

Challenges in applying KFPE 11 principles in Research Partnership - in projects aiming at developing expertise and capacities for innovation and sustainable sanitation programmes implementation.

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Abstract

The UNESCO World Science Report shows that Developed Countries researchers produced 87.6 % of the World shares scientific publications against 17.3 % and 0.3 % for Developing Countries and Less Developed Countries researchers, respectively (UNESCO, 2005). These figures corroborate the fact that no African University ranks among the world top 200. Hence, most leading research institutions working towards the achievement of the MDGs targets for water and sanitation are located in the North (i.e., Europe, USA). As a consequence, the best training curricula for sanitary engineers are co-located in Northern institutions. Although this situation reinforces the development of North-South partnerships, it induces a bias in the debate about what is a sustainable sanitation system. Technologies and concepts are developed, often in North, and then proposed for implementation or promotion. Research partnership for developing sustainable solutions is a way forward to reinforcing research capacity and innovation in Developing Countries. Although KFPE provides guidelines principles for successful research partnership (KFPE, 1998), conditions for their full implementation are far to be met. For instance, the principles assumed an equitable and balanced discussion platform between partners, conditions which are not often met. Because money (budget) and research interest are, in majority of cases, generate from Developed Countries partners; this situation puts the Developing Countries partners in a lower position for pushing forward their vision and expectations. While the Developed Countries partners are focusing on quality and high impact research that should be achieved and published in a short term (often due to donors deadlines), the Developing Countries partners may want to first give priority to their own capacity development agenda in order to become in future reliable and respected scientists or research centres. This might include individual and institutional capacity development programmes. Such demand is seldom openly expressed, as capacity development is seen in many research partnership projects as a participation of the “Southern partner” to a project and missions towards “Northern Countries”. Such projects, neglect the needs for a long-term sustainable capacity generation within the partner institution/country. They close without any or very little inputs for the local curricula development or empowerment of a national team which will be able to pursue the research or manage research programmes for innovation needed for their countries development agenda.

The presentation outlines some challenges met by the author to applying the KFPE principles 1 (Decide on objectives together) and 2 (Build up mutual trust) in research partnership for developing expertise and capacities in Environmental Sanitation in Developing Countries. Based on his experience, he concludes that both individual and institutional capacities development are key for building mutual trust and deciding equitably on research agenda in a partnership North-South. Hence he recommends that the KFPE guidelines should aim at developing research capacity and not only implementing research partnership. The author has worked 7 years as research project officer in Belgium and Burkina Faso (5 years); he has been working the last 5 years as research programme manager based in the Switzerland with field activities in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

References

KFPE (Swiss Commission for Research Partnership with Developing Countries) (1998). "Guidelines for Research in Partnership with Developing Countries: 11 Principles. 32p. UNESCO, 2005. World Science Report.