact<sup>x</sup>, and NGOs facing an increased focus on impact within the wider results agenda (Stevens et al, 2013). Various publications explore challenges with NGO-academic partnerships and how they can be addressed to become more equitable (CCIC & CASID, 2017; Stevens, 2013; Shucksmith, 2016; Fransman and Newman, 2019). Challenges in such partnerships are around starting differences between NGOs and academic institutions (CCIC & CASID, 2017), these can include:

- Epistemological differences, where academics and NGO practitioners hold different worldviews (Stevens, 2013).
- Differences in priority, with academic prioritising scholarly outputs and theory development, as opposed to practical program implementation from practitioners (Shucksmith 2016; CCIC & CASID, 2017).
- Unequal access to academic evidence, which can be behind a paywall, or written in jargon that is hard to understand for practitioners (Shucksmith, 2016).
- Funding differences with academic institutions potentially attracting more funding than NGOs and controlling the funding (Shucksmith, 2016).

Fransman and Newman (2019) draw on data from a seminar series and iterative analysis of seven case studies of partnerships between UK Higher Education Institutions and International NGOs "to capture the relationship between the politics of evidence and the distribution of participation" (p.525). A common observation across the diverse case studies was the importance of understanding the contexts which framed the partnerships (and where the research was implemented). Across the different dimensions of the framework developed, several lessons emerge from Fransman and Newman (2019: pp.539-541). Some of these were echoed in a literature review of the Canadian Council for International cooperation and the Canadian Association for the study of international development (CCIC & CASID, 2017) and are combined here:

1. *Evidence is never neutral.* What counts as legitimate evidence is shaped by the institutional contexts that frame partnerships; funding protocols; systems of career progression; research approaches, tools and infrastructures; and language use. All research should be evaluated against its aims and objectives and within

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<sup>x</sup> Impact here refers to broader development impact, as opposed to more traditionally understood downstream impact when research products are used

- the standards of its organising frameworks (Fransman & Newman, 2019: p.539).
2. *The ways that evidence is valued in partnerships have implications for participation, determining whose expertise counts and to what extent.* However, hierarchies of knowledge might be unsettled or renegotiated by: incorporating civil society into agenda setting and governance systems; disrupting norms; and building movements that extend beyond the boundaries of institutions and are based on shared values and agendas (Fransman & Newman, 2019: p.539).
  3. *Research partnerships are complex and emergent.* Research is seldom a straightforward linear process and grows messier still when multiple institutions are involved. Partnerships able to accommodate uncertainty seem to be more successful (Fransman & Newman, 2019: p.540). Best practice partnerships are those that are responding to their external context (CCIC & CASID, 2017).
  4. *Many funding schemes incentivise the rapid development of short-term project based partnerships.* There are benefits to investing in long-term collaborations, which are based on evolving but shared understandings, values and agendas and enable learning to be channelled back into institutions (Fransman & Newman, 2019: p.540). A clear project design with shared understandings of work practices and motivations, and clear roles and responsibilities is essential for good partnership working (CCIC & CASID, 2018: p.ii).
  5. *The spatial dimension of partnerships should also be recognised.* Need to acknowledge the 'home' context of the research institution and funders. Another spatial consideration is the effect of scale. Furthermore, while all research partnerships are grounded in specific contexts, they also have the potential to transform and create new contexts (Fransman & Newman, 2019: p.540).
  6. *Research partnerships have the power to affect transformation.* This may be internal, external (in the short or long term), through changes in discourse around the meaning of evidence and partnerships (Fransman & Newman, 2019: p.540).
  7. *Learning is key for productive partnerships.* As well as traditional academic skills/knowledge, other types of 'research engagement literacies' are relevant to support partnerships (such as communication, management, brokering). How to capture learning and channel it back into organisations is also important (for example through research 'brokers'). Learning from failure is another rich but largely untapped opportunity (Fransman & Newman, 2019: p.541). Creating spaces for dialogue, learning, meeting and exchange, to help improve the approachability and accessibility of academic institutions and experts is necessary for good partnerships (CCIC & CASID, 2017: p.5).
  8. *The representation of research is a crucial consideration.* There is significant pressure on academics to produce peer-reviewed publications, despite recognition that these outputs are not as timely, accessible or useful as others. Conversely, documents produced by INGOs, such as policy briefs, while

accessible are sometimes seen as less credible (Fransman & Newman, 2019: p.541). To improve partnerships, co-producing of research and knowledge with all parties from conceptualisation and design stage onwards is key (CCIC & CASID, 2017).

9. *Good communication is key.* Central to this is the importance of interpersonal relations and recognition of emotion (Fransman & Newman, 2019: p.541). Keeping lines of communication open, terms and language must be mutually intelligible (CCIC & CASID, 2017: p.5).

Fransman and Newman (2019: p.541) also highlight six shifts that might improve research partnerships by moving beyond: (i) individuals and institutions (embracing relationships, networks and movements); (ii) instrumentalism (embracing criticality and affect); (iii) linear, short-term projects (embracing long-term agendas, complexity and flexibility); (iv) participation in the production and communication of research (embracing participation in agenda setting, research governance and evidence use); (v) traditional written outputs (embracing alternative modes of representation); and (vi) notions of 'success' (embracing learning and unknowing and destigmatising failure).

#### 2.2.4 South-North partnerships

Over the past decade or so there has been an increasing number of "South-North" research programmes in international development. "South-North partnership" as a notion has turned in to another development buzzword and its analytical relevance is waning (Carbonnier & Kontinen, 2014). Carbonnier and Kontinen (2014) draw on work undertaken by the Sub-Committee on Research Partnerships of the European Association of Development Research and Training Institutes (EADI)<sup>xi</sup> in 2012-2014, to explore South-North research partnership practices, funding modalities and power relations. Carbonnier and Kontinen's (2014: p.8) survey results hint that "research partnerships often start right, but tend to end up poorly;" they tend to submit funding proposals with clear responsibilities and objectives set out collaboratively, but then appear to become more unequal as they draw to a close with outcome publication and dissemination. Generally, Southern partners are often limited to primarily data collection and Northern partners usually play a leading role in analysis and synthesising findings in academic publications. Short-term recognition of academic excellence vs longer-term capacity building objectives create tensions. See boxes 2, 3 and 4 for examples of South-North research partnerships and the lessons drawn from these.

An important lesson to highlight from these examples are the structural and contextual impediments to achieving the goals of working in equitable partnerships, that are beyond the influence of the partnerships themselves. These include the short time frames that are often a reality for research funding (usually 3-5 years), that do not leave enough time for building trust and interpersonal relationships that are at the core of

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<sup>xi</sup> See <https://www.eadi.org/about/>

partnerships. Funders are based in the Global North as well as those who predominantly receive the funding (to then subcontract out to Southern partners), further emphasising unequal power relationships between Northern and Southern partners from the very beginning. Especially combined with low levels of trust and a lack of time to build sufficient trust, this reduces the partnerships ability to create equal access, participation and outcomes.

## Box 2: The Ecosystem Services for Poverty Alleviation (ESPA) programme

ESPA was a nine-year global development research programme on linkages between ecosystem services and human wellbeing, established in 2009 with funding from DFID, NERC and ESRC. ESPA was based on research partnerships between institutions in the global North and South. A briefing paper by ESPA (2018) explores how the programme promoted research partnership to achieve development impact.

The briefing argues that assumptions are habitually made (often unconsciously) in partnerships concerning the different strengths (and weaknesses) that individuals and institutions bring to the table. Consequently, South-North research partnerships often fall into a predictable division of labour. These assumptions if left unchecked “can influence the type of evidence that is produced, and hamper the partnership’s transformative potential” (ESPA, 2018: p.2). For equitable partnerships to be possible, “partners need to consider how structural asymmetries, unspoken assumptions and operational constraints can affect equity, in spite of good intentions” (ESPA, 2018: p.1). ESPA (2018, p.1) recommend adopting an equity framework – structured around the dimensions of recognition, procedure and distribution – that can help with identifying where challenges lie, and the ways they can be addressed.

ESPA identifies four key factors that “matter” in achieving equitable research partnerships:

- *Building relationships is a long-term process.* “Looking at ESPA projects with hindsight, the duration of the partnership appears to be an important factor for impact... The first collaboration among two partners may not be the most ‘impactful’, but may lay the foundations for longer-term collaboration. The project timeline should allow for relationship-building” (ESPA, 2018: p.2).
- *Money affects power relations among partners.* “Northern institutions are usually in charge of managing the budget, and this inevitably affects power dynamics. The implications need to be recognised and openly discussed” (ESPA, 2018: p.1).
- *Different incentive structures matter.* “The interests and incentives of all partners [should] receive fair recognition. Partnerships do not exist in isolation from contextual incentive structures, institutional requirements and objectives, which may vary widely. A successful partnership is one that not only delivers project-related results, but also satisfies these interests in a fair and equitable way, as a key component of the distributive dimension of equity” (ESPA, 2018: p.3).
- *Successful partnerships are built on mutual trust.* “Many ESPA researchers attributed their partnership’s success to positive interpersonal relations, which ranged from purely professional collaborations to personal friendships. Conversely, ‘lack of trust’ often appears among the challenges of less successful partnerships. Trust, however, cannot be engineered: it is mostly developed at the interpersonal level, and is very vulnerable to staff turnover. Ensuring transparency and accountability... can go a long way in promoting trust (ESPA, 2018: p.4).

### Box 3: Africa Capacity Building Initiative (ACBI)

The ACBI is a research capacity strengthening partnership award scheme aimed at strengthening higher education institutions and supporting the development of individual scientists in sub-Saharan Africa through UK-Africa research collaborations. Equitability is a key aspect. The consortia use a variety of project management structures with the aim of balancing power dynamics. For example, the majority have a project manager based in an African institution. Some have a model where the African partner leads on project and financial management (Dodson, 2017).

Dean et al. (2015) draw out lessons from ACBI for establishing and maintaining successful research collaborations based on perspectives of both high-income and low- and middle-income country researchers, staff and post-graduate students. “Success” is difficult to define and does not necessarily relate to equitability. Dean et al. (2015) were interested in “the factors that have influenced the ability of researchers in African and United Kingdom institutions to establish and maintain research collaborations.” They see equity as an element of successful research collaborations. Key recommendations for effective research partnerships based on existing partnership principles (including KFPE’s 11 principles (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2014) see Appendix below) and ACBI practical examples include (Dean et al., 2015: p.9):

- *Encourage frequent communication through various methods including virtual and face to face meetings.*
- *Establish mentorship schemes for researchers in HICs with limited experience in LMICs to improve contextual understandings.*
- *Simultaneously strengthen financial systems in LMIC institutions accompanied by changing award financial regulations to give LMIC partners more financial control.*
- *Funders and award partners should be explicit about the benefits to themselves of North-South research partnerships.*
- *Work with Northern partners to encourage them to identify potential learning opportunities for themselves within the partnership.*
- *Incorporate strengthening of institutional infrastructures so that partnership benefits can be sustained.*
- *Promote collaborative dissemination of research findings through different mechanisms*

- *Decision-making between Southern and Northern partners should be equitable with complementary roles; this will reduce or eliminate power imbalances.*

#### Box 4: Collaborative Adaptation Research Initiative in Africa and Asia (CARIAA)

Cundill et al. (2019) share insights from the Collaborative Adaptation Research Initiative in Africa and Asia (CARIAA), a seven-year climate change adaptation research programme that supported collaboration between more than 450 researchers and practitioners across four consortia and 17 countries. Experience from the programme indicates that there were three key dimensions of large-scale transdisciplinary collaboration that were critical influences on the more successful partnerships in the programme (acknowledging different definitions of success) (Cundill et al., 2019: p.4):

- Design, or how programmes are structured to support collaboration and impact. The ways the structure of a partnership can reinforce perceptions and experiences is a crucial element to consider.
- Relational features, or how interpersonal and interinstitutional dynamics evolve are mediated. E.g. interpersonal trust, mutual respect, and leadership styles.
- Systemic features (both enablers and constraints), which refer to pre-existing norms and biases that affect how the other two dimensions take shape. E.g. the design of legal partnership agreements and partner processes, power asymmetries between partners, and conflicting institutional values, cultures, and understandings of success.

In relation to leadership styles, in CARIAA the most successful styles were characterised as “inclusive and hands-on, drawing partners into project planning and design, ensuring that their interests and ideas are incorporated into work streams, and that they have a real stake in the outcomes” (Cundill et al., 2019: p.4).

Friendships and not just purely professional relationships were important to collaboration in some cultural contexts. Accepting what can and cannot be changed in large, multiple-year programmes is emphasised by Cundill et al. (2019: p.4) as being crucial for “learning how to navigate...deep structural barriers to transdisciplinary collaboration.” Enablers to large-scale transdisciplinary collaborations include dedicated project coordinators, leaders at multiple levels, and the availability of small amounts of flexible funds to enable nimble responses.

A CARIAA Novel Insights paper highlighting key insights on research for impact from the programme explains that research for impact “is about working with people, building long-term relationships, and accepting that achieving research impact will be an unfolding journey that takes time” (CARIAA, 2018: p.1). The paper recommends that flexibility and learning need to be integrated into programming in order to pursue Research for Impact. Diversified teams are needed with multiple skills to identify opportunities for impact and to support learning and reflection. Flexible budgets that allow for reflection and course adjustment and quick response to opportunities for impact are also important (CARIAA, 2018: p.6).

## 2.3 General principles for building equitable partnerships

There are a number of general guides and principles for effective partnerships in the literature, although it is important to note that some are not explicitly to do with equitable partnerships. Principles are often based on beliefs, experiences or knowledge, and can help to guide thinking and behaviour towards a result, and are especially useful for complex, dynamic systems (Wolfe, Long & Brown, 2020). Appendix summarises the key guides identified in this review, and the principles and lessons highlighted within these.

Although these give useful insights into the that make different types of partnership work, they tend to be relatively descriptive rather than analytical, are focused at the institutional level and generally have quite a simplistic view of “partnership” as being an equal, linear, short-term relationship between two partners (Fransman & Newman, 2019: p.524). And as Dean et al. (2015: p.2) caution, the recent proliferation of frameworks and principles outlining key research partnership characteristics are not always informed by interdisciplinary dialogue or necessarily reflect perspectives of all low- and middle-income country partners.

Although we found no commonly agreed criteria of what makes a partnership equitable or a clear definition of what is meant by “equitable partnerships,” looking at the plethora of studies and guidelines on effective partnerships highlighted in the previous sub-sections, we are able to draw out some commonalities. As previously noted, it is important to bear in mind that the degree to which Southern voices and practitioners have fed into these insights is questionable. Furthermore, many of the characteristics and principles were based on stakeholder consultations and practitioner-based experiences but not robust evaluation evidence.

Based on the predominantly Northern voices, common themes that can guide how research for development programmes build partnerships throughout which the three dimensions of equity (recognition, procedure, and distribution) are reflected, include:



- Acknowledge principles of equality, mutuality, reciprocity, and respect.
- Acknowledge, recognise and ensure mutual understanding of differences between the partners, including their cultural and contextual backgrounds. This includes varying capacities, priorities and timeframes. Take time to explore what people bring to the partnership and make this explicit to prevent unbiased assumptions from complicating the partnership. It also includes the different incentive structures and institutional practices of partner organisations. Another difference is the cultural and contextual background of each.
- Acknowledge and make power differences explicit, including that funding flows affect relationships and creates power structures. Funding and benefits that people get from the research need to be made explicit and equity in decision making can help address power differences. Power differences also influences which types of evidence and knowledge are valued and consequently how research is designed and implemented and the type of outputs that are produced for which audiences. Equitable partnerships challenge hierarchies of evidence and knowledge and are inclusive of local and Indigenous knowledges.
- Build relationships that are based on mutual trust – transparency and accountability are important aspects of building this. Trust is one of the fundamentals of well-functioning partnerships and takes time to establish.
- Open communication between all partners throughout the partnership is key. Create space so regular communication can happen; including through virtual and face-to-face meetings, networking and building interpersonal relationships.
- Engage with the context that shapes the partnership and create space for mutual learning so that the partnership can adapt to the changes in the external context.

### 3. Towards evaluation of equitable partnerships

Partnerships are central to research for development programmes achieving impact. Working in partnerships are increasingly recognised as causal mechanisms within a more complex and emergent view of pathways to impact (Georgalakis & Rose, 2019). Yet there is little evidence and limited guidance on how to evaluate the causal links between working in partnership and influencing development outcomes and impact. In this section we highlight some potentially fruitful avenues for conceptualising and practically evaluating equitable partnerships within the context of large complex interdisciplinary research for development programmes, such as the GCRF hubs. We frameworks that can be used to assess whether a partnership is equitable drawing on the previous sections of the paper. We also discuss briefly potential evaluation methods, although, similarly, no explicit approaches to evaluating equitable partnerships were found in the literature we reviewed.

### 3.1 Building a framework for assessing equitability of partnerships

Given the lack of existing literature on approaches to measuring equity in partnerships in research for development programmes specifically, we build on definitions of equitable partnerships shared in Section 2, to identify a promising starting point. The three dimensions of large-scale transdisciplinary collaborations that influence the nature of partnerships in the programme: the way the programme is designed; the way relationships are enabled and managed; and their broader systems dynamics that enable or hinder the other two (Cundill et al 2019), provide a potentially useful framework. Applying this framework, an evaluation could assess how equitable the design and systemic dimensions of a programme are, and whether and how the relational dimensions further support equity of all partners.

These three dimensions could usefully be combined with either the equity framework of recognition, procedure and distribution as used by ESPA (2018) or the dimensions of access, participation and outcomes (McLean & Behringer, 2008) to create a comprehensive framework (shown in Table 2).

Table 2 Framework for assessing equitability of partnerships

	Recognition	Procedure	Distribution
Design	Are all partners' needs, interests and contextual backgrounds recognised in programme design?	Are all partners engaged equally in the design process and decision making? Are all partners engaged fully in how the programme evolves and adapts?	Does the design take in to account the different views of success and particular outcomes sought by different partners?
Systemic	Are all partners' needs and interests recognised in institutional arrangements, operational and management systems of the programme?	Are all partners engaged in governance and decision making and are their institutional contexts considered in management?	Are funds distributed equitably and through transparent processes? Are partners sharing risk?
Relational	Are all partners' ways of communicating and learning informing	Are there explicit processes to support building mutual trust and making explicit power differences?	Are there processes in place for acknowledging varying capacities and identifying capacity

	how relationships are built?	Are hierarchies of evidence and knowledge openly challenged?	building opportunities for partners?
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The relational dimension can also be considered as foundational in supporting the design and systemic dimensions to be equitable and so an evaluation can measure more broadly how the partnership is building personal relationships; ensuring mutual understanding of cultural and contextual backgrounds; challenging hierarchies of evidence and knowledge; building mutual trust; acknowledging varying capacities, priorities and timeframes; recognising different incentive structures and institutional practices; creating space for mutual learning and open communication; acknowledging and making power differences explicit; engaging with and adapting to the context of the partnership.

### 3.2 Evaluation methods

When evaluating partnerships, we need to distinguish between evaluating the impact of the whole partnership and what it achieves (programmatic impact) and evaluating the contribution of working in equitable partnerships (an approach) to programme impact. Literature on evaluating partnerships impact primarily focuses on the former rather than on how working in partnerships *enables* achieving impact in research for development programmes, such as the review of reviews by Hoekstra et al (2020), Clarke and Crane’s (2018) work on systemic change in the context of cross-sector partnerships or Van Tulder and colleagues (2016; 2018) work on different basic impact pathways of cross-sector partnerships.

Evaluation is important for building new theory and learning about equitable partnerships (e.g. impacts, implementation, contextual differences). While there is a blossoming of studies looking at different approaches to cross-sector partnership evaluation; research on this topic is still acknowledged as emergent and largely underdeveloped (expert discussion with Will Allen). As we might expect in this nascent field of inquiry there, is, as yet no agreed analytical framework for impact assessment specifically in relation to equitable partnerships (Van Tulder, 2016). Yet some evaluation approaches were identified in the review that we share as potentially useful avenues.

The literature and practice examples suggest that intervention strategies and evaluation approaches in cross-sectoral partnerships are increasingly based on Theories of Change. Nested theories of change (i.e. a series of separate theories of change to capture how the interventions are expected to work at different levels or stages of the process) may be useful for developing a better understanding of how equitable partnerships specifically contribute to the overall programme change/impact (Mayne & Johnson, 2015). This approach to theory of change enables a ‘Russian doll’ view across

scales of intervention (e.g. local, to national to international) through which the specific contributions and mechanisms triggered by working in partnership can be distinguished at a salient scale for inquiry. Alternatively, Van Tulder and Keen's (2018) Complexity-Sensitive Theory of Change can help partnerships to appreciate the level of complexity under which a partnership operates; evolve the partnership configuration (fine-tuning); and align an appropriate learning strategy (more reflective and adaptive). As partnerships themselves evolve and change, there is a need for revisions and updating of the theory of change.

Rubrics is another potential tool for evaluating the contribution of equitable partnerships to a programme achieving impact. Rubrics are "a way of defining and describing components of what are complex tasks and behaviours [and support decision-making] involving risk and uncertainty" (Allen et al., 2019: p.3). Rubrics can be adapted to different contexts and used to help organisations to develop clarity around the different components that underpin partnerships, and as a tool to guide and evaluate progress in a participatory manner. Recent examples of application of rubrics in research for development programming in different sectors illustrate the potential in practice (Apgar et al. 2016; Apgar et al. 2020).

A more integrated approach to evaluation would benefit from understanding equity within a collaborative context. Stachowiak, Lynn and Akey (2020) support the use of an array of approaches to standardise and make judgements about effectiveness across a number of complex large-scale collaborations and strengthen impact. Methods could include rubrics, qualitative coding and analysis, process tracing, structured virtual focus groups, and additional quantitative analyses focused on equity. Rubrics are a powerful tool, especially with topics with a strong literature basis, and process tracing methodology helps to ground a study, strengthening the rigor and quality of all components of the work (Stachowiak, Lynn & Akey, 2020: pp.41-42). In summary, the review identifies the need for contextualising designs for evaluating partnerships within specific programmatic use of theory of change, and suggests multiple methods should be combined to appreciate the complexity of evolving relationships and their contributions to programmatic impact.

## 4. Conclusion

The rapid review identified definitions and principles of equitable partnerships, explored the ways in which equitable partnerships are thought to support development impacts and briefly looked at how to evaluate them. We conclude that despite the surfeit of guides and principles on effective research partnerships, there are no commonly agreed criteria of what makes a partnership equitable or a clear definition of what is meant by "equitable partnerships."

Based on various, predominantly Northern definitions and typologies, we suggest a partnership can be understood as *a group of multiple types of actors that are working together in an ongoing relationship (whether short or long-term) towards a shared goal*

*or on a mutually agreed problem and to a certain extent share benefits, risks and resources with potential elements of mutual learning.*

Equity in partnerships, therefore, can be described as those that enable equal access, participation and outcomes by stakeholders within the dimensions of recognition, procedure and distribution (McLean & Behringer, 2008; ESPA, 2018). We identified common themes across discussions of effective (equitable) partnerships and other collaborations that may be useful to consider in developing a strategy for pursuing and evaluating equitable partnerships in Tomorrow's Cities (and other GCRF hubs):

- Acknowledge principles of equality, mutuality, reciprocity, and respect. This incorporates recognising and ensuring a mutual understanding of differences between the partners and how these differences can influence the partnership. This includes differences based on cultural and contextual backgrounds, including varying capacities, priorities, timeframes, organisational incentive structures and other practices.
- Acknowledge and make power differences explicit, including that funding flows affect relationships and creates power asymmetries. Funding and benefits that people get from the research need to be made explicit and equity in decision making can help address power differences. Power differences also influences which types of evidence and knowledge are valued and consequently how research is designed and implemented and the type of outputs that are produced for which audiences. Equitable partnerships challenge hierarchies of evidence and knowledge and are inclusive of local and Indigenous knowledges.
- At their core, partnerships are built on interpersonal relationships that are based on mutual trust. Transparency and accountability are important aspects of building this. Open communication between all partners throughout the partnership lifetime is key. Trust is one of the fundamentals of well-functioning partnerships and takes time to establish through regular, open communication.
- Engage with the context that shapes the partnership and create space for mutual learning so that the partnership can adapt to the changes in the external context. This requires bringing partners into how success is valued and evaluated and enabling learning across all to inform adaptation. This includes the global funding context within which partnerships are formed.

We found that there is a lack of Southern voices in the research partnerships literature, especially when it comes to who is defining what equity means for whom. In this context, it is important to note that the partnership definition proposed from this review remains based on Northern ideas and epistemologies of equity and partnerships. In Tomorrow's Cities we have a unique opportunity to engage with scholars from the global South in the Hub (and beyond) to define equitable partnership for the Hub and develop a participatory evaluation framework to assess how the partnerships work in practice.

For GCRF research projects (and challenge led research more broadly) it is important to recognise that research for development partnerships are fundamentally political and context dependent. The politics of the funding context creates structural disincentives and challenges that can create a void between the ideal of equitable partnerships and the reality of working in partnerships. In particular, the often short timelines, funding being channelled via Northern partners to Southern partners, and a lack of trust combined with a pressure to achieve and show impact quickly produce a challenging structure within which to build equitable relationships. This is foundational for understanding fair and equitable partnerships, because we know that complex power relations exist in any partnership (RRC, 2018). A power aware view of partnerships is important to create realistic expectations of what a partnership can achieve within the constraints imposed by the funding system, especially when it constitutes new relationships that exist within a context of long standing and deep structural inequalities. Key tensions in relation to the GCRF funding criteria to achieve fair and equitable partnerships specifically include: i) varying capacities and priorities and mutually compatible timeframes; and ii) expanding opportunities for partnership beyond the usual suspects (Grieve & Mitchell, 2020). We conclude that these should be recognised and appreciated in any GCRF programme and in the Tomorrow's Cities Hub effort should be made to navigate them transparently.

There is a dearth of evidence of how working in equitable partnerships support development impact, and lack a of specific assessments of implementation and contextual differences of equitable partnerships. This highlights a unique opportunity for Tomorrow's Cities to contribute to the emergent research topic of evaluating equitable partnerships in large-scale research for development programmes. Starting points for what to focus evaluation on, is to consider how the partnership is performing on the design, systemic and relational dimensions, in terms of recognition, procedure and distribution. Such an evaluation design should be driven by definitions posed by researchers from the Global South and designed and implemented together with these researchers.

Based on the findings of the review, we also suggest that an overarching approach to evaluating the contribution of working in equitable partnerships to programme impact should be built on deep contextual understanding, buy-in and well-developed theories of change so that partners understand the link between equitable partnerships and outcomes at different scales (Newman, Bharadwaj & Fransman, 2019). In addition, evaluation methods that enable partners to come together and reflect on the quality of the partnership as well as how it is supporting movement along impact pathways are recommended, such as evaluative rubrics as a participatory tool which can be adapted to different context and help partners develop clarity around the different components that underpin the partnership.

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## 5.1 Further Reading

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## 5.2 Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following experts who voluntarily provided suggestions for relevant literature or other advice to the author to support the preparation of this report. The content of the report does not necessarily reflect the opinions of any of the experts consulted.

- Will Allen, Independent Consultant
- Jude Fransman, The Open University

We would like to thank Lars-Otto Naess and Rachana Upadhyaya for reviewing this paper and their valuable input toward this final version.

## Appendix: Overview of partnership principles and guides

Name	Organisation & Refs	Type of partnership / sector	Goal / Aim	Principles or insights	Notes or lessons from implementation	Other info
The Principles of Partnership (PoP)	<p>Global Humanitarian Platform (GHP)</p> <p>Russ, 2014</p> <p><a href="https://www.icvanetwork.org/principles-partnership-statement-commitment">https://www.icvanetwork.org/principles-partnership-statement-commitment</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.icvanetwork.org/global-humanitarian-platform-ghp-overview">https://www.icvanetwork.org/global-humanitarian-platform-ghp-overview</a></p>	Humanitarian sector	Develop principles and identify practices that could be factored into operations and improve relationships between humanitarian organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equality (and equity)</li> <li>• Transparency</li> <li>• Results-oriented approach</li> <li>• Responsibility</li> <li>• Complementarity</li> </ul>	<p>According to anecdotal evidence, the PoP has proved difficult to implement in practice: with issues around contextualisation; difficulties instilling it across organisations; transparency, inclusion and information sharing issues; and underlying drivers of money and power imbalances.</p> <p>Russ (2014) highlights some key lessons learnt from putting the PoP into practice:</p> <p>Equality (and equity): This necessitates understanding differing cultural norms and institutional values and norms. With increasing diversity of partners comes more diverse sets of values and ways of working; and equity will often mean different things to different partners.</p> <p>Transparency: Transparency measures are a good tool for building trust in partnerships. Such as transparency in language, behaviours, expectations, assumptions and the need to communicate these. E.g. designing behaviour protocols.</p> <p>Results-oriented approach: Dedicating time to setting-up simple formal systems and processes unique</p>	<p>Introduced in 2007</p> <p>The GHP itself was set up in 2006 by leaders of 40 humanitarian organisations (including NGOs, UN agencies, Red Cross/Crescent movement) to help encourage more partnerships between humanitarian actors.</p>

					<p>to the partnership is key to allowing the partnership to meet its milestones and results. Building relationships and recognising the communication and inter-personal skills needed is also key.</p> <p>Responsibility: Internal buy-in and recognising what is needed (commitment-wise) as a partner are important. Including other staff from within partner organisations (e.g. finance, comms) to attend sporadic meetings can help.</p> <p>Complementarity: To assure mutual benefit for all partners, alignment can often be a better alternative to consensus. This may “necessitate changing typical or ‘normal’ ways of working and look to operating differently” (Russ, 2014).</p>	
<p>11 Principles &amp; 7 Key questions for transboundary research partnerships</p>	<p>The Swiss Commission for Research Partnerships with Developing Countries (KFPE)</p> <p>Stöckli, Wiesmann &amp; Lys, 2018</p> <p>Wiesmann, Stöckli &amp; Lys, 2018</p>	<p>Transboundary research partnership (i.e. South-North research partnerships)</p> <p>KFPE considers transboundary research partnerships a specific form of the global collaborative</p>	<p>The 11 principles underscore the continuous process of knowledge generation, building mutual trust, mutual learning and shared ownership that makes up transboundary research in partnership.</p>	<p>P1 Set the agenda together.</p> <p>P2 Interact with stakeholders.</p> <p>P3 Clarify responsibilities.</p> <p>P4 Be accountable to beneficiaries.</p> <p>P5 Promote mutual learning.</p> <p>P6 Enhance capacities.</p> <p>P7 Share data and networks.</p> <p>P8 Disseminate results.</p> <p>P9 Pool profits and rewards.</p> <p>P10 Apply results.</p> <p>P11 Secure outcomes.</p>	<p>The importance and weight of the 11 principles vary with the programmatic complexity of collaborations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Principles [P1] and [P3] are crucial in disciplinary and multi-disciplinary projects.</li> <li>Principles [P2] and [P4] gain additional importance when the project is located closer to the science-society interface.</li> <li>With increasing programmatic complexity principles [P5] to [P9] gain in importance.</li> </ul>	<p>KFPE is a Commission of the Swiss Academy of Sciences (SCNAT), and is the information hub for South-North research in Switzerland, aiming to promote increased, effective and equitable</p>

	<a href="https://naturalsciences.ch/organisations/kfpe">https://naturalsciences.ch/organisations/kfpe</a>	research effort that cross economic, social, and cultural borders or divides.	The 7 questions point to factors that hinder or enable partnerships in different contexts; they are designed to help better understand the nature and type of a given partnership.	<p>Q1 Why work in partnership?</p> <p>Q2 How to ensure cohesion?</p> <p>Q3 What form of collaboration?</p> <p>Q4 Which foci and priorities?</p> <p>Q5 Who to involve?</p> <p>Q6 Where to create relevance?</p> <p>Q7 When to consolidate outcomes?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Principles [P10] and [P11] deserve special attention in highly complex partnership settings.</li> </ul> <p>Wiesmann, Stöckli &amp; Lys (2018: p.23) recommend that it is advisable to “clearly define the complexity level of a research partnership endeavour, to explicitly negotiate the expected objectives and added values for the participating parties, and to thoroughly address those partnership principles that are particularly critical in relation to the chosen form of collaboration.”</p>	research cooperation. Based on an extensive consultation process, the principles were updated in 2018 (third edition, first edition 2012), adding the 7 fundamental questions to help users to better understand and implement the principles.
Research Fairness Initiative	<p>The Council on Health Research for Development (COHRED)</p> <p>Carvalho et al., 2018</p> <p>COHRED, 2016</p> <p>Dodson, 2017</p> <p><a href="https://rfi.cohred.org/how-does-it-">https://rfi.cohred.org/how-does-it-</a></p>	<p>Aimed at multiple actors</p> <p>COHRED define a fair partnership as being “one that would provide equal opportunity for contribution in the study and for the adequate</p>	RFI’s global reporting system is aimed at encouraging governments, business, organisations and funders to describe how they enact measures to create trusting, lasting, transparent and effective partnerships in research and innovation	<p>Before research: Fairness of opportunity</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Relevance to communities – in which research is done</li> <li>2. Early engagement of partners</li> <li>3. Making contributions of all partners explicit – fair research contracting</li> <li>4. Ensuring that matching and other co-financing mechanisms do not undermine opportunities for fair participation of all partners</li> <li>5. Recognition of unequal research management capacities between partners</li> </ol>	<p>It is not clear from the RFI website or key documents what (if any) difference they give between “fair” and “equitable” partnerships.</p> <p>The main difference between the RFI and previous initiatives (such as KFPE’s 11 principles) is the attempt to go beyond “good intentions” as RFI is a compliance mechanism, which can be implemented by a wide range of institutions (Carvalho et al., 2018).</p>	<p>RFI is a global reporting system (subscription-based), which aims to drive fairer research partnerships</p> <p>The reporting areas were developed by COHRED over a two-year global consultation process.</p>

	<a href="#">work-in-practice/</a>	<p>benefit sharing based on the contributions made by each partner” (COHRED, 2016: p.2).</p>		<p>and providing for appropriate corrective measures</p> <p>During research: Fair process</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Minimising negative impact of research programmes on health and other systems</li> <li>7. Fair local hiring, training and sourcing</li> <li>8. Respect for authority of local ethics review systems</li> <li>9. Data ownership, storage, access and use</li> <li>10. Encourage full cost recovery budgeting and compensation for all partners</li> </ol> <p>After research: Fair sharing of benefits, costs and outcomes</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>11. Research system capacities – improvements to ensure local research systems become more competitive</li> <li>12. Intellectual property rights and technology transfer</li> <li>13. Innovation system capacities – measures to optimise localisation of spin-off economic activities, scaling ability</li> <li>14. Due diligence efforts</li> <li>15. Expectation of all partners to adhere to a best practice standard in research collaborations</li> </ol>		
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N/A	<p>Research4Impact</p> <p>Research 4 Impact, 2017</p> <p><a href="https://www.r4impact.org/">https://www.r4impact.org/</a></p>	Researcher-practitioner relationships	Information sharing article highlighting 8 “good” practices to think about as you begin conversations about a (researcher-practitioner) collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaboration is an iterative process</li> <li>• Standard operating procedures may be different</li> <li>• Make sure that the timing works for all parties involved</li> <li>• It may take time to reveal interests that are aligned between researchers and practitioners</li> <li>• Address any organisational impediments to collaborative research up front</li> <li>• Have an early discussion about your expectations of the kind of research you would conduct together</li> <li>• Make sure you agree up front about how any data generated by collaborative research will be used and maintained, including decisions about whether findings will be published</li> <li>• Try to build a relationship</li> </ul>	No explicit mention of equitability or what evidence the principles are based on	Research 4 Impact is an international online networking platform created by US academics to help connect practitioners, policy-makers and social scientists with similar research interests; its model is rooted in the behavioural science of relationship-building.
N/A	<p>Catholic Relief Service (CRS)</p> <p>Leege and McMillan, 2016</p>	NGO-academic partnership	Six generic, cross-cutting lessons learned around NGO-academic partnerships were developed that can help guide other NGOs and universities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Identify and monitor priorities.</i></li> <li>• <i>Build mutual cultural understanding:</i> Both partners need to understand the other’s institution, values, needs, and opportunities.</li> <li>• <i>Create a value proposition:</i> To avoid confusion, it is important to articulate each partner’s</li> </ul>	The significance of the lessons will vary as the partnership grows, matures, and diversifies.	Lessons drawn from analysis of CRS’ attempt at developing a model for institutional partnerships that goes beyond project-driven collaborations



				<p>needs, core values, and expectations for the partnership and how it will be managed in a written document.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Involve senior management.</i></li> <li>• <i>Empower a focal point:</i> Building full partnerships takes time and the leadership of an institutional focal point on both sides who can serve as a bridge between partners.</li> <li>• <i>Build a knowledge management system and keep it up to date.</i></li> </ul>		<p>towards achieving longer-term, transformational goals.</p>
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