



INTERNATIONAL  
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SCIENCE



Science and Policy

Platform of the Swiss Academy of Sciences

KFPE – Commission for Research Partnerships  
with Developing Countries

## **Support for Scientific Capacity Building in Developing Countries: Coordinating and Enhancing Efforts**

This joint workshop of the International Foundation for Science (IFS – [www.ifs.se](http://www.ifs.se)) and the Commission for Research Partnerships with Developing Countries (KFPE – [www.kfpe.ch](http://www.kfpe.ch)) of the Swiss Academy of Sciences (SCNAT – [www.scnat.ch](http://www.scnat.ch)) was held in Berne, Switzerland from 9-10 November 2009.

The objective of the workshop was to analyse the emerging international “architecture” of research funding for young scientists in developing countries. The agenda (see programme below) centred on the major challenges faced by individual researchers and research institutions in developing countries. Furthermore the challenges for research donors to promote science and research in developing countries were discussed. Working groups were set up to discuss cooperation among research donors and supporting developing countries with weak scientific infrastructure. – The workshop was part of the external evaluation of IFS and provided an occasion for the evaluators to assess the IFS approach in a broader context.

Participants in the workshop (see below) included senior donor officials, representatives from research institutions as well as organisations implementing research-funding schemes. In order to engage a wider audience that could not be accommodated at the workshop, a short questionnaire survey was conducted in Africa, Asia and Latin America and the results were presented at the workshop.

This report does not purport to be comprehensive, but we hope that this summary of the challenges faced by individual researchers, research institutions and donors in supporting research in developing countries, may serve as a road map for others seeking to support scientific capacity building in developing countries. At the same time it should help the external evaluators to assess the IFS approach in a broader context.

### **Discussions of the first day led to the following conclusions:**

- It is important to tap synergies and take advantage of complementarities with other organisations: there is a need for better coordination/cooperation with other funders and research donors – especially on the ground. Cooperation beyond institutional boundaries could lead to meaningful partnerships between donors/funders for local capacity building programmes. Donors/funders should coordinate their efforts more strongly than in the past.
- Include/approach/involve national governments: links to administration/policy are needed, especially to increase the respective country’s ownership. This helps to increase the chances for sustainability (long-term support and activities) and for the creation of an enabling environment. National governments are important partners and should be included whenever possible (political commitment). This also increases the chances for generating local funding (additional support,

matching funds, etc.). In addition, efforts to strengthen research capacities should be determined and tailored to country needs.

- Another important way to go is to combine forces with national/regional research centres and national research councils.
- Scientists must talk to local politicians and they should also publish in local papers: scientific journalism is an important means to increase the local recognition of research.

#### Concerning IFS:

- IFS needs to become a more interesting partner for other organisations/donors: as a broker, service provider, etc.
- IFS needs to be inside and on the ground: local hubs are important, and the first experience (Uganda) shows that IFS is becoming more of an actor than only a 'donor'.

#### **Working Group Sessions:**

Two working groups were formed to discuss the issues of "coordination among research donors" (A) and "supporting developing countries with weak scientific infrastructure" (B). The two working groups came to similar conclusions, which are summarised below.

#### A) Coordination/cooperation among research donors

- An analytical distinction was made between donors, funders and actors: donors are organisations whose sole function is to provide funding to other organisations in accordance with their goals.  
Funders are organisations which depend on financial resources from donors but which, in their turn, allocate resources to research institutions, universities, NGOs, etc. in accordance with their programmes; funders include organisations such as IFS, ISP, TWAS or START.  
Actors are organisations that conduct research, such as research projects, education programmes, etc.
- In many cases the funders function as "service providers" for other donors/funders. A case in point is the collaboration of OPCW and COMSTECH with IFS in providing financial support for young scientists to carry out a research project. The donor considers this to be a worthy goal but lacks instruments in its own organisation to provide assistance. Instead it uses IFS as a service provider (to manage a competitive research grant scheme) and allocates funds to IFS for partial financing of the programme.
- The discussion explored different possibilities of implementing the option of using centres of excellence for the purpose of advancing young scientists: Donors should, together with national and regional scientific networks in the South, identify suitable centres in more advanced (developing/transition) countries. These centres should become focal points for the training of individuals. They could become the core of networks offering an exchange of faculties and students, and could thus be used to provide capacity enhancement support. Training programmes for academics (short-term) and technical training (for technicians) could also be organised in such centres.

#### Concerning IFS:

- IFS should be regarded as a broker and service provider for donors. The role of IFS is to build bridges between people and funding. IFS could play a significant role in leveraging affinities between similar organisations. It needs to identify synergies and complementarities to increase its impact. For this purpose it could also initiate the creation of a platform enabling similar organisations to exchange experience (similar to IFORD, a platform for research donors).
- IFS's focus on supporting individual scientists should be maintained but IFS should intensify its cooperation with national institutions and governments by

seeking to obtain matching funds to support individuals, and with a view to achieving a long-term impact. In addition, IFS should limit the number of countries it is involved in by applying a set of transparent and clearly defined criteria.

### B) Supporting developing countries with weak scientific infrastructure

Both working groups discussed how more advanced developing countries could support developing countries with weak scientific infrastructure and how donors/funders could enhance such activities.

- Criteria used by research donors must further evolve and should be more focussed on scientific strength, not so much on GNP; be innovative concerning the types of partnership with advanced countries.
- Explore a model of interaction in which more advanced countries are involved in order to support weaker (neighbouring) countries through individual training and research support; an example is given at the end of this document. Such an approach should be aligned with government priorities. – For example the Thailand model: agreements were made with the national government, which instructs research organisations to invest in capacity building activities for neighbouring countries.
- Training workshops in the area of innovation and entrepreneurship should be promoted – COMSTECH offers its services as a partner.
- Access to literature and building a network of libraries should be promoted. COMSTECH provides access to 46,000 journals through a consortium of 45 libraries and offers its services as a partner on this subject.

### Concerning IFS:

- The discussion explored different possibilities of implementing the option of using centres of excellence for IFS's purposes; see conclusions for IFS below.
- Create a list of SACs/experts and their specifications/experience: IFS's network of experts is one of its strengths and should be utilised much more
- Reflect on the potential of involving IFS-affiliated organisations.

### **Conclusions for IFS**

The general conclusion reached among the workshop participants centred on their appreciation of continued support to individuals.

The focus of discussions was on IFS's adaptation to the changing environment and its continued relevance as an agency supporting research for development. It was noted that IFS was both an actor (service provider) and a broker in this changing environment. It was noted that IFS must continually identify the gaps and complementarities in its area of operation in order to position itself strategically with a view to remaining relevant and increasing its impact. IFS should tap synergies with like-minded organisations and thereby enhance its position.

It was agreed that IFS's focus on providing grants to individual scientists must be maintained. This should be one of IFS's strategic functions. IFS has a lot of competence in running competitive grant programmes. IFS can leverage this competence with national governments in developing countries (which do not have such schemes) to set up national competitive grant schemes.

IFS also has a global footprint and it can easily link up researchers/research networks internationally and within each continent via its excellent network of experts (SACs – scientific advice committees) and ex-grantees. This is another area that IFS can influence greatly, becoming a broker between researchers & research networks and national

science authorities. For IFS to be an effective actor/broker, it must be sensitive (and responsive) to local/regional dynamics in developing countries. The recently set-up regional office at Makerere University was cited as an effective mechanism by which IFS would be responsive to African scientific research needs. IFS should pursue the same goal in a few selected advanced developing countries by creating virtual hubs.

Furthermore the workshop explored a model of interaction according to which IFS supports individuals in developing countries, while teaming up with institutions and eliciting government support in more advanced countries. In this way IFS would support weaker (neighbouring) countries through individual training and research support, i.e. through access to advanced research facilities. To this end, IFS should offer the respective centre e.g. an annual global amount – e.g. USD 50,000 – in exchange for a certain number of man-months of accommodating scientists. Such an approach should be aligned with government priorities, and IFS should select the countries to be supported in accordance with their strategic priorities and elaborate a cooperation package. This model would require IFS to be present by establishing a physical or a virtual hub.

