A CRITICAL RESOURCE

FOR

ETHICAL INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

Whose world-view has framed your research?

When we start a new project with partners in a different context, it is never truly a "new start." Historically it has been experts from the Global North who have studied and interpreted the South. This means that international research partnerships are inevitably imbued with power relations and possibly even the assumption that it is northern knowledge that will lead the transformation of situations in the South.

So, when we pose our research question, necessarily we make a set of assumptions about how the world is from our own perspective, how we can access it (via particular methods) and how we can seek to transform it (via particular interventions). This can make other people's world views invisible, silencing their reality.

Thus, all new partnerships begin on the basis of histories, understandings, and layers of context that are not always immediately evident, not always directly connected to you, but always influencing the starting positions and the potentials of the collaboration ahead.

Without a clear recognition of these contexts for partnership, it is inevitable that existing inequities, injustices, and imbalances of knowledge and power, will continue to pervade our work.

If we start from the perspective of southern academics or from the lives of those in the communities we wish to help, would the research questions look the same?

HOW TO USE THE BOOK

We have designed this resource to help make explicit the practices and dynamics that underpin partnerships, to support the development of more equitable working relations.

The concepts and principles that we address in the following pages are entangled – they overlap and often address common issues from different angles.

The pages do not need to be read in any particular order

dip in

dip out

read across the various texts and contexts of your work

and take in the visual design in conjunction with the words

CAPACITY SOUTH CAPACITY NORTH CAPACITY

WHY DO
WE ONLY
TALK ABOUT
CAPACITY-
BUILDING FOR
THE GLOBAL
SOUTH ?

DO WE HAVE
NOTHING TO
LEARN IN
THE NORTH?

HOW CAN WE ACKNOWLEDGE THE
HISTORY THAT HAS BROUGHT US
TO THIS POSITION?

WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?

In every research collaboration there is an embedded geometry of power, authority, and commitment - for some the stakes are higher than for others.

These positions will impact, if not determine, the directions, decisions, practices, and outcomes of a project.

They cannot simply be flattened or wished away.

To engage across contexts already deeply entrenched in cultural, historical, and economical hierarchies, power dynamics need to be recognised and interrogated.

If left unaddressed, the partnership and project will unfold with similar inequities as the broader power dynamics of the world: increasing access to power, resource and agency for those already privileged, while continually reinforcing the marginalisation of others.

To address hierarchies in partnerships and ensure that they support the ethical foundations and the success of the work, roles and responsibilities need to be discussed and agreed upon.

Roles need to reflect the multiple – and often contested - needs of the project stakeholders. Each project is accountable to many project stakeholders:

WHO ARE YOU ACCOUNTABLE TO ?

The world is round, there is no centre - on the surface every location is central and connected at the same time

Project PI

Other co-Is

Postdocs   Participants' universities

Funders

In-country national priorities

Journal editors

"The Academy"

Women and men

Partner communities

Other things in the world: vegetable, animal and mineral

Future generations

FRAMING THE QUESTION

Research grants provide huge opportunities but bringing large sums of money into partnerships can also introduce tensions

For some academics this might be linked to intellectual and scientific questions; the pressure to lead research grants for personal promotion; or a desire to make the world a better place.

DO YOU KNOW *WHY* EACH PARTNER HAS GOT INVOLVED WITH YOUR PROJECT?

For other academics, and some non-academic partners, the motivations might be different – for them, it may be that no opportunity for funding can be turned down, regardless of topic; it may be that senior partners need to bring in money to continue to pay the salaries of team members; it may be that they have different local and national-driven priorities than Northern researchers; or they might be about to lose their farm…
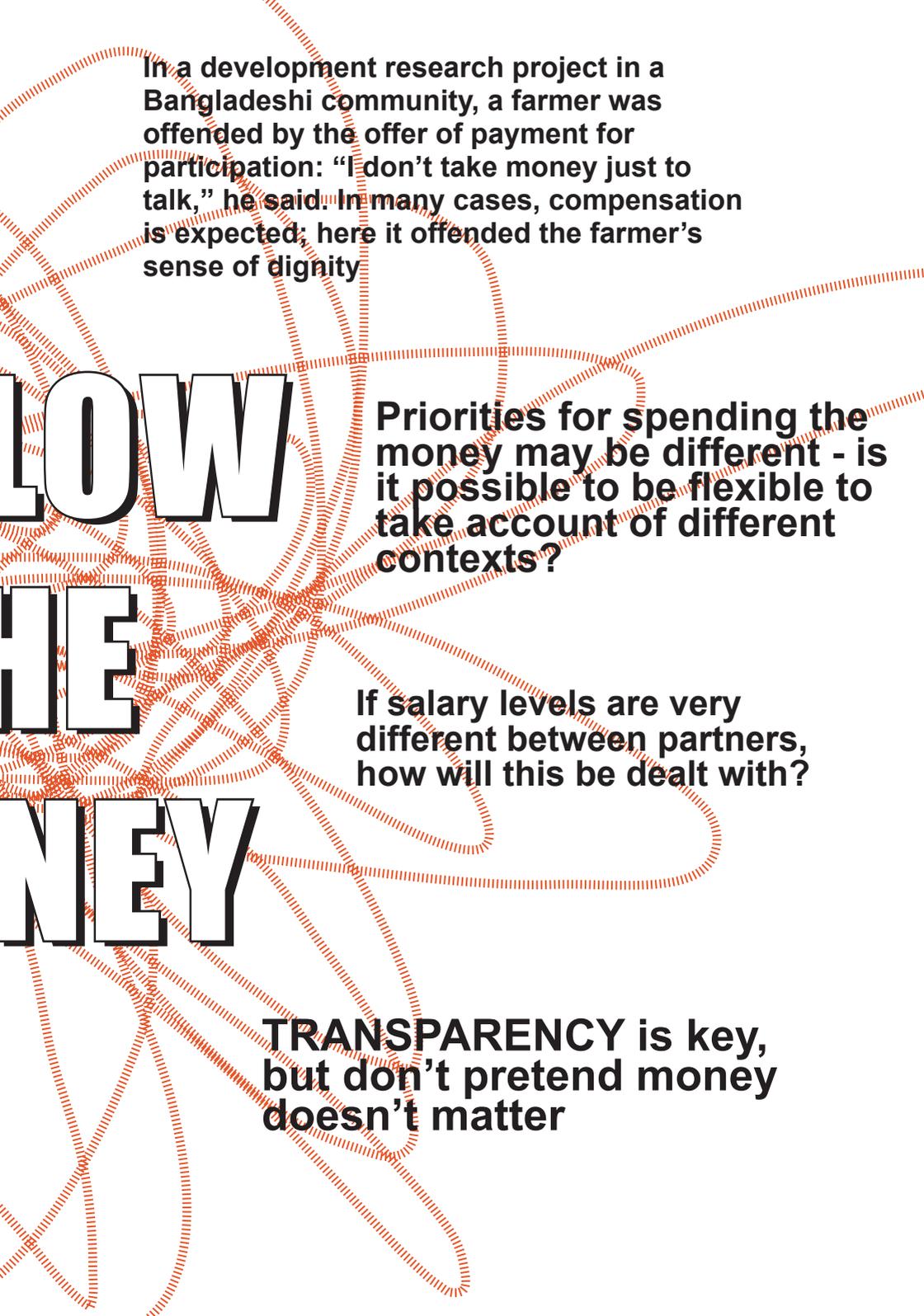
MONEY can be an OPPORTUNITY or an OBSTACLE

The ways in which funds are allocated and accounted for may be different

Do you know how to manage this?

Do you know what compensation for time is locally appropriate?

Money comes into a context of EXISTING INEQUALITIES – how can you ensure that you do not exacerbate these inequalities?

FOLL

TH

MON

In a development research project in a Bangladeshi community, a farmer was offended by the offer of payment for participation: "I don't take money just to talk," he said. In many cases, compensation is expected; here it offended the farmer's sense of dignity

LOW
HE
NEY

Priorities for spending the money may be different - is it possible to be flexible to take account of different contexts?

If salary levels are very different between partners, how will this be dealt with?

TRANSPARENCY is key, but don't pretend money doesn't matter

IT IS ABOUT

TIME

Time is a critical force.

It has scales:

The timescale of international research does not always align with the timescales of partnerships, interdisciplinary collaboration, participatory research practices, government policy-making schedules, people's expectations of change, the other demands on people's lives…

The timescale of ethical partnerships doesn't always align with humanitarian emergencies.

«THE FRESH CHEESE IS FOR THE POOR; THE AGED, TASTY CHEESE IS FOR THE RICH – IT COSTS MONEY TO PAY FOR MATURITY» (SARDINIAN SHEPHERD).

A community under siege by aggressive urban development doesn't have time

A village starving doesn't have time

A funding cycle of 12 months requires design, development, partnership, practice and findings

Relationships take time: to walk, talk, build trust, think, read, develop understanding

A research call may have 6 weeks

A child learns over years and years

- What timescale takes priority in your research project
- What (therefore) needs to be (de)prioritised?
- What are the implications of this setting of priorities?
- Who decides?

TIME IS OF ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

THE ESSENCE

গবেষণা

Translation is never a straightforward process.

Of course we may be aware that there are things that we just don't have the English words for. And there are things that are ineffable.

Might it be that the concepts the words refer to don't straightforwardly transfer between contexts either?

Looking for a lost cow...

Like the English word "research" - a simple concept?

In Bengali, the word is translated as *gobeshona.*

But this can also be understood as "looking for a lost cow" (*go* - "cow", *eshona* - "in search of")

Do we know the significance of these differences?

Do we know what sort of impact they have on different partners' expectations of what is being researched, what is included as knowledge, what the outcomes are anticipated to be?
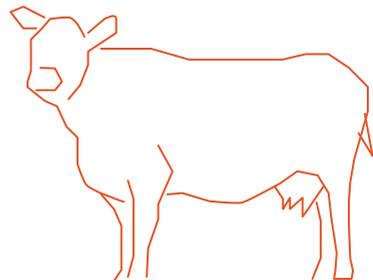
In the majority of international research, we assume the English language as the primary means of communication and dissemination.

Indeed, the vast majority of the international institutional structures of research – academic publishing, international policies, grant-awarding bodies – depend upon this.

This is a functional and efficient process of working across many other differences of context.

...or the politics of language

If taken up without careful and continuous questioning, interpretation and analysis, the data, the decisions and the outcomes of our research become sterilised into a singular version of the world that is afforded and containable through English.

Very practically, translation is a skilled, time consuming and expensive service.

HOW TO AVOID EXTRACTION
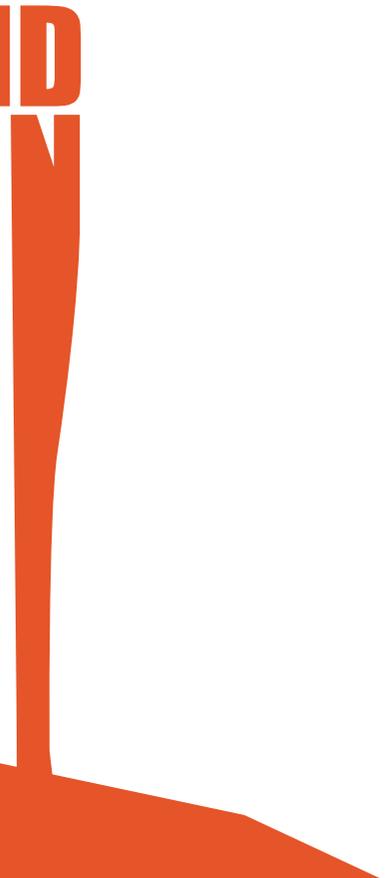
- In light of what you have just read, list a few critical reflections on a previous partnership you have been involved with.

- Were there any mistakes or things that you may have overlooked in forming or running a partnership that done differently might have led to more effective or better relations than you have had?

- Can such mistake(s) be corrected today to transform an already existing partnership?

Consider your project design carefully...

How do people or places benefit from this research?

How can you ensure that value remains in the communities you work with?

How can you ensure that they see the returns?

Saying that this research might lead to a cure "sometime in the future" is no help to people dying now – is there a way to put something back sooner?

What will you do differently next time **?**

DON'T UNDERESTIMATE THE LITTLE THINGS

There are structures that reproduce inequalities, but there are things that can be done to help to recognise and challenge them.

I learned to prepare and serve coffee in the Palestinian way. Understanding those codes of hospitality got me closer to the people I was working with, beyond the barriers of language and culture.

Pick up your international guests at the airport - welcome them to your country!

In some cultures, greetings are very important, and may be very specific to certain types of people. Take time to learn the appropriate greeting for different participants.

Small gifts - perhaps "typical" things from home - can help to break the ice at a first meeting.

Do you know the local protocols for meetings? How do they start? Who speaks first?

Notes and observations:

PARTICIPANTS / CONTRIBUTORS: We are all in this work together, you and us and all the "theys" in our futures. We are all implicated in the problems we face and all agents in the potential pathways for change, transformation and development. This work came about through a recognised need to explore and widely articulate key principles and practices that have emerged from the privilege of working closely and over time with a wide range of collaborators across settings, languages, and disciplines. We are a group of 13 active collaborators from 8 different countries working in academic research (spanning disciplines of education, geography, geology, health, anthropology, sociology, and biodiversity), arts practice (visual, social, design, and curation), and development work (civil society organisations).

Kevin Aanyu is a Lecturer of Structural Geology at the Department of Geology and Petroleum Studies, College of Natural Sciences, Makerere University, Kampala. kaanyu@cns.mak.ac.ug

Brian Barrett is a Lecturer at the School of Geographical & Earth Sciences, University of Glasgow, Scotland. Brian.Barrett@glasgow.ac.uk

Beatrice Catanzano is an artist and Doctoral Researcher at Oxford Brookes University. beatrice.catanzaro@gmail.com

Viviana Checchia is Public Engagement Curator at the Centre for Contemporary Arts, Glasgow. viviana@cca-glasgow.com

Vanessa Duclos is the Research Manager of the Sustainable Futures in Africa Network. Vanessa.Duclos@glasgow.ac.uk

Heather McLean is a feminist geographer based in Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc (otherwise named Kamloops, British Columbia, Canada). mcleanhe@gmail.com

Oitshepile MmaB Modise is Associate Professor at the University of Botswana in the Department of Lifelong Learning and Community Development. Modiseom@mopipi.ub.bw

Mia Perry is a Senior Lecturer at the School of Education at the University of Glasgow and co-Director of the Sustainable Futures in Africa Network. mia.perry@glasgow.ac.uk

Jude Robinson is a Professor of Health and Wellbeing at the University of Glasgow and researches gender, health inequalities and participatory methods. Jude.Robinson@glasgow.ac.uk

Jo Sharp is Professor of Geography at the University of St Andrews, Scotland. js314@st-andrews.ac.uk

Zoë Strachan is Reader in creative writing at the University of Glasgow. Zoe.strachan@glasgow.ac.uk

Helen Todd is Executive Director of theArt and Global Health Center Africa (ArtGlo) in Malawi. helen@aghcafrica.org

Shahaduz Zaman is Reader in Medical Anthropology and Global Health at the Brighton and Sussex Medical School and a fiction writer in Bengali literature. S.Zaman@bsms.ac.uk

SUSTAINABLE FUTURES in AFRICA

For more information, see:
www.sustainablefuturesinafrica.com

University of Glasgow

GCRF
Global Challenges Research Fund

CCA: Centre for Contemporary Arts

University of St Andrews