

North-South partnerships in development research: an institutional approach

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Abstract

In order to challenge the global 'knowledge divide', knowledge-producing systems in the South need to become more integrally linked to international research networks as full partners in knowledge accumulation and international exchanges. This paper raises some issues for discussion on how North-South partnerships can contribute to supporting such processes. The paper draws evidence from the literature, existing Dutch programmes for North-South research cooperation, and recent innovative Dutch partnerships in North-South research, which emphasise a greater equitable exchange with partners in the South. It shows that joint programmatic research builds up more cumulative patterns of capacity enhancement and international networks, although capacity retention remains a long-term problem in the South. New initiatives give more space to equal exchanges and learning in the programmes than older established programmes. In the final section, five important issues that need to be explored in future studies of North-South research partnerships are discussed briefly.

Keywords

North-South
Partnerships
knowledge producing
systems
Dutch development assistance
capacity enhancement
institutions
learning

Introduction

The view that research and knowledge development is needed to drive national socio-economic development in countries all over the globe has become well established since the 1990s. Knowledge production and dissemination through tertiary education is a basic requirement, and has led to economically more developed societies being defined as 'knowledge societies'. Such countries are characterised by complex knowledge production systems with extensive interactions, and strong sources of demand for knowledge from end users. Sassen (1997) has even suggested that countries in the South, whose knowledge production systems are not well developed, will soon become excluded from global networks promoting knowledge accumulation, losing their international competitiveness in the process. Very unequal patterns of expenditure on knowledge production systems exist globally. The OECD countries account for roughly 85 per cent of total world expenditure in science and technology; India, China, and the East Asian NICs account for 10 per cent; and the rest of the world for the remaining 5 per cent (DANIDA 2001). This means that for the majority of countries in the developing world, existing knowledge production and dissemination systems are inadequate to deal with rapidly changing patterns of development and globalisation.

In order to challenge the global 'knowledge divide', knowledge-producing systems need to be developed and extended in countries in the South (capacity building).¹ They also need to become more integrally linked to international research networks in order to become full partners in knowledge accu-

- 1 The RAWOO uses the term capacity enhancing, which more correctly reflects the fact that knowledge and research capacity exists in most countries of the South.

- 2 The government of Denmark is an exception, recently commissioning a study of Danish-supported development research for a new policy designed to increase such support (DANIDA 2001).

mulation and international exchanges (North-South and South-South research collaboration). Both are important strategies, which should be linked to draw out their mutual benefits. This raises a number of fundamental issues about the domains of knowledge to be promoted; the modalities of knowledge production; and the spread and use made of the knowledge generated. Existing patterns of inequality can be easily reproduced, reducing the opportunities for countries in the South to develop autonomous pathways of knowledge production, reflecting national and local concerns.

This paper raises some areas for discussion on how North-South partnerships can contribute to supporting development processes in the South. It does not pretend to cover the various discussions comprehensively or completely, but reflects some of the author's concerns. Specifically the following questions are raised. How can North-South research partnerships:

- (1) reflect the development interests and preferences of Southern researchers and stakeholders oriented towards (sustainable) development issues;
- (2) promote knowledge production and capacity-enhancing systems that allow Southern researchers to participate on an equal footing in international research networks; and
- (3) incorporate processes of interaction between researchers and users of knowledge (i.e. research, policy and end-users)?

The paper draws on three sets of literature to examine these questions. The next section presents a short literature review, which discusses aspects of South-North research cooperation, raised in the questions above. In the subsequent section, some existing programmes for North-South research cooperation and partnerships in the Netherlands are described. In the fourth section, some examples of recent partnerships in North-South research, which emphasise greater ownership by partners in the South, are presented. In the final section, some conclusions are drawn about issues that need to be explored further in studies of equitability in North-South research partnerships.

Knowledge production and capacity enhancement in North-South research partnerships: raising the issues

International cooperation in 'research for development' has been heavily supported by national governments in Europe and international organisations for the past fifty years. Although the interest of national governments in funding universities has generally decreased in Europe in the 1990s, respectable sums of money are still spent in this area.² The Netherlands alone has outstanding commitments of one billion Dutch guilders to development research (Box 2001). Public support remains important for North and South researchers, because the financing of private sector international research is skewed and its results are withheld from the public domain by wide-ranging restrictions on its use and spread (Gaillard 2001). Public funding is particularly important in countries of the South, where other sources of funding for development research are minimal or non-existent.

International cooperation can take various forms. These include *networks* (defined as a relatively loose form of cooperation, characterised by horizontal exchanges of information, lacking a hierarchy and a long-term commitment (Box 2001)); *cooperation* (a form of organised interaction towards a common

end for mutual benefit (Box 2001)); and *partnerships* (highly structured forms of cooperation, with long-term commitments, concrete activities, a form of contract, and autonomous participating partners (Baud *et al.* 2001)). The discussion here will centre mainly on forms of cooperation and partnerships. A number of models of how knowledge is produced and distributed exist. The classic linear model associated with the North-South 'transfer of knowledge and technology' model, assumes that the scientific community produces 'universally applicable knowledge', which it then distributes to users. Many authors have criticised this type of model, which ignores the context in which knowledge is produced, and the limits of that context (cf. Rip 2001; Box 2001).

Alternative models assume that knowledge production is based on interactions between researchers, people and organisations, who are both sources and users of various types of knowledge. Common to this type of model is the recognition that the scope of knowledge ranges from the local, craft and practice-based knowledge (Chambers 1997) to the more generalised, 'cosmopolitan' knowledge produced by the scientific community (cf. Rip 2001). I would like to add to this the 'middle range' of embedded knowledge, built up and circulated at the level of sub-national regional 'districts' (e.g. Van Westen 2001; Helmsing 2000).

Knowledge production systems consist of the constant interaction and translation between the three different types of knowledge, mediated through the institutions that structure such knowledge collection and dissemination. Based on this, three modes of knowledge production are distinguished: (1) the exchange/circulation of knowledge from local practices, which helps define research problems; (2) the 'embedded knowledge' exchange, which becomes more encoded and generally used through its spread within networks of practising professionals (engineers, technicians, and entrepreneurs) and (3) the 'generalised' knowledge produced in 'controlled settings' (laboratories, experimental).³

Rip rightly states that all knowledge production involves two basic processes; namely, first translating local problem definitions to more generalised knowledge, and then translating the results from generalised knowledge back to local contexts, so that it can be matched to local circumstances (Rip 2001: 14). Therefore, I would strongly suggest that a focus on the institutions involved in knowledge production, capacity building, and knowledge utilisation, and their relationships is an essential ingredient to promote understanding of how North-South development research partnerships can become more equitable (see Figure 1 at the end of this section).

Turning now to such partnerships, I will briefly discuss the literature about the dynamics of North-South development research partnerships, along the lines of questions I raised about partnerships in urban sustainable development recently (Baud 2000). These are: (1) what actors are involved and whose research agendas are prioritised; (2) how does interaction in North-South research partnerships take place and contribute to knowledge production and capacity enhancement; and (3) how are the outcomes of research used by policy-makers and other stakeholders? The literature used for this discussion refers mainly to authors writing on these questions in the area of social science development research.⁴ It is also a section that raises more ques-

3 I have adapted the three modes of knowledge production that Rip distinguished to the context of the social sciences: he talks about the 'exchange/circulation of local practices', the 'natural history' setting, and the 'controlled lab' setting (Rip 2001).

4 The Social Science Research Council Inter-regional Working Group used similar questions in 'International Scholarly Collaboration: lessons from the Past'. (2000).

tions than it can answer, as the knowledge in this area is largely anecdotal and based on localised, disciplinary experiences.

Setting the research agenda: inequities in North-South partnerships

Who sets research agendas? The main types of actors setting research agendas are national governments and their bureaucracies, private-sector firms and their associated professional organisations, institutions of higher education and research, and 'civil society' organisations, having and utilising knowledge for practice. Each of these categories of actors is diverse in their composition, with possible conflicts of interest. Although such diversity and the existing polarities between groups of actors should be made explicit when research programming takes place, this often does not occur in practice (Nauta 1994: 15).

In North-South cooperation the choice of topics at the programme level is often determined with supply-side interests in mind. Groups of researchers have their own disciplinary interests and agendas, with accountability largely to the academic community (Gibbon's first mode of knowledge production (Gibbons 1994)). The alternative way of setting research agendas is through the broader community defining problems, which need research to help solve them (Gibbons' second mode). This requires researchers to look across disciplines and work together with local communities, i.e. being socially accountable. This second mode of agenda setting is increasingly used in North-South and South-South programmes of development research. Examples are the RAWOO programming exercises in biodiversity research and health research (KNAW 2000; RAWOO 1998a, 1998b, 1998c), and national programmes in the South in urban development research (Miranda and Hordijk 1998; Hordijk 1999, 2000).

An active interplay between scientific community, private sector and civil society may be very difficult to carry out in many countries in the South as a result of long-standing conflicts and high levels of mistrust between the different groups of actors. This is known as the Ganuza dilemma, where Northern governments set research agendas for lack of a unified 'voice' from the South (Schweigman and Van der Werf 1994: 8). However, saying this means refusing engagement with the diversity of communities and interests in the South. Rather, interactive consultations with a variety of Southern partners can lead to informed political choices on whose voices to give priority.

Knowledge production and strengthening research capacity

How to improve North-South research programmes designed for knowledge production and strengthening research capacity has been a question increasingly raised in the last decade by the Dutch research council RAWOO and the national funding agency DGIS (Bunders and Mukherjee 1997; Gaillard 2001; Wils 1995). Wils has given a multilevel definition of 'research capacity', which refers to the capacity of a whole research system to set its own priorities, and to design a research policy and programme accordingly. This includes development research carried out in a non-academic setting – such as research done by NGOs or users' initiatives. It involves components at different levels: individual human resource development, the capacity of research

institutions to handle research projects and programmes, and the capacity to set and execute national research priorities (Wils 1995: 7). Therefore, programmes designed to enhance research capacity must build on existing situations in the country concerned, and take the different levels of a national research system into account in a coherent manner, to be effective.

Greater equality between partners is a basic goal; a number of instruments are used to reach it. Funding agencies have zoomed in on the financial and organisational instruments related to research programmes that try to guarantee greater equality between cooperating partners. The Netherlands has undertaken experiments to shift control over thematic priority setting, funding and management to Southern partners (as in the MMRP programmes), and in joint control, to give Southern partners a more dominant role (e.g. SANPAD discussed in later in this paper). Capacity building among Southern research partners can take place in a number of areas. In human resource development (at individual level), the gulf between the 'newly industrialising countries' and emerging countries and very poor countries is growing in terms of individual research capacity-building instruments. In the former countries, national competitive research grants schemes are being established, which alleviate the necessity for external funding (Gaillard 2001). Therefore, international fellowship programmes can concentrate on countries without such schemes, and on research sectors, which are not funded through such schemes.

A danger inherent in international research fellowship programmes is the potential brain drain if graduates do not return to their own countries. This danger exists when the countries do not have sufficient capacity to absorb graduates in the labour market, or when employment opportunities elsewhere are much more attractive. A current example is the brain drain from countries like India in the ICT sector, whose graduates are actively recruited for employment in Europe and the United States. To reduce the danger, many scholarship programmes work with 'sandwich' schemes, which maintain interaction with the country of origin on a more continuous basis. Other programmes require graduates to work at the sponsoring university in their own country for some years, before moving on (MHO).

In the cooperation between institutions, the relative weight of research production and capacity building varies according to the existing strength of both institutions. This cooperation should be coupled with support for networking to counter the isolation and lack of communication felt by researchers in the South (even with ICT, as the possibilities are often not as extensive as assumed in many research institutions there). Networking can be through horizontal networks linking institutions working in the same field, or through vertical networks linking institutions working on different aspects of the same problem or related problems. Links to information networks can support access to international databases and literature, and training networks (Wils 1995: 21).

Utilisation of knowledge by policy-makers and other stakeholders

How knowledge is used in development processes is receiving more attention internationally (cf. Stone 2001). The major part of the literature has focused on the research-policy sector and research-private sector utilisation nexus. It

is only recently that the research-civil society nexus is receiving greater public attention, highlighting the efforts of federations of NGOs combining research and practice in publicising their models (RAWOO 2001; CORDAID 2000; Moser and McIlwaine 1999; Patel 2001). Research-policy/civil society dynamics are interactive processes with feedback loops, which can be conceived of in different ways, take place through different channels, and have an 'uncertain impact'.

Research-policy dynamics can be defined in a number of different ways:

- It is a 'public goods' problem: there is an insufficient supply of policy-relevant research.
- It consists of a 'lack of access' to existing knowledge for researchers and/or policy-makers.
- Researchers do not understand policy requirements, so that their research is irrelevant or cannot communicate their results effectively to policy-makers.
- Neither researchers nor policy-makers are 'connected to society' or the end-users of research (more participatory approaches are required).
- The problem is the ignorance of politicians about existing research available to define policy problems and measures.
- Policy-makers can be dismissive about research and its usefulness, and require improved capacity to recognise and use it.
- The problem is one of cultural, economic and socio-political influences, with only long-term changes possible.
- The problem is power relations, with the validity of knowledge being contested, and mechanisms of control being established (Stone 2001).

All of these elements contribute to the variability of the mutual returns between researchers and policy-makers. A number of questions emerge. The first question is whether relevant knowledge and research exists for a particular problem; and whether it is accessible to policy-makers, end-users and other researchers. The question of open access to knowledge is essential, in a context in which knowledge is increasingly being privatised, patented, and excluded from the public domain. However, the 'relevance' of knowledge also remains a vexed problem, as policy-makers and civil society groups may well give quite different weights to certain aspects of knowledge. Changes in policy paradigms only take place when incremental changes and new experimental methods fail to deliver satisfactory results. This situation generates a radical shift in thinking about a problem, in which 'problems are redefined, new interpretative frameworks developed, and policy learning from external sources takes place' (cf. Stone 2001).

The second question concerns the channels for communication between researchers and policy-makers, the power relations structuring these channels, and the perceived validity of the knowledge processed through them. Is there frequent and mutual interaction between knowledge-users, producers, and others; or does this interaction remain very limited?

This question addresses the interaction between policy and implementation cycles and the influence a researcher or research-based knowledge exerts at different points in the process. The policy agenda is defined by public and political debate; this is translated into a more formal policy agenda in which

priorities are established to be implemented in practice. During implementation, policies often undergo unanticipated changes, to make them more practical and/or acceptable, or because outside influences are brought to bear on those carrying out changes. These changes provide an extra source of knowledge on how policies translate into practice, and should be part of the link between knowledge and policy. Particularly, knowledge about how choices are made in allocating scarce resources, and the negotiations involved between implementers and local communities are important (e.g. Hordijk 2000; de Wit 1997). This is important in making explicit knowledge of citizen organisations on 'practice' and anchoring that knowledge in new policy-making processes (Baud 2000).

Finally, monitoring and evaluation processes provide channels for exchanges of views between researchers, end-users, and policy-makers. This applies more to programme-level evaluations than project evaluations; the former are often specifically designed to instigate changes for greater effectiveness, whereas project evaluations often remain within the boundaries of their existing terms of reference. The researchers recruited to do evaluations are crucial to the communication process, and their views are privileged; therefore, the question to what extent Southern researchers are involved in such processes needs to be raised. In summary, the influence of research on policy-making can take place at different levels – through individual interactions, collective action by advocacy groups, and through changes in institutions (i.e. the rules and procedures of the organisations involved). It can also take place in different phases of the policy and political process (Waardenburg 2001).

This section ends by introducing a flow model, in which the actors and dynamics that have to be taken into account in analysing international development research collaboration are shown in an institutions systems model. The model (see Figure 1) shows the main actors involved in determining research priorities; producing knowledge; and using knowledge. A basic assumption is that we should look at a broader range of actors who can and do influence the types of knowledge produced and utilised. Particularly, the feedback loop including end-users as generators of knowledge should be more clearly spelt out in knowledge production and dissemination processes. A second assumption is that the level of 'institutions' plays a crucial role in the ways that knowledge is distributed. Existing degrees of trust, common 'assumptions' on particular topics, and prior coalitions lead to 'path dependency' in the channels and ways that are utilised for interaction, in both negative and positive directions.

Knowledge production and capacity building in development research in the Netherlands: modalities and access

The starting point of this paper was that issues important in countries of the South should be reflected in the choices of topics in research carried out in North-South partnerships. This immediately begs the question of whose preferences in the South should and would be reflected in such choices. In countries in the North, there is a similar diversity in the researchers, universities, policy-makers, research NGOs, and civil society organisations, and private firms, who jockey for power in setting research agendas, allocating funding, and defining analyses and methodologies. Here I shall look briefly at changes

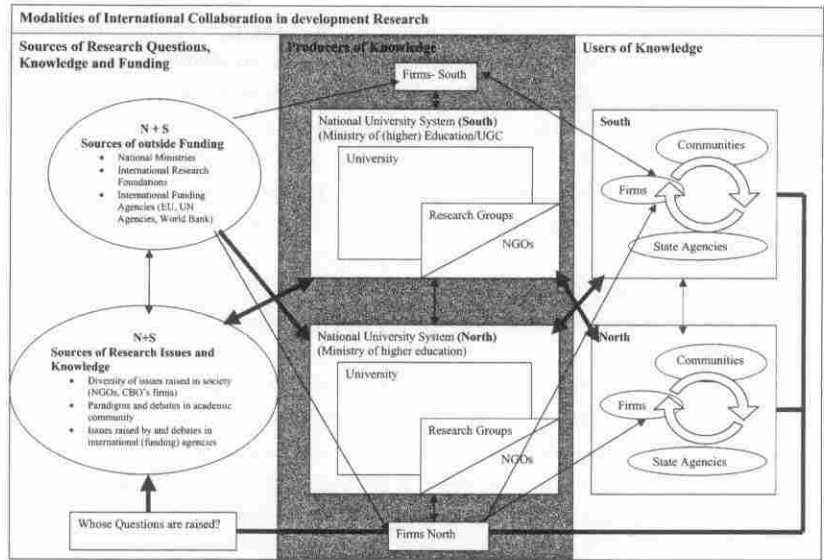


Figure 1. Modalities of International Collaboration in Development

in the role of development research in the Netherlands in the past fifteen years.

Modalities

The Netherlands, Great Britain, and the Scandinavian countries have played an important part in stimulating European-based development research carried out over the past fifty years. Great Britain's research capacity in development research was reduced greatly during the Thatcher and Major years, and is currently being rebuilt, with DFID heavily promoting development research. In contrast, development research in the Netherlands is in danger of being marginalised in mainstream research (DANIDA 2001). The changes in the structures through which development research is funded and carried out in the Netherlands are taken as a point of departure to examine some of these changes. Funding for development research is carried out through a number of channels, some of which are currently undergoing major changes. The main channels for researchers attached to Dutch higher education institutions are funded through:

- internal university budgets, for staff and Ph.D. research;
- externally through WOTRO, for individual Ph.D. research and larger-scale programmes (not discussed further here);
- inter-university programmes and institutions for international education in the Netherlands by Nuffic; and
- through country-specific research programmes, such as IDPAD and SANPAD.

Universities

In the past decade, the universities in the Netherlands have brought together their research (and Ph.D. teaching) in various National Research Schools. These include CERES, ASSR, and CNWS. ASSR and CNWS have strong sec-

tions in the humanities and social anthropology, whereas CERES has as its main focus on 'resources and capital management for development'. Therefore, CERES is the main research school discussed here. It groups researchers from five major universities and the Institute of Social Studies around eight thematic areas. These include: (1) management of natural resources, human resources, and social insecurity; (2) rural transformation; (3) enterprise, governance and local-global interactions; (4) structural adjustment and sustainable development; (5) state formation and disintegration; (6) health, well-being and population dynamics; (7) culture, religion and identity formation; and (8) management of meaning and the meaning of management in a changing world (CERES 2001; see also CERES web page).

The theoretical research perspective within CERES characterises itself as 'theorising on the edge of practice' (CERES 2001: 8). This requires '... the use of a multidisciplinary approach' at different levels of interaction. It also requires 'a multi-actor perspective', based on the idea that constant negotiation by actors results in transformation of existing structures. A third premise is the use of comparative location studies to enhance theoretical reflection. Fourthly, research strives for more integral links with practice, and societal relevance. Participatory forms of research methodology are increasingly being recognised and used within CERES (CERES 2001: 8–9). Current yearly Ph.D. funding in CERES is around 42 million guilders. The number of senior researchers and junior Ph.D. researchers in the school has doubled since the start in 1994; with senior researchers standing currently at 200 people (64 fte) and junior researchers at 209 people (147 fte)⁵. The yearly intake of Ph.D. researchers stands at about 35, half of these coming with international backgrounds, mainly from countries of the South (CERES 2001).

Ph.Ds. from the South define their own areas of research, and thus reflect one portion of Southern 'demand'. In working together with other Ph.Ds. in the thematic working programmes, they develop horizontal research networks on an equal footing; vertical networks exist with supervisors and other staff members. The potential for more synergy is exploited by promoting joint/comparative research programmes at the working programme level in which Ph.D. students can participate. The longer-term spin-offs of networks across regions are stimulated by participation in the research schools.

Nuffic/MHO and NFP/SAIL

The Nuffic is the main Dutch organisation dealing with cooperation between universities internationally.⁶ It promotes institutional capacity in higher education and research internationally, including countries in the South. This has taken place mainly through the MHO programme, through long-term collaboration with selected universities designed to strengthen their overall capacity in a wide variety of areas. Twelve universities in different countries have been supported for longer periods of time (5–10 years) in this fashion (Nuffic website). Interestingly, the programme sets preconditions for partnership agreements with universities, which must have minimum levels of capacity and stability in staffing, collaboration between departments, and administrative support to be eligible for the programme. Support is given to university departments as well as to building up central facilities of the university in question. (For project details see MHO Annual Report 2000: pp. 50ff.).

- 5 fte: full time equivalent as specified by university regulations.
- 6 The Netherlands Organisation for International Cooperation in Higher Education.

- 7 There are fourteen international education institutions in the Netherlands.
- 8 The SPP provides support to institutional capacity building through partnerships with Dutch institutions. It has currently 42 projects with a yearly budget of 20 million guilders (SAIL 2001).
- 9 See Mom, T. and Nair, K.N. (2000) and Patel, S. (2002) for details on IDPAD.

The second programme supports international education in the Netherlands. There are two components: the National Fellowships Programme for international education (NFP-BIO) and the SAIL Projects Programme (SPP). The former provides funding for individual students to obtain their education in international education institutions in the Netherlands at masters and Ph.D. levels. The latter coordinates institutional capacity building with universities in the South.⁷ The NFP programme funding is around 40 million guilders yearly, with 85 per cent being spent on regular courses for students, 10 per cent on refresher courses, and 5 per cent on Ph.D. fellowships (FION 2001). Students are drawn largely from mid-career working professionals in the South, who wish to obtain a degree in an area related to their professional interests (FION 2001). The MA and Ph.D. research carried out by them clearly reflects their societal concerns, and is carried out in their own country in a 'sandwich' format. The group of Ph.D. researchers currently stands at 40 (www.fion.nl/sail). These institutes have constituted an important instrument for developing individual research and professional capacity in the South, and in stimulating South-South international networks of academics and professionals across regions.⁸

Country-specific research programmes

There are two country-specific research programmes, based on forms of collaborative research between researchers from the South and the North: IDPAD and SANPAD. IDPAD was established twenty years ago as an initiative of the then Minister for Development Cooperation as a mechanism for research collaboration with India.⁹ SANPAD is a recent initiative, which involves an approach underpinned by the concept of a joint Dutch and South partner country committee (see below). Such programmes aim at building research expertise relevant to local contexts and also seek to strengthen linkages with research users, particularly policy-makers.

Issues arising

Several trends can be distilled from this discussion of the ways in which development research is carried out in Dutch higher education institutions. There has been a clear shift from support of individual towards more programmatic research. This makes research projects potentially more effective, because it allows for multi- and interdisciplinary research. In practice, this has remained an area of tension for research groups, because of conflicting requirements from colleagues in a particular discipline, and the time and effort involved in 'learning another language'. Joint programmes lead to more cumulative patterns of knowledge production in which groups of researchers become focal points for one area of knowledge. Publishing channels have remained open to the academic community traditionally. The extent to which attention is paid to equality in authorship between South and North researchers could not be traced systematically in this review, but remains a question that should be raised, given the globalising trends in academic publishing.

Building research capacity in projects and programmes has distinct advantages over individual capacity building at Ph.D. level. Firstly, yearly cohorts build up international networks, which provide immediate mutual support throughout the Ph.D. project period. Secondly, Ph.D. research projects embed-

ded in larger programmes receive extra substantive inputs from the intensive contact with senior researchers. Finally, networks among North and South researchers are built up which survive over a longer period of time, creating a more international academic community. Retaining research capacity once built up remains difficult in both North and South. In the last fifteen years, universities in the Netherlands were hard put to retain young researchers at junior staff levels. In the South, the question to what extent researchers can be absorbed in their respective countries cannot be readily answered in the context of this paper. Anecdotal evidence suggests that a brain drain away from the universities takes place. The impression is that this is especially the case, where the institutional setting for research and higher education is weak. Postdoc researchers are able to obtain much more lucrative positions with national policy-related 'think tanks', and/or international agencies than at national universities. In countries with a well-established university system, this problem could be less. International education institutions have a better position, because they build up the capacity of mid-career professionals, who can return to their previous organisations. The dissemination of research results and the utilisation of research by practitioners and policy-makers is an area which remains understated and little analysed in these programmes.

The DGIS initiative in 1998 to collect and discuss the Ph.D. level development research carried out over a ten-year period in the Netherlands attempted to make research results more accessible to policy-makers. It revealed that more than 675 theses had been produced, grouped around several themes, which had been part of the policy debate as well. However, their results had never been systematically used. Recent publications suggest that more interactive relations and 'policy entrepreneurship' are necessary to make research results available and relevant to policy-makers and practitioners (Waardenburg 2001; Stone 2001). Certain types of research arrangement – e.g. contract research; or a certain organisational setting, e.g. civil society research – may create different channels of access to policy-makers, and can exercise influence through the organisations and groups they represent, when requested to present alternatives to policy-makers. On the other hand, researchers more interested in scholarship are not particularly interested in dissemination to policy-makers, despite the fact that their results may well be useful (Stone 2001: 13–14).

New modalities of international research collaboration: assessing pros and cons

In this section, some of the programmes for international research collaboration funded through the Netherlands are analysed according to the questions I raised above in the section on knowledge production and capacity enhancement in North-South research partnerships.

RAWOO

RAWOO (the Netherlands Development Assistance Research Council) is an autonomous advisory council established to advise the Dutch government on priorities and policy issues in research for development. Six of its fifteen council members are Southern nationals who work and live in the South. RAWOO focuses on stimulating public discussion on areas of development

10 RAWOO (2001).
'Balancing ownership
and partnership in
development
research', The Hague:
RAWOO.

11 Prof. C. Mukherjee
has guided such
discussions (cf.
Bunders and
Mukherjee 1997).

12 The biodiversity
research is discussed
here, based on work
by Maan, on whom
this section draws
heavily.

13 RAWOO (1995).
'Medium term
perspective on
research for
development, research
needs and Dutch
research capacity',
The Hague.

14 SEARCA facilitated
and organised the
activities of the
Philippine Working
Group (PWG) and
other local partners
involved. RAWOO
mobilised professional
and material
resources from the
Netherlands for the
preparation and
programming process
and advised the Dutch
government on poten-
tial financial support.

research needed and new ways of achieving it. Quoting from its latest report, RAWOO states:

A new type of research partnership is needed, based on mutual trust, understanding, sharing of experiences, and a two-way learning process. In such a partnership the various stakeholders and partners will work together on an equal footing at all stages and levels; during the process of setting the research agenda, as research programmes are designed and implemented, and in the governance and management of these programmes.¹⁰

The composition of the Council has generated an ongoing interactive international discussion within the Council in the past five years, which has been reflected in the activities and publications of the Working Group on North-South Research Partnerships (RAWOO 2001a; RAWOO 2001b), in which the Southern members have taken the lead.¹¹ The activities of the Working Group have consisted of commissioned reports and consultative meetings at which RAWOO programming exercises and analyses of specific sectors were presented. These have focused on several issues involved in developing new modes of research cooperation.

The first issue was how to ensure that research programmes better reflect the societal and research needs of the South, particularly those groups whose needs are not prioritised by the national powers that be. A second issue was the difference in the institutional context, which often undermines the existing skills and capacities of Southern researchers working and living in the South (RAWOO 2001b: 6). As Northern researchers are citizens of countries funding research, they have the advantage of knowing procedures to access funds. Because of the orientation of research to the supply side, and the international system of peer review, Northern views tend to dominate (RAWOO 2001b). New types of North-South cooperation should be geared to supporting Southern researchers who want to build knowledge production and research capacity in their own society and make their contributions felt there (cf. also Box 2001).

RAWOO has also developed new tools for 'setting the agenda' by stimulating new forms of programming exercises in health and biodiversity research.¹² A broad exploration of the need for development research led RAWOO to identify biodiversity research as one of the priority areas.¹³ After the first communications with Philippine and Dutch institutions and professionals, during which the need for research in the field of biodiversity was articulated in greater detail, RAWOO advised the Dutch government, to facilitate a solid period of programme design ('pre-implementation'), during which both Dutch and Philippine resources would be mobilised for consultation, participation and needs identification with relevant stakeholders in the Philippines.

The SEAMEO Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (SEARCA) in the Philippines and RAWOO jointly conducted this preparation phase.¹⁴ The joint programme design phase took approximately two years, with local Mindanao partner-institutions and researchers conducting studies, doing participatory rapid appraisals of the proposed research sites, holding stakeholder consultations and several workshops. General research

areas were discussed and agreed upon by researchers and other stakeholders from Mindanao, Luzon and the Netherlands. To anchor the programme organisation for the future, a Joint Programme Committee was established which gradually took over from RAWOO and SEARCA. During this process, the programme's main agenda was shaped, which reflected the shift to more inclusive, participatory forms of research. The two main goals were:

- to make biodiversity research more responsive to real-life problems and the development needs of the local communities, by introducing a new mode of knowledge generation for biodiversity management and conservation which takes end-users into account, and is interactive, inclusive, inter- and multidisciplinary and learning-based; and
- to strengthen local and national capacity for biodiversity research and decision-making by empowering the Philippine research partners and other local stakeholders.

The role of participating institutions shifted in the process of building up the North-South research programme. RAWOO's role moved from taking the early initiative of consulting potentially interested organisations in the Philippines, to the role of partner of the PWG, SEARCA and other stakeholders in a joint programming process, which ultimately led to an advisory report to the Dutch government to financially support the envisaged research programme. It also facilitated the preparatory process on the Dutch side by mobilising potential Dutch research partners, providing and channelling the additional funding for preparation, and liaising between Philippine and Dutch researchers. Although the programming process was a long one, it generated important assets, which support greater equity in programme implementation. These assets include a common understanding of the main aspects of North-South research cooperation in biodiversity research, how science-society linkages can work, and the build-up of mutual trust between different types of stakeholders involved in the programming exercise.

The outcome of the programming exercise for ideas on the design of North-South research cooperation was formulated as follows. Development research cooperation budgets should aim at strengthening the (institutional) role of Southern partners. The dialogue on research cooperation and capacity building has to include the broader cultural and institutional context, of which southern researchers are a part. Donor policies aimed at strengthening research capacity in the South require both a country specific approach and a comprehensive vision, taking into account the levels of: (1) the individual researcher; (2) the institutional context; (3) the national (science) policy and enabling environment; and (4) the international context of research funding and programming, which increasingly influences the incentive systems of national and local research systems (Maan in EADI 2001).

SANPAD¹⁵

The SANPAD programme was set up in 1996, and is currently completing its first five-year phase. The objectives of the programme are to:

- stimulate and promote high-quality collaborative scientific research by South African researchers, where possible with the involvement of Dutch

16 Slightly more than half the researchers were women; 40% of the students were women. In both groups together, 43% were black in early 2000 (Ofir 2000).

researchers, on issues relevant for development in South Africa and its people:

- facilitate the building of research capacity in South Africa, especially at historically disadvantaged institutions (HDIs); and
- develop an institutional research culture as well as a culture of inter-institutional research cooperation (Box and Mohamed 2001).

The programme was also to promote policy relevance of research and promote gender and racial equality. Because the programme was started from scratch, the organisation required a good deal of time and effort. A dual governance structure was set up, with national committees in each country, an advisory structure, and national secretariats, although the emphasis lies with the South African governing bodies. The dual structure made it possible to develop continuous relationships between the governing bodies of the programme, and was a necessary part of building up mutual trust and knowledge between the participating partners (Box and Mohamed 2001).

The programme projects were grouped within five themes, which were the outcomes of joint consultations with researchers and higher education institutions in South Africa at the outset of the programme. These included: (1) new approaches to economic development (10 projects); (2) social development for empowerment (17 projects); (3) natural resources and their management (14 projects); (4) governance for democracy (5 projects); and (5) culture, identity and a new society (7 projects) (Box and Mohamed 2001). In the first phase, many projects were submitted, of which around 10 per cent were funded. 129 researchers and 58 students participated in the projects in 2000 (Ofir 2000) – an average of almost 5 researchers and 2 students per project.¹⁶ The total budget for the first phase was around 12.5 million Dutch guilders. Little can be said about the extent to which SANPAD promotes knowledge production, because the time period is still too short; most projects have been ongoing for two to three years, and results are not yet widely available. Therefore, the question whether SANPAD has contributed to research capacity building at various levels is the main consideration here.

The achievements of SANPAD need to be analysed within the existing context of research capacity in South Africa. The National Plan for Higher Education (2001) states that the output, capacity and distribution of the higher education and research system still remain a matter of concern, despite the attention given to it since 1997. There has been a decline in research output and capacity, and enrolments still remain very low among disadvantaged communities. Black students constitute about 30 per cent of all masters and doctoral enrolments in higher education, but only 20 per cent of postgraduate enrolments in the traditionally white institutions of higher education. About 40 per cent of all postgraduates are women. The main problem is the continuing fragmentation and lack of coordination within the national research system.

Building research capacity takes place mainly through participation within the projects. Although this process generally works well, no overall monitoring system exists as yet to keep tabs on progress. Secondly, research capacity building was also provided to researchers submitting proposals by giving them the opportunity to hold workshops where they could discuss and improve

aspects of their proposals (SANPAD Annual Report 1999). This process led to several proposals being successfully re-submitted, and is a useful instrument in a context where the quality of research training has been variable. Thirdly, SANPAD also builds capacity at the junior-staff-member level, a special initiative (the RCI), which takes place outside the projects. Forty people have received special research training under RCI, an activity that is set to be expanded in the second phase (Ofir 2000). Participants consider this method very effective, both for the training they received in research methods, as well as for the networks they build up with other professionals across the country. Box and Mohamed note 'traditional quantitative and qualitative methods of doing research in South Africa were constantly being challenged both by communities that were subjects of researchers and by the researchers themselves' (Box and Mohamed 2001: 10).

The 'relevance of the research' and its contribution to development processes is still a step too far for the programme in its present stage. Box and Mohamed suggest that the basic research capacity needs to be further built up before researchers can also take on aspects of 'policy relevance and implementation'. This suggests that such research programmes require longer periods of time to build up cumulative expertise in the different objectives, and cannot do so all at once.

Conclusion: issues in North-South partnerships for development research

The review and the examples of new North-South research programming suggest a number of issues, which need to be kept in mind and analysed further in attempting to promote research partnerships on an equal footing. A first issue is the 'changing international context', in which knowledge results and production are increasingly being privatised (cf. Gaillard 2001). This trend threatens the emerging types of interactive research partnerships, with their relatively free exchanges of knowledge and experience, and more widely, the access to knowledge of researchers in both North and South. Knowledge from research should remain part of the 'global public goods' system (Stiglitz 1999). Increasing privatisation of knowledge also threatens development processes in far-reaching ways, and ways to counteract it should itself be the subject of North-South research.

A second issue concerns the ways 'research priorities are determined'. We still know too little about how to promote the inclusion of a wider variety of stakeholders in agenda-setting. We need to explore further how the implicit paradigms with which researchers and other stakeholders work can be made explicit, so that common points of departure can be defined. The role of regional and international agencies in setting research agendas should also be studied, particularly the ways they support or steer agenda-setting processes.

A third issue concerns the differentials in 'institutional preconditions'. In promoting research partnerships, much more needs to be known about how existing strengths of universities, research institutions, private firms, educational institutions, civil society organisations and their networking capacities can affect potential partnerships. The extent of political freedoms and the strength of public debates as sources of knowledge need to be taken into

account. Knowledge on how such 'base-line situations' can be best matched to the modalities of research partnerships needs to be examined.

A fourth issue that we need to know more about relates to the 'modalities' (structures and processes) through which partnerships are built up. What types of mechanisms are effective, and under what conditions? How can we make modalities more interactive between North and South and between different actors and their networks horizontally across disciplines, and between researchers and non-academic users and producers of local knowledge? How can levels of cooperation be increased and conflicts reduced? What methodologies can we develop to trace such processes, including changing flows of money, flows of people, flows of ideas, at different scale levels?

A final issue concerns the 'outcomes for research capacity and development processes in the South'. We need to develop ways of analysing the outcomes of different types of research partnerships more systematically, in such a way that the concerns about the 'interactive' nature of the process are reflected. Ways of ensuring that research capacity is built up solidly, and maintained in institutions in the South need to be studied. Aspects that should be included are the extent of regular and cumulative knowledge acquisition by partners in the South; access to knowledge produced; positive spin-offs from research partnerships; and ways to mitigate the brain drain problem. The relationship between researchers and other stakeholders, including policy-makers, remains a major issue. Ways of promoting effective 'research entrepreneurship' need to be explored, so that the results of research are more effectively incorporated into practice.

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