

Creating Equitable Partnerships



Guidance document for leadership

What are equitable partnerships?

Equitable partnerships are research partnerships in which there is mutual participation, mutual trust and respect, mutual benefit and equal value placed on each partners contribution at all stages of the research process.

Why are equitable partnerships important?

Equitable partnerships are key to successful interdisciplinary research. Some of the benefits of equitable partnerships include:

- Wellbeing and dignity of project members, participants and stakeholders is protected and maintained
 - Build capacity and increase knowledge sharing
 - Increase the quality and reputability of our research
 - Research is more implementable and recommendations more fit for purpose
 - Benefit of local knowledge, networks, community and industry buy-in
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Creating equitable teams

Senior researchers and those in positions of leadership have a key role in developing equitable partnerships and creating collaborative research teams. Through their leadership and guidance, experienced researchers can create teams built on trust, respect, collaboration and inclusivity. They can also help direct the research process in a way that supports equitable partnerships.

This guidance document outlines some ways in which you can help create a collaborative and inclusive team environment, increase capacity building and knowledge sharing and ultimately foster equitable partnerships throughout the entire research journey.

Creating inclusive and collaborative teams

The first step in building equitable partnerships is to first create a team built on mutual respect, trust, sharing, collaboration and inclusivity. There a range of important factors to consider when building an equitable research team.

Project Structure and Governance

- Does our project/ organisation support equitable partnerships? Is their an equitable partnerships strategy in place?
 - Are their options for distributed leadership? Could their be equal co-leaders from different organisations of the partnerships?
 - Is our project/ funding/ governance transparent? Does decision-making and governance include a variety of perspectives and include members from all relevant groups of the partnership? Is it possible for all members of the partnership to input into decision-making in some capacity?
 - How will conflict or concerns be handled if they arise? Are their disputes, authorship and safeguarding policies in place?
 - Are all partners given the opportunity to read, understand and comment on the project governance arrangements?
 - Do all partners know how to escalate concerns they may have and are able to contact independent bodies in case they feel their concerns are not address properly in the project?
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Team roles and expectations

- What expectations does each partner have of the project and their role in it?
- What roles would each partner like to take?
- Are the roles of each partner accurately reflected in their contract or terms of reference
- Are their processes in place for if/when a partner changes their mind on what they would like their role in the project to be?
- What the expectations surrounding communication? What will be the main mode of communication (meetings, emails, chat messaging platforms, whatsapp)? What will be the frequency of that communication? Are their any boundaries surrounding communication that a partner would like to implement (i.e no messages/emails on weekends etc)?

Plans for capacity building

- What are the strengths and skills do partners already bring to the project? What are their learning needs?
 - How will knowledge be shared throughout the project? How will knowledge be shared with participants, stakeholders and beneficiaries of the research?
 - Is there any specific suggested literature, networks or tools which the partners should be aware of before commencing research? Are there ways to help partners develop a deeper understanding of the topic under investigation and the research context in study countries?
 - How will early career researchers be supported in their growth and development? What opportunities are there for students and early career researchers to participate in all stages of the project?
 - Will any tools, guidance documents or training programmes be developed as part of the project, either for project members or a wider audience?
 - How is capacity building planned, monitored and its effectiveness evaluated over the lifetime of the project?
 - Are there funds available for formal or external training from either the main grant or other sources?
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Diversity and Inclusion

- Is there a regional, discipline and gender balance within the team as much as possible? Is there representation of all study countries in the team membership?
- Is there a balance of seniority in the project as appropriate? What efforts have been made to include students and early career researchers?
- Are all members appropriately trained and briefed on the local context/ culture / political situation of all study countries? Do partners understand issues that may arise regarding local partner safety.
- Are cultural norms, boundaries and expectations shared and discussed before commencing research?
- Does the project draw on local expertise? Are local researchers hired as much as possible? Do local researchers have a principle role in the research?
- Do all partners understand the demands arising on staff in different contexts, at the personal, institutional and national levels, particularly in times of crisis? How is information surrounding these topics shared in an appropriate manner?

Finance and Budgets

- Is the budget allocation fair and realistic for the work expected? Are researchers paid a liveable contribution for the country they live in?
 - Does any partner feel they have inadequate resources or funds for what they are expected to do?
 - Does the budget cover all key aspects of the research and includes cover for key aspects of equitable partnerships to be implemented (ie. co-production, publication costs, travel costs, equipment, training and field work costs)? (Sometimes not applicable in co-funding situations)
 - Have overheads and indirect costs been fairly accounted for and compensated?
 - Is there an appropriate payment schedule that allows work to take place? Sometimes advances may be needed to cover equipment and training costs before research takes place?
 - Are there clear expectations on what funding can and can't be used for? Are there clear and fair expectations on what partners are expected to already have available in terms of equipment and training? Is there funds to build equipment and training capacity where needed?
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Contracts

- What type of contractual arrangement will be used to formalise the partnership? How and where will this be created?
- Do all parties have reasonable expectations of how long the contractual process will take and what challenges may arise if there are delays? If contracts are delayed, is there a shared understanding of what preparatory work could be done in advance of a signed contract, and what funds will support that?
- Is there a mutual understanding of processes for due diligence checks and how the contract performance will be monitored? Does any additional support need to be given or time spent on reaching a mutual understanding?
- Which country's law will govern the contract? Are all partners comfortable with this plan? If there are disputes, under which country's law will these disputes be settled?
- Is it clear to partners what is required of them? Will they be required to undergo ethical review?
- Do all partners have a clear understanding on the rules required by the project funder and how they can comply? Do all partners have a clear understanding where the funding comes from (ie. UK government, ODA funding in the case of SANH)?

Developing Relationships

- How will we help the team get to know each other, understand each other's organisations and research and build trust-based relationships?
 - Will there be any social activities as part of the project? Will there be any exchange programmes, workshops, events or other ways for the researchers in different countries to meet each other?
 - How will you evaluate how well the partnership is working? Will opportunities be created for reflection and evaluation be created?
 - How will feedback be collected from partners on their perspective on the partnership and suggestions on any improvements?
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Building trust-based and inclusive teams

- Encourage honesty and open communication. Ensure there are no negative consequences for disagreeing with something, bringing constructive feedback or communicating reasonable delays.
- Provide space and opportunities for all members to contribute to a discussion and proactively ask for feedback on your leadership and communication.
- Proactively create opportunities for collaboration where partners can work more closely together, instead of work always being clearly separated by organisation.
- Involve members in decision-making and actively ask for feedback on ideas and suggestions you bring forward.
- Rotate tasks like meeting chairing so it is not always the same people leading and controlling meetings.
- Ensure to treat all countries with the same importance. Simple things such as making sure to include meeting times in all relevant timezones helps show that all countries are weighted equally, instead of being biased towards a few.
- Make sure roles and responsibilities are very clearly defined, as well as making it clear who is responsible for communicating and sharing information. Make it clear when updates on progress need to be given.
- Ensure to invite all relevant people to meetings and important discussions. Pay particular attention to inviting students and early career researchers to events, meetings and to participate in all stages of the research process.

Equitable Partnerships throughout the research journey

Co-design, co-implementation, co-analysis and co-evaluation are they keys to equitable partnerships in research. All members of the partnership should be invited to participate in all stages of the research process. This section outlines how you can maintain equitable partnerships throughout the entire research journey

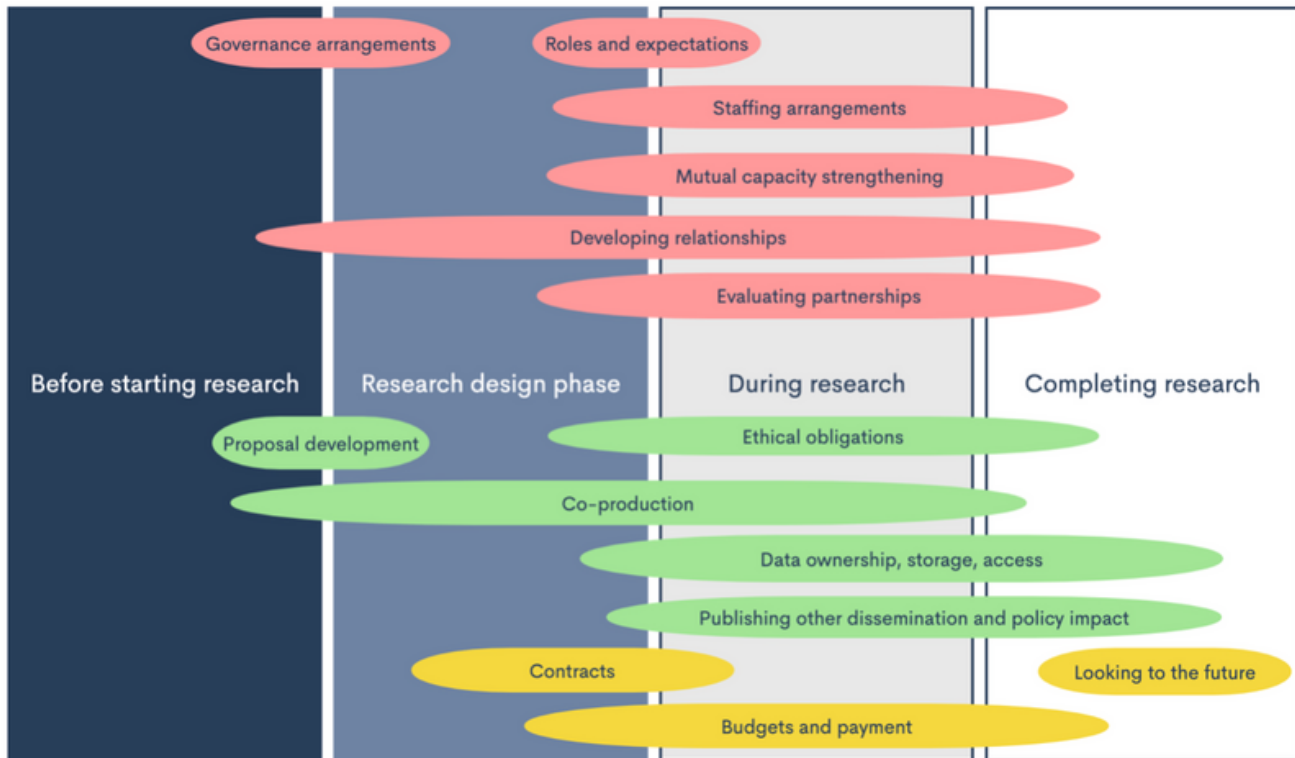


Figure 1: Moments when equitable partnerships issues will arise in the research cycle (red: people management and professional relationships, green: research activities and outputs, yellow: contracts and resource management).

Research Questions and Proposal Writing

- Does the funder you are applying to encourage equitable partnerships? Does the nature of the grant create any obstacles to equitable partnerships?
- How will all partners be involved in the design and writing of the proposal? Are their funds to support co-design?
- How can opportunities be provided for all partners to be involved in key stages of the project initiation?
- Are their options to include external stakeholders (ie. local communities, policy makers, potential beneficiaries and other stakeholders) in the co-design of the project
- Who does this study benefit? Does it benefit people in the countries the study is being conducted in?

Research Design

- What efforts have been taken to co-design the study from research questions to methodologies? Are all members of the partnership invited to help design the study?
- Will any extra training or equipment be needed to complete the research plans? How will this be shared with those who need it?
- How is feedback collected on the study design? Who is providing this feedback? Are all partners given the opportunity to provide their feedback and input?
- Is the study design realistic and doable for all partners in the time and with the funds available? If not, what support will there be to build capacity?
- Is the study design considered culturally appropriate in each country where research is conducted?

Ethical Review

- Which processes and principles for ethical research will be used? (different disciplines can often have different approaches to research ethics)
- Is formal ethical review required? Will ethical approval be obtained in all partner countries to make sure research is culturally appropriate?
- Do all partners have access to ethical review committees in country? If not, how can they be supported in obtaining approval in country?
- Are all partners equally involved in discussions about any ethical concerns surrounding the research? Are these different perspectives given equal weighting?
- Are there accessible options for partners to get support and advice on research ethics? Is there funding available to support this?

Field/ Laboratory Work

- Are the safety and wellbeing concerns of all members taken into account and actioned upon where possible? Is there support available for extra safety measures if needed? (ie. personal protective equipment)

Data Management

- Are all members aware of the cultural norms, customs, expectations and taboos of any country they are visiting for research, meetings or events?
- Are all members made aware as much as possible of any potential risks associated with field or laboratory work? Are all members provided with the equipment, funds and information needed to do their work safely?
- Who will own any data collected or any samples? How will data and samples be shared? (usually the ownership of the data is by the institution in the country which the data is collected, with a right of use granted to other partners where appropriate)
- What are the data protection laws of the countries of each member of the partnership? How can the research methodologies and data management comply with these various laws and regulations?
- Are all members of the partnership given fair and equal access to data they need for their research? Is there a common, secure database where data is stored and accessible for other partners?
- Are there any important considerations that need to be made in regards to intellectual property rights? (you can find out more about SANH's IP rights policy on the wiki)

Publication

- All members of the partnership should be informed from an early stage about any future outputs or publications so that they can offer to contribute before research commences.
- Are there opportunities for students and early career researchers to participate in analysis and paper writing?
- What outputs will be produced and how are they decided? Which partners will be contributing to which aspect of the the research, analysis and paper writing and how is this decided?
- Are all members of the partnership correctly and fairly acknowledged for their contribution? (you can find out more on authorship principles in the SANH Publication policy)

Knowledge Exchange

- How will the results and conclusions from the study be disseminated? Who will receive the findings first (ie. study population, national bodies, international bodies etc)?
- Is there an agreed set of principles for dissemination and what mediums will be used (i.e internet, national press, social media, conferences etc)?
- Will any findings, tools or other information sources be translated into local languages? Is there funds to assist this? Will there be an conferences/ seminars where findings will be shared in local languages?
- Are there any institutional structures that different partners can use to help share findings to different audiences?
- Are there any opportunities to continue or develop new projects together? How can we ensure all members of the partnership are invited to any future opportunities arising out of this project?
- How can the lessons learnt from your experience be shared to help encourage future equitable partnerships? Is there any ways to share best practices with other researchers?

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