

Upholding and advancing Africa's contribution to the world's generation of scientific knowledge

Africa Charter for Transformative Research Collaborations

PREAMBLE

This Charter, co-created by key higher education and research bodies and constituencies in Africa, sets out key principles and aspirations for fostering transformative research collaborations with the continent. Such collaborations will serve to advance a more just and richer, pluriversal global scientific effort across formal, natural, social sciences, arts and humanities, in which Africa takes its rightful place.

This Charter accords with core values of the 2022 UNESCO framework on Open Science and builds on ongoing, significant efforts to promote equity in research partnerships. These include the Four Approaches to supporting equitable partnerships, good practice document, whose recommendations draw on wide consultation with stakeholders and funders internationally including in Africa; the Global Code of Conduct for equitable research partnerships; the Guide for Transboundary Research Partnerships; more discipline-focused frameworks such as the Principles for Global Health Research; wider movements including the Knowledge Equity Network, and practical instruments such as the Equitable Research Partnerships Toolkit.

Above all, this Charter draws on, and is imbued by a long history of pan-African intellectual thought and engagement concerned with upholding and advancing the continent's contribution to the generation of scientific knowledge.

More information:

The Africa Charter for Transformative Research Collaboration is a joint endeavour of Africa's

major higher education bodies and networks, including the Association of African Universities (AAU), the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA), the Inter-University Council for Eastern Africa (IUCEA), the Association of West African Universities (AWAU), the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), the African Academy of Sciences (AAS) and the International Network for Higher Education in Africa (INHEA).

The initiative is facilitated by the Perivoli Africa Research Centre (PARC), University of Bristol, in partnership with the University of South Africa Chief Albert Luthuli Research Chair and the University of Cape Town Institute for Humanities in Africa (HUMA).

WHY TRANSFORMATIVE RESEARCH COLLABORATIONS?

Expanding Africa – 'global North' research collaboration

Collaborative research between actors in Africa and those outside of the continent continues to expand as part of the ongoing internationalisation of higher education (HE) and science. While 'South-South' initiatives play an increasing role, joint inquiry with 'Northern' partners remains predominant. Today, undertakings to further grow, consolidate and better deploy Africa - global North collaborations are gathering pace, amid recognition of frequent inequities in their conceptualisation, design and operation.

'Equitable Africa-global North' research partnerships efforts

A hugely important effort, variously driven by different funders, HE networks and institutions, has sought to ensure more equity and address asymmetries in the arrangements that shape 'global South-global North' research partnerships. Such asymmetries arise in the typically global North-led decision making on research foci, objectives, methodologies, the allocation of budgets and use of collected data and samples, the division of labour, where 'global North' partners have commonly led 'high-value' aspects of joint projects such as overarching analyses and 'theorising', leaving African counterparts consigned to data collection or local interpretations; the marginalisation of relevant non-academic stakeholders and their understandings; the typical orientation of capacity building only to the Africa partner; and the access to rewards - specifically in terms of authorship of publications and other outputs.

Need for a fundamental rebalancing of the global science and research ecosystem

Our present, collective moment demands that we go beyond 'equitable partnerships' thinking and acknowledge the urgent need for a more fundamental rebalancing of relations between- and the positioning of Africa and global North in the global science and research ecosystem as a whole. The goal must be for African scholars, African HE and research institutions and knowledges produced in and from the continent to take their rightful place in the global scientific effort.

This is an imperative as a matter of social justice, and of disrupting the perpetuation of unjust hierarchies in the scientific endeavour that arise from colonial histories and serve to sustain wider global political and economic inequities. It is also imperative as a matter of fostering

the richer, more potent scholarship that the global community needs to tackle the multiple crises facing the world and to properly sustain human dignity and flourishing. Such richer science must make active room for a plurality of knowledges of 'how the world works- and ought to work'. It must offer alternatives to the monochrome logic of 'Western' scientific thought that has dominated scholarship thus far and has helped drive the adversities the world faces today.

The potential of transformative research collaborations

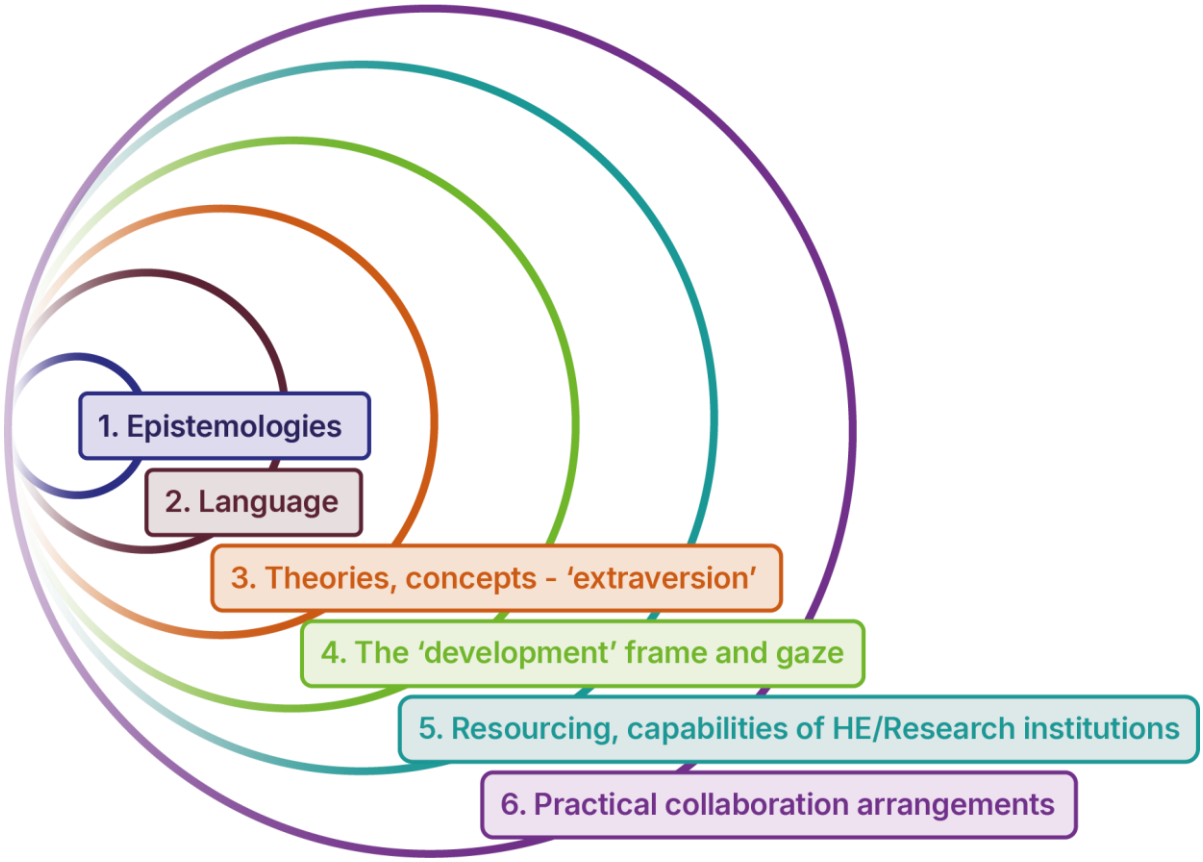
International collaborations with global North partners dominate Africa's research effort: a majority of published scientific outputs arise from such partnerships. This means such collaborations can serve as an entry point for advancing shifts in the global science and research ecosystem as a whole: they have the potential to be transformative.

TRANSFORMATIVE RESEARCH COLLABORATIONS

To be transformative, research collaborations must not only ensure equity in the concrete arrangements for joint inquiry – the division of labour, decision making, access to rewards, inclusion of non-academic stakeholders and the targeting of capacity building efforts. They must, in addition, actively redress the multiple underlying layers of power imbalances in the production of scientific knowledge, which constitute an uneven playing field in global science and which systematically disadvantage the continent as well as limit the potential of global scholarship (see Schema).

The multi-layered power imbalances in the generation of scientific knowledge are perhaps best imagined as a set of concentric circles. At the core (layers 1-3) are the predominance of Western-centric and the devaluing of other epistemologies, languages, theories and concepts in the generation of new knowledge– and a resultant orientation to the 'global North' as the natural site of scientific knowledge production. A connected, next layer of profound asymmetry arises from the logic of the development frame (layer 4), which more often than not underpins research conducted in/on or for Africa. The frame delimits the areas and predefines problematics and solutions deemed relevant for inquiry in the continent- and imposes a unidirectional 'gaze' that renders Africa as deficient, and a site for investigation and assistance by global North actors. Rarely is the gaze returned and rarer still, if ever, is it reversed. A final, related, major power imbalance arises from the vast disparities in the material resourcing, including in physical and data infrastructures that African and global North Universities have at their disposal (layer 5). Together, layers 1-5 give rise to and shape the observed asymmetries in practical collaboration arrangements (layer 6).

Schema: Uneven playing field in Africa - global production of scientific knowledge: multilayered power imbalances



Establishing transformative collaborations as best and standard practice

Such a transformative mode of research collaborations will only advance a rebalancing of the global science and research ecosystem if it is established as best and standard practice. This will require active change across four major domains: in individual mindsets and capabilities, in shared social intellectual norms, in available resources and, crucially, in the policies and regulatory frameworks that, ultimately, set the 'rules of the game' for Africa-global North collaborative research. Policy change is necessary at multiple levels in the global North as in Africa: by individual HE institutions (HEI) and networks, by funding agencies, by HE or research assessment bodies, by publishers, by national or international science policy agencies and, ultimately, by national governments.

Guidance and commitment

Efforts to effect such structural change must be anchored in an Africa-centred, framework that:

- Defines and garners endorsement by key actors of core principles for transformative research collaborations and broad aspirations for change in policies and regulatory frameworks at different levels.
- Recommends, identifies goals and measures of success for- and garners commitments to, concrete action by target constituencies (individual HE institutions and networks, funding agencies, science governance or assessment bodies, publishers, national or international science policy agencies, governments).

- Provides guidance on approaches for such concrete action, building widely on relevant examples and experiences of good or promising practice.

This Charter establishes the foundation for such a framework. It defines key principles for transformative research collaboration and sets out broad aspirations for change in policy and regulatory frameworks - by HEI and networks, funders, research and HEI assessment bodies, publishers, governments and international science policy bodies – to establish such a collaboration mode as best and standard practice.

Subsequent, targeted implementation frameworks and guidance resources will be developed to advance- and help track concrete action by key bodies and agencies actors outside and in the continent.

An evolving, broader intellectual debate and further inquiry will be critical in informing and sustaining such action and change at policy levels. The wide engagement of scholarly communities will refine thinking on the rationale and principles for transformative collaborations, will foster progressive learning on meaningful ways to bring them to bear in joint research across disciplines and fields, and will build knowledge on the consequences and wider implications of such transformative partnerships.

Together, this will nurture the growth of cross-sectoral Africa-global North communities of interest and practice.

PRINCIPLES FOR TRANSFORMATIVE RESEARCH COLLABORATIONS

Collaborative research between actors in- and outside of the continent must actively redress the multi-layered power imbalances in scientific knowledge production, in order to advance a fair and richer global scientific effort in which African scholars, institutions and knowledges take their rightful place.

Epistemology

- Predominance of Western-centric epistemic orientations in the generation of scientific knowledge
- Non-consideration, -use, or -generation of alternative epistemologies from Africa

Principles for redressing the imbalance

As a matter of principle, all collaborative research must:

- Be founded upon an initial critical examination and acknowledgement of collaborators' epistemic positions
- Assume a non-universal validity of- and de-centre Western-centric- epistemological orientations and seek to build on existing or generate new alternatives from the continent

Language

- Predominance of Western languages as mediums for the generation and dissemination of new scientific knowledge
- Non- or marginal use of African languages as mediums for the generation and dissemination of new scientific knowledge

Principles for redressing the imbalance

As a matter of principle, all collaborative research must:

- At least where focused on phenomena in the continent, centre African languages at every stage of knowledge production: conception, design, data collection, analysis, interpretation, dissemination

Theory, concepts, extraversion

- Predominance of Western-centric epistemic orientations, concepts and theories in academic research, and an inherent orientation toward 'the West' as the site for the generation of scientific theory for the world
- Non-consideration, -use, or -generation of alternative knowledges from the continent

Principles for redressing the imbalance

As a matter of principle, all collaborative research must:

- Be founded upon an initial critical examination and acknowledgement of collaborators' theoretical positions
- Assume a non-universal validity of- and de-centre Western-centric theories and concepts and seek to build on existing or generate new knowledges from the continent for the world

The Development Frame

- Predominance of development frame and global development agendas as underpinning for research in/on/for Africa and consequent:
    - Imposition of a unidirectional gaze rendering the continent as a site of 'deficiency' and of investigation/intervention by 'developed' country actors. Rare return, even rarer reversal of the 'gaze'
    - Delimiting of areas deemed relevant for research in the continent; foreclosing of other fields of inquiry that are priorities or strategic for the continent
    - Imposition of a priori notions of key 'problematics' and desired 'solutions' for development progress and human flourishing; foreclosing of alternative logics or conceptions (from the continent)

Principles for redressing the imbalance

As a matter of principle, all collaborative research must:

- Seek to address fields of priority or strategic interest to the continent, even if they do not fall within- or are not foregrounded in global development agendas and areas designated as 'global challenges'
- Where focused on areas identified as 'global development challenges':
    - entail at least a return- at best a reversal of the gaze
    - 'de-centre' implied 'understandings' of what the key problematics and necessary solutions are; and generate alternative accounts based on knowledges from the continent.

Institutional resourcing

- Vastly 'inferior' resourcing and infrastructure of most African HE/research institutions (vis-à-vis those in global North) undermines ability to mount strong, sustained independent or collaborative research efforts
- Current funding regimes with a typical focus on individual, relatively short-term projects and, often the lead of projects from the global North, undermine the nurturing of such institutional capabilities

Principles for redressing the imbalance

As a matter of principle, all collaborative research must:

- Establish funding streams geared explicitly toward:
    - strengthening the institutional resourcing, including for infrastructures and research management, of the African partner
    - supporting the forging of longer-term, sustained programmes of Africa-led research on priorities identified in the continent.

Practical arrangements

- Division of labour in joint projects often sees non-African (esp. global North) partners leading 'high-value' aspects of the inquiry (analyses, theory, interpretation), with African 'partners' consigned to data collection or local interpretations
- Decision making power on research foci, objectives and methods, on budget allocation and (where relevant) use of collected data and samples often lies with non-African partner
- Focus of capacity building elements typically aimed only 'unidirectionally' at African-partners (not at 'global North' partners)
- Access to rewards, in particular (lead) authorship on publications arising from the joint research is frequently limited for the African partners

Principles for redressing the imbalance

As a matter of principle, all collaborative research must:

- Seek, as a first and preferred option, intellectual and institutional leadership by the African partner
- Build on recommendations of the Four Approaches to supporting equitable partnerships, good practice document' and other complementary frames to forestall unfair asymmetries in the prosecution of joint inquiry

ASPIRATIONS FOR CHANGE IN POLICY AND REGULATORY FRAMES

HE/research Institutions and networks:

Align their organisational policies, guidelines and internal funding so as to actively require, enable and reward debate and learning activities on - and the pursuit of collaborative inquiry that adheres to the key principles for transformative research collaboration

Research funders:

Align their funding streams and parameters so as to require, enable and reward learning activities on- and the pursuit of collaborative inquiry that adheres to the key principles for transformative research collaboration

Research/HEI assessment bodies:

Adapt existing- or establish new normative frames for the assessment of research and/or assessing the culture and environment of HEI so as to value explicitly and reward learning activities on- and the pursuit of collaborative inquiry that adheres to the key principles for transformative research collaboration

Governments:

Adapt existing- or establish new national or local science, higher-education or other relevant policy- or shape international policy so as to require and enable learning activities on- and the pursuit of collaborative inquiry that adheres to the key principles for transformative research collaboration

International science bodies:

Adapt existing- or establish new international policy so as to require and enable learning activities on- and the pursuit of collaborative inquiry that adheres to the key principles for transformative research collaboration

Science publishers:

Align their publishing policies and guidelines so as to favour manuscripts reporting on collaborative inquiry that adheres to the key principles for transformative research collaboration

CHARTER ENDORSEMENT DECLARATION

The .....

[organisation/institution] endorses the key principles and aspirations of the Africa Charter for transformative research collaborations and resolves to support and engage with the wider initiative and programme of work needed to realise them.

Name: .....

Capacity: .....

Signature: .....

Date: .....