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Refugee Research Agendas: The Influence of Donors and North-South Partnerships

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This paper examines how refugee studies and forced migration research agendas have been shaped by donor policies, and in particular by donors' support for North- South research partnerships. The first part of this paper considers the nature of donors' influence on forced migration research agendas, and contextualises donor support for forced migration research within broader trends in the financing of development related research, including increased assistance for multidisciplinary, multi-stakeholder research, and the primacy of 'policy-relevant' research. The second section focuses on the implications of donors' tendency to support forced migration research through North-South partnerships. In this section, I explore researchers' motivations for entering into such partnerships, and discuss the obstacles they may entail for Southern researchers trying to articulate and advance their own agendas. At their best, North-South research partnerships are a source of mutual learning and capacity building that stimulate academic debates while successfully contributing to efforts to protect and assist the displaced. However, I contend that donors and researchers alike are well-advised to be frank about the limitations of this approach and use it only judiciously, as North-South partnerships are not necessarily the most productive way to advance research agendas grounded in the concerns and perspectives of Southern actor.

INTRODUCTION

Researchers concerned with forced migration face a myriad of challenges, from negotiating access to displaced populations, to refining methodologies and advancing the theoretical underpinnings of the field. Alongside these issues, researchers must often navigate the inter-related challenges involved in working with donors to secure funding for the research process. This paper examines how refugee studies and forced migration research agendas have been shaped, both directly and indirectly, by donor policies. Donors' influence has extended to the organizational structures within which research is carried out; in particular, it has stimulated the growth of partnerships between Northern and Southern researchers and research organisations. In many cases, these partnerships have struggled to respond effectively to the priorities of Southern actors, including researchers, policymakers, displaced persons, and host community members.

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The first section of this paper examines the nature of donors' influence on forced migration research agendas. As Zetter (2000: 350) observes, the international community's failure to prevent the 1994 genocide in the Great Lakes region prompted forced migration scholars to revisit the role and responsibilities of donors. However, this debate has focused on donor support for protection and assistance efforts in the field; the influence and obligations of donors vis-à-vis forced migration research remains in need of further scrutiny. As a modest step in this direction, this article contextualises donor support for forced migration research within broader trends in the financing of development-related research, including increased assistance for multidisciplinary, multi-stakeholder research, and the primacy of 'policy-relevant' research. It also briefly discusses two prominent conceptual frameworks that have informed donors' efforts to support development related research, namely the 'demand-driven approach', and the notion of knowledge as a global public good. My analysis focuses on donors concerned with development, particularly bilateral agencies, and key independent, internationally active funders, such as the Ford and Mellon Foundations. While forced migration researchers undertake a wide variety of work, from literary critiques to policy studies, this article focuses on 'development-related' forced migration research, broadly construed.

The second section of the paper focuses on the implications of donors' tendency to support forced migration research through North-South partnerships. In this section, I explore researchers' motivations for entering into such partnerships, and discuss the obstacles they may entail for Southern researchers trying to articulate and advance their own agendas. At their best, North-South research partnerships are a source of mutual learning and capacity building that stimulate academic debates while successfully contributing to efforts to protect and assist the displaced. However, I contend that donors and researchers alike are well-advised to be frank about the limitations of this approach and use it only judiciously, as North-South partnerships are not necessarily the most productive way to advance research agendas grounded in the concerns and perspectives of Southern actors.

The arguments in this article are based on an analysis of donor policies and the results of a series of 40 semi-structured interviews on North-South research partnerships that I conducted with donor and NGO representatives, academic officials and migration and governance researchers in Europe, the Middle East and Southern Africa.[1] In addition, the paper is informed by the understanding of the challenges associated with North-South research cooperation and the fi nuancing of development-related research that I gained by working for two years with the Canadian Partnerships Program at the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). [2] In advance of a discussion of amorphous concepts such as partnership and North-South relations, a word on terminology is in order. Although the terms North and South helpfully recognise the influence of history and geography in shaping global patterns of development and knowledge creation, they are clearly not discrete categories. Indeed, the limitations of these terms are particularly stark when considering research cooperation on an international issue such as forced migration, as many of the countries and key actors elude easy categorisation as 'Northern' or 'Southern'. Moreover, researchers in the field of forced migration are themselves remarkably mobile. Many researchers originally from the developing world are trained and work in the North. By the same token, a significant number of researchers from the North live and work in the global South. While I recognize such limitations of thinking about research cooperation in terms of North and South, I would argue that these concepts remain practically and conceptually relevant, as they continue to animate the policies of many funding agencies, as well as researchers' analyses of forced migration flows.

'Partnership' is a notoriously slippery term. Partnerships vary dramatically in terms of their goals, membership, structure, duration and intensity. While university based academics have historically been the principal investigators in North-South research partnerships, today these endeavours often include researchers working at think tanks and NGOs, as well as policymakers, practitioners, and, in some cases, displaced persons and host community members. The words 'partnership', 'cooperation' and 'collaboration' are used interchangeably, to indicate the wide variety of arrangements that link researchers and research institutions in the global North and South. These arrangements extend from the co-publication of research work to institutional twinning, the establishment of North-South research networks and the creation and co-management of scholarly journals.

Just as varied actors are involved in collaborative research processes, a wide range of donors with diverse goals and specialisations are involved in funding forced migration research. As mentioned above, this article focuses on the activities and policies of bilateral donors and independent foundations, arguably the most active and influential organisations involved in financing forced migration research. However, the donor community also includes the private sector and national research councils, and even multilateral organisations and NGOs who occasionally fund forced migration research.

Understanding the influence of donor policies and North-South partnerships on the forced migration research agenda is a complex proposition, as donor priorities and researchers' interests are constantly evolving. Furthermore, it cannot be assumed that donor policies affect all recipients in the same way. The literature on the influence of donors focuses predominantly on how funding policies affect NGOs involved in advocacy and field interventions, rather than research. In this literature, the case studies used to illustrate donors' influence tend to be anecdotal, while analyses struggle to identify and account for the many variables that determine donors' influence, from the size and leadership of the recipient organisation, to the political context in which it operates (Minear and Weiss 1995, Vakil 1997).

To make matters even more complicated, there is only a limited sense in which one can meaningfully discuss the forced migration research agenda. While it is possible to plot broad developments in the field, such as the shift away from a narrow focus on legally recognised refugees, in reality there is no monolithic forced migration research agenda in the global North or South.[3] Rather, the field is shaped by multiple, often competing, research *agendas*, which intersect with broader research programs in related fields such as development, economics, and transitional justice. The competitive nature of these agendas is unsurprising, given the highly politicised nature of contemporary migration. Furthermore, as Scholey (2006: 183) notes, 'fractured polities', such as those that experience conflict and forced displacement, 'find reflection in fractured research, advocacy and policy communities – both within and between each category'. Forced migration research agendas may emerge through specific agenda-setting exercises.[4] More often, however, these agendas emerge organically, through scholarly debate, discussions between researchers and practitioners, and in reaction to new political and institutional developments, including donor initiatives.

Why is the question of agenda-setting an imperative one? Why should forced migration researchers in all regions be concerned by the suggestion that Southern perspectives are muted, in part as a result of donor policies and inequitable North-South partnerships? First, a scan of the forced migration literature easily demonstrates that ample room remains for diverse Southern perspectives to be better integrated into contemporary debates. This has the potential to enrich the perceptivity and relevance of forced migration scholarship, which is surely in the interest of all

researchers, whether in the North or South. Second, and simply, the vast majority of forced migrants come from and remain in the developing world. Yet, Southern actors fi nd themselves at the 'receiving end' of migration management policies developed, for the most part, in the North. Grounding these policies in Southern perspectives and analyses is essential to responding effectively to forced migration, and ensuring that migration more broadly contributes to prosperity and well-being in both the North and South. However, 'this is not without serious challenge' (Scholey 2006: 179).

DONOR POLICIES AND FORCED MIGRATION RESEARCH AGENDAS: A SPECTRUM OF INFLUENCE

Despite the difficulties associated with systematically analysing donors' impact on research agendas, the pervasive influence of donors on forced migration research is widely assumed amongst many scholars. For example, at the 2006 Conference of the International Association for the Study of Forced Migration, the former director of the Forced Migration and Refugee Studies Program at the American University in Cairo called on his colleagues to resist the temptation to allow the research agenda to be co-opted by Northern interests, urging researchers to question the frameworks and terminology imposed by donors, and advance a research agenda based on Southern needs.

While the agendas of researchers, practitioners, policymakers and donors alike may often be developed through iterative processes that allow each group to input its perspectives and expertise, some scholars suggest that donors are playing increasingly constraining roles (Brookings 2007: 8). The financial reports of forced migration research centres give a preliminary indication of the breadth of donors' influence in this field: like many development-related research institutions, the majority of prominent forced migration centres rely on donors for most if not all of their funding, underlining the difficulty of achieving institutional self-sufficiency in a field that has historically had little revenue generating potential. For example, the 2003-2005 Annual Report of the Oxford Refugee Studies Centre (RSC) indicates that approximately 80% of the RSC's income for the period was provided by almost 50 different funders. In 2006, the University of the Witwatersrand contributed approximately 4% of the budget of its Forced Migration Studies Programme, with the remaining 96% of the budget raised from donors and through consultancies. The 2005 Activity Report of the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), which carries out research and training on IDP issues, states that 100% of the Centre's budget was provided through donor funds. Some institutions have successfully attracted significant amounts of core support or endowment donations, which enable them to develop aspects of their research agendas over a longer term, without needing to revert so often to donors for support. However, many donors are hesitant to provide core funding, and most forced migration research institutions appear to rely on project funding for the majority of their institutional incomes. Yet, donors' impact on the development of research agendas is best understood on a spectrum from direct to indirect influence, as the effects of donor policies are always tempered by factors such as researchers' ability to find creative ways to carry out their work, even in the absence of significant financial support.

Instances of outright donor interference in shaping or controlling the dissemination of research findings are deeply concerning, but seem to be relatively rare (Scholey 2006: 184). More often, a donor's influence is felt at the start of the research project development process, and in setting the structure of funding systems. At the general level, donors influence the research agenda

by identifying their funding priorities and rejecting proposals that do not accord with the goals of their programmes. Given the limited funds available for research, researchers and institutions must adapt to the donor funding priorities. This inhibits the development of long term agendas as research programmes are vulnerable to the shifting or reframing of donor priorities. During the 1990s, for example, various independent donors such as the Mellon, Ford and MacArthur Foundations and the Pew Charitable Trusts took the lead in channelling resources towards forced migration research and building the capacity of refugee studies centres. Between 1996 and 1999, the Mellon Foundation alone awarded US $16 million for the support of refugee studies. This funding was instrumental in establishing three new programmes related to refugee studies at Columbia University, Tufts University, and the University of the Witwatersrand. The funding provided during this period by foundations, alongside bilateral donors, had a catalytic effect on the field of forced migration studies: during the 1990s, numerous universities in both the North and South launched forced migration programmes, and humanitarian agencies such as the International Rescue Committee and Save the Children significantly enhanced their ability to carry out and apply the results of research (Makinson 1999: 46). However, over the past five to ten years, many of these targeted funding programmes have closed, compelling researchers to reframe their work in order to attract funding from other sources. In some cases, the organisations responsible for these programmes continue to fund research related to forced migration, but in the context of new initiatives on the broader phenomenon of migration.[5]

The donor community's influence on forced migration research agendas is not uniform, in part because different donors have diverse interests and goals in funding forced migration research.[6] For instance, the foundations that provided early support to emerging forced migration research centres are, for the most part, expressly dedicated to supporting academic freedom, and strive to enable researchers to have open debates and develop critical research agendas.[7] In contrast, some bilateral donors attempt to exert a more active influence on the research agenda, in accordance with their foreign policy platforms. USAID, for example, is often forthright in its efforts to shape the research agenda, requiring the researchers it supports to 'sign on' to US government objectives (Brookings 2007: 9). Equally, donors who commission research to inform their own policymaking typically play a very active role in setting the research agenda, and expect researchers to respond to prescribed terms of reference. Despite their diverse purposes and institutional characteristics, many prominent research funders strive to harmonise their efforts by participating in coordinating bodies such as the International Forum for Research Donors and the International Human Rights Funders Group. Such high-level efforts to ensure coordination among donors may augment their influence on particular development-related research agendas, including in the field of forced migration.

While donor policies are a central factor in the evolution of forced migration research agendas, it is important not to overstate the extent of their influence. Some issues that are of only marginal interest to large research donors, such as the legal analysis of western countries' asylum procedures, continue to be major topics in the field, while issues that would presumably be of significant interest to Northern bilateral donors, such as repatriation, remain on the fringes of forced migration studies (Black 2006: 24).

Researchers' *perceptions* of donors' interests can also affect how agendas are framed. As Landau and Jacobsen (2003: 3) suggest, forced migration researchers may employ popular but ill-defined terms such as empowerment, participation, human security, gender, and social capital in the belief that this may increase their chances for funding. Even when donors set out funding frameworks that explicitly detail their interests, researchers do not simply respond to these

frameworks, but challenge donor priorities and the assumptions that underpin them. For example, in recent years many donors have been keen to fund research and policy initiatives on human trafficking, largely in response to pressure from the United States government. This was the case in South Africa, where trafficking was given a high priority by policymakers and international agencies such as the IOM despite the limited data available to suggest that it represents a large enough problem in the region to merit such attention. The Institute for Security Studies, a prominent African research organisation, accepted a Belgian grant to carry out a study on trafficking in the region, but only tackled the issue with the caveat that the Institute would stand by the results of its dispassionate analysis of the issue, even if the study reached the potentially controversial conclusion that trafficking is not as critical an issue in the region as international organisations and policymakers have assumed (Gould 2007).

Just as the extent of donors' influence on the shape of forced migration research agendas is ambiguous, so too are its merits. Donors' interest in the developmental implications of displacement helped to open up more space for non-legal researchers in the field of forced migration, which many scholars and practitioners regard as a positive contribution. Yet, many researchers and refugee advocates have well-founded reasons to suggest that bilateral donors' support for forced migration research is often motivated by a desire to limit migration and advance economic and security interests, more than concern for the rights and well-being of the displaced. These motives have arguably contributed to the 'securitisation' of forced migration research, and heightened interest in the connection between migration and poverty. Whether these are, on balance, positive or negative developments in a matter of debate. Scholars such as Loescher compellingly argue that the securitisation of forced migration is not a new phenomenon; rather, security concerns have been at the forefront of the politics of the modern international refugee regime since its inception after World War II (Loescher 1992). However, entrenching the rhetoric of security in forced migration research may bolster the perception of refugees and IDPs as threats to be managed and contained. Further, Nhema (2005) points out that the notion of 'human security' is largely foreign to the African research lexicon. By privileging support for projects that examine forced migration through the lens of human security, donors may limit Southern scholars' opportunity to advance their own theoretical conceptions of the dilemma of displacement.

Donor policies affect not only the substance of research agendas, but also popular approaches to doing forced migration research. Again, the value of this influence is up for debate. Donors of almost all stripes were early and active supporters of multidisciplinary and multi-stakeholder research. Indeed, bringing together the different actors involved in understanding and responding to forced migration has been an explicit goal of various forced migration studies funding initiatives.[8] Donors provided incentive for researchers to pursue participatory, multi-stakeholder research, despite traditional academic establishments' tendency to regard such efforts as an inappropriate *mélange des genres* (Bradley, Labatut and Morin-Labatut, forthcoming).

Perhaps the most unambiguous effect donors have had on forced migration studies is the orientation of the agenda towards 'policy-relevant' research. As Turton (2003: 16) suggests, 'We can surely agree that there is no justification for studying, and attempting to understand, the causes of human suffering if the purpose of one's study is not, ultimately, to find ways of relieving and preventing that suffering.' Yet donors and researchers in the North and South may have very different conceptions of how research is best applied to the task of preventing and redressing human suffering. IDRC's extensive experience of supporting research related to peace and conflict, including forced migration, suggests that while Southern researchers are certainly interested in international debates on issues such as human security, they are often sceptical about

the practical relevance of these debates, and are particularly driven to carry out analyses that can have direct and immediate impact in their own contexts. Scholey (2006: 185) points out that when IDRC's Peace, Conflict and Development program operates in a 'purely responsive mode', the proposals it receives from Southern scholars address specific, timely, ground-level concerns, and almost never focus on 'trendy' issues in Northern literature, such as multilateral reform, human security and the responsibility to protect.

In my discussions with researchers, however, Northern and Southern researchers alike have stressed the difficulty of crafting projects that could meet bilateral donors' expectation that their investigations make a clear and ideally immediate contribution to poverty alleviation. Indeed, many researchers underlined the difficulty of needing to anticipate the policy relevance of their work in their proposals to donors, before the research is carried out, and emphasised the need for more removed, theoretically rigorous research, in order to help the field of forced migration and refugee studies mature. To some extent, the donors' drive for policy-relevant research is counter-balanced by the disparaging view tenure review committees often take of this type of work (Scholey 2006: 182-3). Of course, at its best, forced migration research advances scholarly debates while strengthening practical efforts to prevent and resolve displacement. The unresolved concern is how to respond to the continued need for knowledge to inform effective policy, in a way that does not preclude in-depth engagement with the theoretical debates that give nuance to scholars' and practitioners' understandings of displacement.

Donors' influence on forced migration research agendas is best understood in the context of the conceptual frameworks that have informed donor support for development-related research in recent years. A detailed discussion of these frameworks is not possible here, but two of the most important include the 'demand driven approach', and the notion of knowledge as a global public good. Demand led research refers to 'activities in which people are able to bring about their own development, with the objective of building up research systems to unleash the potential of the South' (Nair and Menon 2002: 2). Under the leadership of Jan Pronk, former Minister for Development Cooperation, the Dutch government played a leading role in the development of the demand-driven approach, which aims to respond first and foremost to the priorities of Southern communities, rather than to provide research inputs on the basis of knowledge 'supply' in the North. The Dutch government's efforts in the 1990s to channel greater levels of support directly to Southern researchers met with marked resistance from various sectors of the Dutch academic community, and the government has since reverted to a more traditional approach to funding development research, largely through North-South research partnerships. Applying a 'demand-driven approach' to funding and carrying out forced migration research is a complex undertaking, given the potentially competing concerns of migrants, host community members, NGOs, international organisations and government representatives. However, the rhetoric of prioritising Southern demands has been adopted by almost every donor, and is reflected in calls for the concerns of Southern policymakers, host communities and displaced persons to be at the heart of forced migration research (Van de Sande 2006).

A second relevant conceptual framework is found in the idea of knowledge based approaches to development, and in the notion of knowledge as a global public good essential to development and human well-being (World Bank 1999). Pure public goods are *nonrivalrous*, in that there is no marginal cost to sharing their benefits, and *nonexcludable*, in that no one can practicably be excluded from enjoying the good. While the benefits associated with some public goods are geographically bounded, Stiglitz (1999: 308-310) identifies five global public goods, including international security, international humanitarian assistance and knowledge. Knowledge

is often considered an impure public good, because it can be appropriated, and it is possible to exclude people from enjoying its benefits. Without active international support, global public goods suffer from under-provision. The discussion of knowledge as a global public good has largely focused on the issue of patents and intellectual property rights but, as Stiglitz (1999: 318) argues, 'Much of the knowledge that is required for successful development is not patentable; it is not the knowledge that underlies new products or new processes. Rather, it is equally fundamental knowledge: How to organise firms, how to organise societies, how to live healthier lives in ways that support the environment.' It is also how to survive crisis and rebuild communities, the type of knowledge brought to light by forced migration research. This approach suggests that internationally supported research in fields such as forced migration can and should advance mutual interests in the global North and South. Avoiding the under-provision of this good is one of the primary rationales for donor support for the creation and dissemination of knowledge. Tilak (2001) argues that international, collaborative research is the best route available to produce knowledge as an international public good. The policies of many major donors suggest their concurrence with this view, and it is not surprising, therefore, that North-South research partnerships have long been a defining feature of the forced migration research landscape.

SETTING THE AGENDA IN NORTH-SOUTH RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS

In this section, I look more closely at North-South partnerships and argue that in some cases they can hamper efforts to set agendas that effectively respond to Southern concerns. The literature on North-South research cooperation often laments the continued domination of collaborative agendas by the interests of Northern donors and researchers, and almost invariably calls for more equitable Southern engagement in agenda-setting processes. However, this issue is rarely examined in detail, particularly in the context of forced migration research, despite the significant role partnerships continue to play in the development of the field. Early North-South forced migration research partnerships included the links programs sponsored by the Mellon Foundation, as well as the UNITWIN/ UNESCO Forced Migration Network, which involves five universities in Morocco, Egypt, the Palestinian Territories, Jordan, South Africa and the UK, and was established in 1991 with a focus on capacity building (Elmadmad 2002). Contemporary examples of major North-South partnerships include the DFID-sponsored Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty, which is hosted at the University of Sussex, and links researchers in the UK, Bangladesh, Ghana, Albania and Egypt. Beyond the 'ivory towers', NGOs such as the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) have established partnerships with Southern counterparts to channel local expertise into international advocacy work, and engage these organisations in monitoring IDP issues (Brookings 2007: 7).

North-South research collaboration in forced migration is poised to grow in the future, but new partnerships will inevitably confront the persistent and well-documented challenges associated with international research cooperation. In addition to the question of agenda-setting, obstacles include language barriers; complex management structures; inequitable access to financial resources, libraries, conferences, training and publishing opportunities; mismatched expectations for the partnership; lack of in-depth, face-to-face interaction; and different levels of methodological sophistication (Bradley 2007). In light of these pitfalls, one of the principal issues I examined through my interviews with Southern researchers was their motivation for engaging in

North-South partnerships, and how their motivations affected their experiences with agenda-setting. Researchers have a wide range of interconnected interests in engaging in North-South partnerships, including the overarching desire to support the protection of migrants. For both Northern and Southern researchers, the opportunity to travel and interact with colleagues from other cultures were also significant incentives. However, amongst the researchers interviewed, almost without exception, access to funding stood out as a primary impetus to engage in partnerships.

This is in part a reaction to the structure of the international research funding system; most Southern governments have only meagre resources available to support research, leaving researchers reliant on international sources of funding. Historically most donors, particularly bilateral agencies, have required Southern researchers to partner with Northern counterparts in order to access funding. Indeed, various funding bodies are expressly mandated to support North-South research partnerships, and do not have the latitude to fund Southern researchers independently.[9] While some donors accept proposals from both Northern and Southern institutions, even prominent Southern organisations often do not fare well when they vie for funding against well-connected, highly skilled, experienced Northern groups.[10] Consequently, although they would prefer to receive direct support for their work, for many Southern institutions partnerships remain an important avenue for funding, particularly as partnering with prominent Northern organisations may increase their ability to attract independent funding in the future. However, the objective of obtaining funding is mediated by a number of other goals. Many of the Southern researchers I interviewed underlined that maintaining their scholarly integrity and personal and institutional reputations was more important than funding, and highlighted instances in which they turned down partnership opportunities that could have eroded either.

Beyond financial considerations, researchers suggested that, especially when considering internationalised phenomena such as migration, North-South collaboration holds out the opportunity for improved learning and intellectual output, as it enables researchers to gain direct insight into the conditions in different regions. Ideally, North-South partnerships also open up space for researchers to refine their theoretical frameworks, and create opportunities for collegial debate, which is particularly valuable when national research communities are small or isolated.

For some researchers, particularly in Israel and the Palestinian Territories, the decision to partner was a profound and carefully calibrated political statement. For others, partnerships were sought out because they augmented Southern researchers' ability to influence policy processes. This depended largely on the researchers' policy target. Where Southern researchers sought to influence the policies of Northern governments or international organisations, North-South partnerships increased Southerners' clout and perceived credibility. However, if researchers aimed to affect national policymakers, the amount of leverage gained through a partnership was more ambiguous. While some Southern policymakers prefer 'home-grown' analyses, others give greater weight to the views of 'outsiders', who they regard as more objective than local researchers (Nhema 2005). In the Middle East, researchers stressed the value of their longstanding Northern partners' advice on delicate political questions, and highlighted the important role well-connected partners played in removing the obstacles to carrying out sensitive fieldwork, for example, by bringing political and diplomatic pressure to bear on those obstructing the research process. Affiliation with a well-known Northern organisation can also lend a degree of protection to researchers working in dangerous contexts (Brookings 2007: 8).

Many interviewees emphasised the fallacy of thinking of North-South research partnerships as exercises in Southern capacity building, particularly as collaborations often pair

senior Southern scholars with relatively novice Northern scholars. Indeed, Northern researchers frequently suggest that they gain the most through partnerships, benefiting from Southern counterparts' contacts, linguistic abilities, knowledge of local conditions and customs, and expertise in adapting research methodologies. Nonetheless, many Southern researchers indicated that personal and institutional capacity building remained important motivations for partnership. Collaboration provided Southern researchers with access to high quality methodological training, databases and libraries, as well as advice on crafting proposals and navigating donor relationships. In some cases, Northern institutions temporarily increased the research capacity of their Southern partners by assigning researchers to work on projects that the Southern institution identified as important, but did not have the staff to complete.

Although the primary concern of this article is the negotiation of substantive research agendas, these diverse, interconnected motivations underline the fact that the substantive research program is only one of the many agendas at stake in North-South research partnerships. Prior to the navigation of these personal, professional and institutional agendas, different social and scholarly agendas affect which researchers get involved in partnerships in the first place. In different regions, researchers' opportunities to enter into partnerships are shaped by factors such as age, professional seniority, personal connections, religious and political affiliations, and educational background. In some cases, researchers suggested that agenda setting processes were simpler if researchers had similar educational qualifications, professional roles, or political beliefs. However, many partnerships specifically aim to link diverse Northern and Southern actors, counting that this diversity will result in richer research agendas, and more insightful findings. Researchers involved in multi-stakeholder partnerships suggested that difficulties in agenda setting often had less to do with meshing Northern and Southern interests, as with enabling cooperation between professionals from different sectors.

While the 'received wisdom' is that partnerships are dominated by the interests of Northern donors and scholars, the experiences of researchers involved in North- South forced migration partnerships indicate that a more nuanced analysis of power dynamics in the agenda-setting process is required. A closer examination demonstrates that Southern partners often have more leverage in setting the research agenda than is commonly assumed. This is not simply the result of the emergence of well-managed, intellectually innovative Southern institutions that can work as equals alongside their Northern counterparts. Well-established Southern researchers also function as gate-keepers to local populations, and their influence in setting research agendas is bolstered by the policies of an increasing number of donors who prefer North-South partnerships to be headquartered at Southern institutions. This is a significant shift, as responsibility for the management of partnerships often translates into increased influence in substantive agenda setting processes. However, this policy is not uniformly popular; some researchers argue that it reflects the unfounded assumption that all Southern institutions are weak and require more experience in project management. Furthermore, when administratively proficient but under-resourced Southern organisations work with longstanding, trusted Northern partners, it can be beneficial to have the latter administer the partnership, as this relieves the burden on the Southern side.

In many North-South agenda-setting processes, the 'devil is in the details'. Northern and Southern researchers may be interested in the same sorts of issues, but nonetheless struggle to pin down a mutually agreeable research program, because they approach the issue for different reasons, or employ different lenses to interpret the problem (Scholey 2006: 191). Even when researchers are in agreement, project negotiations can be drawn out for months or even years due to the slow-moving nature of donor and university bureaucracies. Furthermore, the question of

who negotiates the research agenda can decisively affect the success of a partnership. Difficulties can arise when collaborative research agendas are negotiated by the institutions' directors, but then passed on to junior researchers with different views on the key issues. Similarly, changes in the composition of research teams make it difficult to consistently develop the agenda agreed upon at the outset of the partnership. Although Southern researchers may remain committed to developing an agenda articulated in the context of a North-South partnership, if the Northern researchers' interests change, they may 'take the money with them', limiting the Southern partner's ability to continue the work independently.

Individuals' theoretical backgrounds and career development concerns can also complicate the development of mutually beneficial research agendas. For example, while Nhema suggests that Southern researchers are often motivated to pursue investigations that respond directly and practically to immediate concerns, academics striving to gain tenure may prioritise the development of research agendas geared towards theoretically rigorous scholarship for peer-reviewed publications (Rawoo 2001, Nhema 2005). Where Northern and Southern researchers are equally concerned with making theoretical contributions to the field, this may nonetheless be a difficult proposition, as they may be schooled in strikingly different bodies of theory, depending on linguistic, cultural and geographic backgrounds.

While formal 'rules', set largely by donors, govern the administration and financing of North-South partnerships, there are no regulations to ensure the equitable nature of agenda-setting processes. More often than not, partnerships in fields such as forced migration are premised on the assumption that the researchers involved are well-informed and well-intentioned, and that these are sufficient conditions for a successful partnership. However, managing international research teams and facilitating culturally sensitive, innovative agenda-setting processes are specific skills that are not necessarily developed through traditional academic training, nor are they clearly rewarded through most research institutions' performance evaluation systems (Ettorre 2000).

In the face of the multiple factors hindering equitable engagement, I would argue that the strength of the Southern institution in a North-South partnership remains the foremost factor determining the successful negotiation of a mutually beneficial agenda that reflects Southern priorities. Good intentions on the Northern side and sensitivity to their potential for sidelining Southern concerns can facilitate effective agenda-setting processes, but they cannot substitute for the advantages strong Southern institutions have in partnership negotiations. In this context, strong institutions are characterised by a realistic assessment of their own strengths and weaknesses; relatively stable if modest finances; sound administrative systems; and, most importantly, a clear institutional purpose and agenda.

Research institutions exemplify these characteristics to varying degrees in both North and South, but identifying clear institutional goals and agendas is often a particular struggle for Southern organisations that have to contend with unstable political and economic circumstances. It is rarely a rewarding or productive experience for Southern organisations to be recruited as passengers on the 'bandwagons' driven by Northern researchers and donors, but difficult to avoid if partners lack a clear sense of their own priorities, and where these fi t in relation to local actors. It is not uncommon to find that a Southern institution appears to have a well-defined agenda, but 'the institution is an individual' – that is, the organisation's leadership and research capacity is bound up in only one person. Consequently, while the individual *qua* institution may have a clear personal agenda, it has not been enriched by collegial debate, nor does it necessarily enjoy the support of community members. This is particularly problematic as North-
South partnerships appear to be most successful when they link institutions, rather

than just individuals, and can be developed over a long period of time and involve multiple projects.

Although sympathetic to the challenge of transforming struggling Southern institutions into strong organisations that can hold their own in negotiations with donors and Northern partners, many of the Southern researchers I interviewed questioned whether organisations could ever successfully make this transition by 'going along' with Northern-driven agendas.[11] Developing the ability and readiness to walk away from funding with too many strings attached was almost seen as a rite of passage for reputable researchers and organisations. Indeed, researchers expressed pride in being selective in their choice of partners and donors, and following their own agendas even when they did not meet with outside support. The staff of strong Southern organisations also valued their ability to tackle research agendas that they hold to be important, but which are unpopular locally because they are seen to be donors' 'turf '. These attributes not only strengthen Southern parties' hands in agenda negotiations, but also limit the costs to the Southern organization if a partnership does not materialise.

CONCLUSION

While strong Southern institutions are often the lynchpin in effective, equitable North-South agenda-setting processes, the reality is that there are a limited number of organisations involved in forced migration research, and these institutions have drastically different levels of institutional strength. North-South partnerships can help build the capacity of the organisations that are involved in them, but proponents of partnership must be realistic about the limitations of collaboration as a tool for carrying out research and building capacity. It is rarely possible for a partnership to focus on raising the capacity of an organisation that lacks essential resources and a clear set of priorities, while advancing a nuanced, timely and relevant research agenda. There are a wide range of detailed guides on creating successful partnerships, but there is little evidence that the advice in these guides is used by researchers when they enter into North-South partnerships, and it is perhaps overly optimistic to hope that careful planning can effectively sidestep the deeply rooted problems that trouble North-South collaborations (KFPE 1998, KFPE 2005).

Indeed, North-South research cooperation is characterised by a number of tensions that elude easy resolution. These include the tension between the desire for equality amongst partners, and the need for leadership in order to have the project move forward;[12] the fact that successful capacity building can ultimately lead to not wholly welcome competition between partners in the future;[13] and the possible discord between the view that North-South partnerships must be equally and mutually beneficial, and the commitment to prioritising Southern concerns reflected in the demand-driven approach to development-related research. While the prevention and resolution of forced displacement is surely in the general interest of both the North and South, it would be a grave oversimplification to suggest that Southern priorities can always be met without a cost to the interests of Northern actors, particularly governments. Confronting the potential dissonance between the idea of equally and mutually beneficial partnerships, and the commitment to prioritising Southern demands, is an important first step towards ensuring that partnerships are based on coherent, viable principles.

Increasingly, South-South partnerships may be a more appropriate response to the challenges of advancing Southern agendas and building research capacity in the developing world. While South-South partnerships circumvent some of the difficulties associated with North-South

cooperation, they must still contend with the influence of donors. Furthermore, South-South partnerships are not a panacea for agenda-setting challenges. In fact, several Southern researchers suggested to me that too often these partnerships replicate the negative power dynamics historically associated with North-South partnerships.

In these preliminary reflections on the influence of donors and North-South partnerships on forced migration research agendas, I have suggested that donors' impact is decisive but often indirect, and that while strong Southern organisations are well-placed to negotiate opportune, rewarding agendas in the context of North-South partnerships, North-South research cooperation is nonetheless characterized by tensions that cannot be readily untangled. While partnerships can be a powerful and productive tool, donors and researchers alike should be frank about the limitations of this approach, and to use it only judiciously, recognising that in many cases, the provision of increased direct support to Southern institutions is a more efficient route to producing rigorous research rooted in Southern priorities.

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Notes

[1] These interviews formed part of a broader study for the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) on agenda-setting in the context of North-South research partnerships. A total of 40 interviews were carried out between October 2006 and March 2007 in the Netherlands (7), the United Kingdom (5), Botswana (3), South Africa (9), Jordan (8), and Israel and the Palestinian Territories (8). The interviews were conducted in English, and each lasted from 45 minutes to two hours. The initial pool of interviewees was principally identified through recommendations and contacts provided by program officers at IDRC. I expanded the interview pool on the basis of suggestions made by various interviewees. The interviewees' names and identifying details have been omitted to preserve confidentiality.

[2] IDRC is a Canadian donor organisation that works closely with Southern researchers engaged in the pursuit of healthier, prosperous and more equitable societies. The Canadian Partnerships Program supports the different sectors of the Canadian development research community, and often helps enable interaction between Canadian researchers and their Southern counterparts. See http://www.idrc.ca/en/cp/.

[3] Attempts to categorise migrants have had a decisive effect on the agenda-setting processes of researchers and policymakers alike. The difficulties associated with labelling different types of migrants, and even distinguishing between forced and voluntary migration, have been discussed by numerous authors (e.g. Van Hear 1998: 42). While categorisation can serve important practical and theoretical purposes, developing separate research agendas on the basis of political or legal labels runs the risk of distorting researchers' understanding and analysis of the issues at stake.

[4] For example, the Institute for the Study of International Migration and the Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement convened a workshop in Cairo in March 2007 entitled 'Researching Internal Displacement: State of the Art and an Agenda for the Future' (Brookings 2007).

[5] For example, the MacArthur Foundation launched its Program on Global Migration and Human Mobility in 2006. See http://www.macfound.org/migration.

[6] Just as there is great diversity between donor organisations, funding agencies are not internally homogeneous. How individual representatives of donor agencies interpret their mandate and manage their portfolios can have a profound impact on the shape that projects take, and the quality of the relationships between the donor agency and the research community.

[7] For example, see http://www.fordfound.org/about/docs/fulfi lling_responsibilities.pdf. Accessed 13 May 2007.

[8] For example, the Mellon Foundation's Program on Refugees and Forced Migration aimed to mutually engage the refugee research and practitioner communities (Makinson 1999: 44, Andrew W. Mellon Foundation 2000: 36).

[9] For example WOTRO, the development branch of the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO), concentres on supporting North-South research partnerships. See www.nwo.nl/wotro. Accessed 15 May 2007.

[10] By way of illustration, it is interesting to note that while the MacArthur Foundation's program on Global Migration and Human Mobility is open to organisations from around the world, as of April 2007 18 of the 22 grants had been given to US organisations.

[11] This is not to say that all North-South research partnerships are by definition unsuccessful if the development of the research agenda is Northern-led. For example, the Southern African Migration Project (SAMP) is a Canada based network of Canadian and Southern African researchers in operation since 1996. The partnership model is based on Northern intellectual leadership, as reflected in the frank statement on the SAMP website that their Northern-based director is 'responsible for setting and directing the [project's] regional research agenda'. (See http://www.queensu.ca/sarc/personne.htm, accessed 18 May 2007.) However, the 'eagle-eye view' provided through the leadership of a researcher from outside the region, but with strong local connections, arguably enabled the project to identify some innovative and productive research questions that would not necessarily have been evident to researchers deeply embedded in particular countries in the region.

[12] This tension is part of a broader debate on the meaning of equality in the context of cooperation for development.

[13] This tension is reflected in the Terms of Reference for the Danish Commission on Development-Related Research, which admit that 'the development of indigenous research capacity in developing countries, in itself much to be welcomed, [poses] new challenges for the Danish development research sector.' The Commission was principally concerned with Denmark's role as a provider of development research in the future, and the ability of Danish-funded research to meet the Danish government's policy-making needs (DANIDA 2001).