Ethical guidelines for responsible academic partnerships with the Global South

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Preface

The Ethical Guidelines for Responsible Academic Partnerships with the Global South provide recommendations for Finnish higher education institutions, highlighting key points to consider in their academic engagements in and with the Global South. These recommendations encourage critical thinking and reflection in academic partnerships. They should not be regarded as fully exhaustive or prescriptive, but rather as an invitation for reflection and to adapt these guidelines according to specific needs, circumstances and contexts.

The guidelines are divided into five main sections, which includes key concepts that frame the ethical considerations, followed by recommendations and references for their implementation. The document concludes with a compilation of existing guidelines and toolkits that have served as benchmarks and can further support equitable and responsible practices for engaging with the Global South in an academic environment.

In this work, we also share more information on other initiatives, worldwide, that have further addressed similar practices and principles for responsible and equitable partnerships with the Global South.

This document complements the Finnish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity and Procedures for Handling Alleged Violations of Research Integrity in Finland(2023), precisely point 3.2 ‘Good research practices’ (See TENK’s Research Integrity guidelines here).
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The ethical journey in Finnish academia

Who is this for?

Educators, researchers, students, practitioners and administrators in Finnish academia.

The guidelines also seek to complement the ethical principles of research with human participants and ethical review in the human sciences in Finland by acknowledging that these principles should be equally applied for engaging responsibly with our peers in the Global South.

What is in it for you?

It will enable you to conduct more sustainable, equitable and responsible collaboration with your partners in the Global South.

→ This is an invitation to rebuild your partnerships on a more equitable basis for more sustainable and long-term results.

It will help you prevent or mitigate risks and develop more reciprocal, equitable and responsible partnerships.

→ Be an equity and inclusivity advocate.

It will increase your knowledge and understanding of ethical issues that may arise in partnership development.

→ Become knowledgeable not only in your field of study but also in ethical considerations for global engagement!

It contributes to the broader aim of decolonising Finland’s academic partnerships.

→ Contribute to a more comprehensive and responsible societal impact in your work!
Background

Imbalances in global academic partnerships, such as discrimination, systemic bias, and resource and funding allocation disparities, impact research integrity. Power imbalances also twist priorities, with researchers and other stakeholders pursuing goals that frequently overlook the needs of local people or even academic collaborators. Additionally, the political and social context of empirical investigations and fieldwork can pose risks to the security of local researchers.

In Finland, national initiatives for internationalisation with the Global South have increased, encouraging higher education institutions (HEIs) to develop and build academic partnerships encompassing education, research, and innovation. This has led to an increased number of educators, researchers, practitioners and other staff at Finnish HEIs cooperating with partners from and in the context of the Global South, who may need support for building responsible and equitable partnerships. Being part of Europe and the Global North, Finland is inevitably placed in an advantaged position regarding power and privilege. This work aims to find ways to use that privileged position and counterbalance global inequalities in academic partnerships.

Finnish academia is committed to the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity’s (TENK) guidelines. However, the specific issues related to academic collaboration with the Global South (as partners and/or research participants) have not been considered comprehensively enough. Without denying the utility and merits of the existing guidelines on research integrity, issues and distinctive processes of power imbalances between people and contexts have not been addressed fully. Thus, the Finnish University Partnership for International Development (UniPID) proposed the development of ethical guidelines for Global South academic partnerships to complement the existing national research integrity guidelines. This is an invitation for Finnish academia to embrace reflection on ethics, responsibility and equity to improve engagement with the Global South.

This work started in October 2021 and has been implemented by the UniPID task force for ethical guidelines under the guidance of the UniPID ethical guidelines working group and an international steering group (Appendix 1). The UniPID task force collected and analysed data from various events and sources to inform the drafting of the guidelines. Firstly, UniPID reviewed national and international guidelines for building responsible academic partnerships to identify trends, similarities and differences. Secondly, the TENK guidelines were compared with the existing guidelines to determine how the TENK guidelines are framed in the context of academic partnerships. This meant identifying whether there were any gaps or a need to define how the premises in the TENK guidelines can be implemented in the context of the Global South. This work contributed to creating an online survey focused on ethical guidelines for Global South academic partnerships, targeted at researchers and staff at HEIs in Finland and the Global South. Data was also gathered through workshops held at the FINCEED Forum, organised by the Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI) in November 2022, and the Development Days Conference in 2022 and 2023, organised by the Finnish Society for Development Research (FSDR).

1 For more information on the other guidelines consulted, please refer to the benchmarking analysis in the data analysis report.
2 The FINCEED Forum is a flagship annual event of the Finnish Centre of Expertise in Education and Development under the Finnish National Agency of Education.
Research integrity and responsible academic partnerships. How are they related, and why should it concern you?

Research integrity ensures that research is of high quality, reliable, and is conducted ethically. Traditionally, it has mainly focused on internal or intrinsic practices that undermine the validity of research, such as falsification, fabrication and plagiarism. According to the discussion paper developed for the World Conference on Research Integrity 2022, promoting research integrity should also involve addressing systems and practices, at a macro level, that can negatively influence the project or micro-level behaviours. Research integrity should also focus on ensuring that the academic community is provided with enabling environments for conducting high quality and reliable research in an ethical manner, and that the systems and incentives for research promote good practice and engagement, rather than those that can inversely cause people and organisations to cut corners or increase inequity.
Key concepts

Whether you have lots of experience or are just starting to get familiar with the issue of equitable academic partnerships, here are a few key concepts you will find helpful as you embark on your ethical journey. You will encounter these while deep diving into ethical practices of equitable academic partnerships and they will help you understand the recommendations in these guidelines.

**NOTE**

There is not one single definition of these concepts, yet their absence would create myths or a generalisation of practices that may seem somewhat simplistic when addressing the issues.

**Global South**

The Global South is a dynamic, geographical, geopolitical, historical and developmental concept, that has had various definitions. First, it has traditionally been used within intergovernmental development organisations (primarily those that originated in the Non-Aligned Movement) to refer to economically disadvantaged nation-states and as a post-cold war alternative to “Third World.” In recent years, and within a variety of fields, the Global South is employed in a post-national sense to address spaces and peoples negatively impacted by contemporary capitalist globalisation. A third meaning refers to the resistant imaginary of a transnational political subject resulting from a shared subjugation experiences under contemporary global capitalism (Mahler, 2017). In academic partnerships, the term ‘Global South’ is also shaped by the experiences of students, educators, researchers and practitioners working on cooperation, development and sustainability issues.

**NOTE**

There are economic Souths in the geographic North and Norths in the geographic South…” (Mahler, 2017). Hence, the division between the Global North and the Global South is not exhaustive, and it carries the risk of stereotyping and condescending the contexts of the Global South, which should be critically reflected on. Any other definition of the term should not create an obstacle to participation but rather empower HEIs to embrace partnerships’ multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary character.
Key concepts in a nutshell

**Academic partnerships**
Relationships of an academic nature between:
- individual
- institutions
- organisations
- government actors
- the private sector
- NGOs
- CSOs
- communities.

**Decolonial approach**
Global North-Global South academic partnerships are challenging due to knowledge, resources, and power imbalances.

The decolonial approach refers to the recognition that there are hegemonic standards of knowledge and practices that dominate the academic world.

**Global South**
Refers to:
- economically disadvantaged nation-states
- spaces and people negatively impacted by capitalistic globalisation
- shared subjugation experiences of contemporary global capitalism

**Helicopter research or parachute science**
Researchers from a wealthier context or a more privileged setting conducting research in resourceless settings with limited to no involvement of local communities or researchers.

**Ethics dumping**
The practice of exporting unethical research practices to lower-income settings.

**Conflict of interest**
Conflicts of interest in an academic partnership occur when secondary and/or personal interests may overly influence a person’s involvement.

Recognising the oversimplification of grouping a large variety of countries, regions, and people within a generic term risks ignoring historical relations and power imbalances between people, regions, and countries, and it evokes different descriptive and analytical meanings for different people.

**Decolonial approach**
Global North-Global South academic partnerships are challenging due to knowledge, resources and power imbalances. The decolonial approach refers to the recognition that there are hegemonic standards of knowledge and practices that dominate the academic world. Hence, a decolonial approach addresses epistemic hierarchies, injustices and extractivism by actively promoting responsibility, equity, inclusivity and plurality in knowledge production, dissemination, monitoring and evaluation.

Decolonialism in research and education involves shifting the focus towards internationalisation and partnerships from a Global South perspective. This approach aims to foster critical engagement with the dominance of Global North knowledge, ultimately striving for greater balance, equality and justice in academic partnerships (Chasi, 2020). The UniPID Toolkit for Responsible Academic Partnerships includes a learning bite for reflecting on power dynamics in identity and privilege developed by Chasi (2022).
Ethics dumping

The practice of exporting unethical research practices to lower-income settings. For more information, please refer to *The Global Code of Conduct for Research in Resource-Poor Settings* (Trust Consortium, 2018).

Helicopter research or parachute science

This occurs when researchers from a wealthier context or a more privileged setting conduct research in resourceless settings with limited to no involvement of local communities or researchers. It also refers to situations when data is collected from resource-poor settings, but analysis and publishing happen elsewhere with limited accessibility for those who provided the data. The term can be related to broader global intellectual, cognitive and epistemic extractivist discussions.

Conflict of interest

Conflicts of interest in an academic partnership occur when secondary and/or personal interests may overly influence a person’s involvement. The situation is context-specific and depends on the degree of influence the personal or secondary interest may have over the collaboration’s design, analysis, output and outcome.

Various types of conflicts of interest can arise. These include:

- **Financial conflicts of interest:** These occur when individuals or institutions stand to gain financially from a decision or action.
- **Personal conflicts of interest:** These happen when personal relationships or affiliations might influence decision-making. For example, favouring a family member or friend in awarding a contract.
- **Professional or organisational conflicts of interest:** These occur when professional responsibilities clash with personal interests. For instance, representing an entity while having a personal relationship with a stakeholder in that entity’s partnership.
- **Research conflicts of interest:** These involve researchers having financial or personal interests that could impact their research findings or objectivity.
Ethical guidelines for responsible academic partnerships with the Global South

Counterbalance inherent inequalities

Mitigate disparities by
- promoting diversity and inclusion when selecting and engaging with your partner
- encouraging language awareness and multilingualism
- promoting joint agenda-setting and open dialogue
- recognising your partner and promoting transparent and inclusive engagement practices

Context matters

Understand your partner’s
- different professional, institutional, and system settings embedded in already differing social, cultural, economic, and political realities
- interests, perspectives, ideologies, societal goals

Recognise
- the diverse knowledge, traditions, and experiences

Manifest integrity in academic partnerships

Manifest integrity in your academic partnership by
- demonstrating respect, trust, transparency and honesty in your relations with your partner
- disclosing any dispute and set up, document and monitor conflict of interest and fair decision-making processes

Manage conflicts of interest

Manage conflict of interests by
- Disclosure
- Establishing impartial decision making
- Recusal
- Transparency

Shift from ‘do no harm’ to ‘ethics of care’

Shift from ‘do no harm’ to ‘ethics of care’ by making an effort to
- understand your partner’s reality and experiential knowledge
- pay attention to the contextual social dynamics and cultural norms in the partnership
- attend to the needs and concerns of your partner

Instead of imposing Western knowledge, give space to
- indigenous, local and traditional knowledge and practices
- open dialogue to foster co-design, co-creation and co-implementation

Shift from ‘knowledge transfer’ to ‘knowledge(s) in dialogue’

Instead of imposing Western knowledge, give space to
- indigenous, local and traditional knowledge and practices
- open dialogue to foster co-design, co-creation and co-implementation
Counterbalance inherent inequalities

Disparities and uneven distribution of resources and opportunities among academic institutions, globally, can arise due to historical, economic, geopolitical, structural and systemic barriers. These disparities can affect academic partnerships negatively and limit sustainable outcomes. Acknowledging global inequalities and power imbalances can create an atmosphere of openness, transparency and mutual respect.

Reflect on and consider the following:

Promote inclusivity and diversity

→ Partnership building: Consider partnerships with diverse institutions, organisations, communities and regions, or expand existing partnerships to include underrepresented stakeholders.

→ Transboundary research: Promote interdisciplinary research and methodologies to contribute to a more balanced and inclusive global academic community.

→ Intersectionality: Consider reviewing how age, gender, race, religion, ethnicity, disabilities, geographic location, educational background, socioeconomic status and sexuality have been considered in the partnership.

Encourage language awareness and multilingualism

Actively encourage language awareness and multilingualism in partnerships and provide opportunities for engaging in different formats.

Consider the following:

→ Translation and interpretation services can help overcome language barriers and promote broader participation.

→ Look into diverse ways for embedding language awareness in partner and stakeholder engagement processes, and communications in, e.g., meetings, workshops, public presentations, non-academic publications, conference presentations, and scientific publications. Dissemination of information in multilanguage formats also makes information more accessible.

→ Include the participation of individuals, communities, institutions and organisations whose primary language of communication is not English or other imperial languages.

→ Promote and recognise research published in languages other than English or other imperial languages.

TIPS

→ Check out the University of Helsinki Guidelines for Language Awareness.

→ Plan and budget (if needed) for language support in your projects and recruit proficient interpreters and translators. Acknowledge your interpreters and translators and pay them properly. They are your voice, after all.
Promote joint agenda setting, participatory procedures, and open dialogue with your collaborators and/or target group

Inclusive decision-making, starting from the co-design of activities, is crucial for considering diverse perspectives and enhancing more informed and effective outcomes. Unintended consequences and blind spots that may go unnoticed are identified more easily.

Consider the following:

→ Open dialogue and participatory procedures empower stakeholders to actively shape projects, policies and programmes that can impact them, fostering ownership, responsibility and accountability.

→ Discover and implement different ways and methodologies for reporting back, collecting feedback, and giving back to the community. Find out what compensation for time is locally appropriate.

→ Provide spaces to foster inclusive co-design, co-creation and co-implementation with all partners. This requires candidness, transparency, and open and transparent dialogue, which can be supported with clearly documented agreements.

→ Involve local communities in the academic partnership process, planning the research or project design, method, and data gathering, seeking their input, and engaging in dialogue. Foster ‘we-benefits’ over ‘me-benefits’ and ensure that the diversity of needs and concerns of different partners are represented. Build long-term relationships with your partners and avoid ‘partner-shopping’ and superficial involvement of communities.

→ Regular monitoring of the effectiveness of participatory processes and how these impact the partnership demonstrates a commitment to continuous learning, adaptation, inclusivity, transparency and respect for all.

TIPS


→ Listen to Kagiri-Kalanzi and Avento’s (2022a) discussion on the Administration of North-South Academic Partnerships in the UniPID Toolkit for Responsible Academic Partnerships.
Focus on the 3Rs: recognition, representation and redistribution

**Recognition**
Acknowledging, actively identifying and validating the different identities, experiences, struggles and rights of team members, collaborators, research participants and institutions involved.

**Representation**
Ensuring that marginalised and under-represented groups in academic partnerships have a meaningful presence and voice in decision-making processes, institutions and public discourse.

**Redistribution**
Addressing economic disparities and social inequalities involves practices, initiatives and policies that seek to provide fair access to education, healthcare, housing, employment, insurance and other essential resources.

**NOTE**
These 3Rs are multifaceted and complex, and their implementation requires a comprehensive and intersectional approach that considers the various dimensions of inequality. They form the basis for the creation of more inclusive and just societies that value all individuals’ dignity, diversity and equality.

Clear and fair practices for open access, open research data and open science

Individuals, institutions and regions differ in their practices, capacities, infrastructures and frameworks for open science. Guaranteeing transparent and fair procedures for data sharing, storing, publication and dissemination is essential to nurture equity in partnerships.

Consider the following:

→ Discuss alternative ways, with your partners, to improve individual and collaborative processes, their communication and reproducibility to accelerate the production and use of new knowledge in society.
→ Promote open science, transparency and data sharing by making research and project progress and findings publicly available. Discuss the best channels for open science and data sharing in collaboration with partners and stakeholders. This will help prevent information asymmetry and selective reporting and ensure that the knowledge gained benefits the global scientific community and the local communities contributing to generating that knowledge.

TIP

Review:

→ Research Council of Finland’s practices for supporting ‘Open Access’

→ Finnish National Board on Research Integrity’s practices for open science in the ethical principles of research with human participants and ethical review in the human sciences

→ The Latin American Council of Social Sciences’ Declaration on open access to knowledge managed as a commons by the scholarly community

Context matters

Focus on contextuality and inclusivity

The different circumstances and contexts that form the setting of a partnership matter. Academic partnerships tend to place different people, institutions and systems, already embedded in differing social, economic and political realities, under the same roof. This does not automatically translate to the same ways of working and mutual understanding.

Contextuality helps to challenge and transform practices for more equitable and inclusive academic partnerships that recognise and celebrate the diverse knowledge(s), traditions and experiences of people. This requires that a stage is set for the voices of the Global South. As Sheik (2020) aptly says: ‘Who are we when we are not spoken for, spoken of, spoken over, when we are not given a voice, not given a platform to amplify our voice, not given the volume control of our voice?’

Consider the following:

→ Get familiar with whom you partner with, how, and in what capacity. Awareness of differing understandings of responsibility, practices, working methods and infrastructures can help alleviate misunderstandings, imbalances and disagreements in the partnership.

→ Allocate time and resources to get acquainted with your partner and their context, whether it is through workshops, group discussions, and/or meetings. Self-educating oneself, i.e. studying, reading and learning about the context, well in advance, is essential. It usually requires a lot of time to familiarise oneself with complex historical and present-day social, political, economic, cultural, religious and other aspects.
→ Check whether your colleagues, networks or institution can provide any support to navigate the context of your partner(s)

→ Review how different legal frameworks may influence partnerships and actively seek ways to mitigate the unintended, negative impact these could have on the overall safety and security of the people involved. For example, differing data protection regulations, intellectual property, and controversial research themes/areas may impact the partnership.

**NOTE**
If you are unaware, or if the settings differ significantly, including and collaborating with a ‘mediator’ is encouraged, whether it is a local NGO or a representative of the local community. This middle person can be an expert in the field, someone with relevant experience, or a civil society organisation. Their participation in the partnership should also be reimbursed and acknowledged. It is also important to consider the role and position of independent experts, advisors or ethics committees and ensure they include community representatives rather than solely relying on institutionally framed ethical frameworks.

**TIP**
→ Review how the political, social, cultural and legal context can be addressed in the International Swedish Foundation for Cooperation in Research and Higher Education’s guidelines on Responsible internationalisation (pp. 7–9).

**Embrace differing interests**

Stakeholders in academic partnerships may have different interests, perspectives, values or priorities, leading to disagreements or conflicts. This can be observed in debates over policy issues, ideological differences, or conflicting societal goals.

Differing interests can sometimes be overlooked by the idealistic view that creating and/or engaging in a partnership is enough for the greater good, regardless of the conditions and capacities of how the partnership is developing. A collective goal does not mean that differences are non-existent.

Differing interests do not automatically present a conflict of interest. Instead, varying interests and integrating these can become an asset and add value to the partnership. Overall, differing interests are a natural part of human interactions and can provide learning, growth and collaboration opportunities. Navigating these differences with open-mindedness, empathy and effective communication is essential to fostering understanding and finding common ground whenever possible.

**TIP**
→ Listen to Kagiri-Kalanzi and Avento (2022b) discuss examples of these situations and how to solve them in the UniPID Toolkit for Responsible Academic Partnerships in a learning bite titled International Research Partnerships.
Manifest integrity in academic partnerships

Academic partnerships involve what the ‘Ethical Action in Global Research Toolkit’ summarises as **Peoples, Places, Practices and Precedence**, or the 4Ps. Addressing these and avoiding ethics dumping requires attention to at least the following values attached to integrity:

### Respect

‘Respect’ means acknowledging the differences between people, societies, ecosystems, cultural heritage and the environment (ALLEA, 2017), and providing value to different perspectives and knowledge(s). It is also perceived as understanding varying circumstances and cultural diversity.

Respect can be implemented through participatory approaches in designing and planning academic partnerships through open discussions including different stakeholders, reflecting on power dynamics in identity and privilege, and contemplating how to use these privileges to benefit the partnership. Acknowledging the value of varying knowledge(s) is essential.

**TIPS**

→ Check out how ‘respect’ is defined and manifested by the South African San Institute and the Consortium’s respective codes of conduct.

→ Review how respect is address in the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity’s ethical principles of research with human participants and ethical review in the human sciences.

→ Review the UniPID Toolkit for Responsible Academic Partnerships for Chasi’s (2022) video learning bite for reflecting on power dynamics in identity and privilege.

### Trust

‘Trust’ refers to sharing agency, voice and responsibility, and feeling honest and at ease. Trust is also perceived as having a connection and possibly showing vulnerability.

Trust can be demonstrated through open communication, sharing, and having the possibility to discuss uncertainties and admit mistakes. The key is to provide a safe, confidential space for listening, and sharing voice and agency in designing and conducting activities and through long-term engagement. Also, building on past positive experiences with partners may promote trust and how the academic partnership is framed in the greater social relevance of knowledge discussions.

**TIP**

→ Check out how ‘trust’ can be nurtured in the Commission for Research Partnerships With Developing Countries’ (KFPE) Guide for Transboundary Research Partnerships and Guidelines for Research in Partnership with Developing Countries.
Transparency

‘Transparency’ encompasses openness, honesty, disclosure and clear indications of motivations, e.g. how and where research participants’ voices are considered. Transparency also includes candid decision-making processes and the use of funding, with clear rules and justifications for decisions. Furthermore, transparency involves a commitment to clear explanations of benefits from access, new data, new channels, methods, etc.

Transparency can be demonstrated through open communication and dialogue concerning, e.g., funding sources, possible conflicts of interest, methods used, research permits, contributions, and so on.

TIP

→ Review how the Human Rights-Based Approach and Gender Mainstreaming Checklist addresses transparency and accountability and check out how to foster transparency with the Commission for Research Partnerships with Developing Countries’ (KFPE) Guidelines for Research in Partnership with Developing Countries.

Honesty

‘Honesty’ means being continuously open about intentions, understanding and actions (including mistakes) and saying things as they are.

Honesty can be demonstrated through ongoing individual and team reflection and continuous engagement with partners and participants, having the courage to start difficult conversations, and allowing them to be solved, regardless of whether they take considerable time.

TIP

→ Check out how ‘honesty’ is defined and manifested by the Trust Consortium in the Global Code of Conduct for Equitable Research Partnerships (pp. 3–4)

Manage conflicts of interest

Conflicts of interest can hamper integrity. Take steps to differentiate between perceived and actual conflicts of interest and how these could be managed (management of conflict of interest does not translate into exclusive avoidance). Therefore, consider the following:

Disclosure

Encourage partners to disclose any potential conflicts of interest proactively. Establish transparent practices, policies and procedures for reporting conflicts, ensuring confidentiality and protection from retaliation. The simple act of declaring a conflict of interest should not lead to a false reassurance that the conflict has been managed effectively.

Impartial decision-making

Establish mechanisms to ensure decision-making processes remain fair and unbiased. This may involve separating conflicted individuals from decision-making roles or implementing independent oversight.
Recusal
Encourage or require individuals to recuse themselves from decision-making processes or other activities where their conflicting interests could compromise impartiality. Alternative decision-makers or independent committees can be designated to handle the situation.

Transparency
Foster a culture of transparency by disclosing conflicts of interest to all the relevant parties involved in a particular decision or action.

Monitoring and enforcement
Implement monitoring mechanisms to ensure compliance with conflict-of-interest policies. Regularly review and update policies as needed. Enforce consequences for non-compliance to deter unethical behaviour and maintain accountability.

Independent review and advice
Consider engaging independent experts, advisors or ethics committees to provide objective assessments of potential conflicts of interest and recommendations for their management. Did you know that there are projects now involving ethicists?

Documentation
Maintain thorough documentation of all reported conflicts of interest, the steps to manage them, and any decisions made. This documentation is evidence of due diligence and can be crucial in scrutiny or audits.

Policy development
Develop comprehensive conflict-of-interest policies that outline expectations, procedures for disclosure, and steps to manage conflicts when they arise. Make these policies readily available to all relevant stakeholders.

Awareness and education
Promote awareness and train employees, stakeholders and relevant parties about what constitutes a conflict of interest, how to identify and manage conflicts, and the potential consequences of non-compliance.

Shift from ‘do no harm’ to ‘ethics of care’

‘Ethics of care’ considers relationships and stories that people are involved in, leading to empathy and compassion in decision-making. The ‘solution’ to a moral problem does not lie exclusively in applying concrete and prefabricated norms but also inductively in social processes, which respect the multidimensionality of the issues (Schuchter & Heller, 2018). Therefore, consider the following:

Care dialogue
Focus not only on the moral norm but on changing perspectives and in-depth reflection, trying to understand your partner’s reality, which means entering into compassionate and caring partnerships.

Contextual ethics
Context is important in academic decision-making and partnership, noting that social dynamics and cultural norms shape these in different contexts.
Responsiveness and attentiveness

Attend to the needs and concerns of others through active listening, being present, and being sensitive to the nuances of different situations and circumstances.

TIP

→ Dive into collaborative and creative ways to promote reflection in action and on action, not only on the agreed activities of the academic partnership but also on the partnership itself, and by doing so, foster a partnership that values experiential knowledge alongside academic and other forms of knowledge.

Shift from ‘knowledge transfer’ to ‘knowledge(s) in dialogue’

Traditional knowledge transfer, in which knowledge, ideas, technologies and practices are disseminated from the Global North to the Global South, tends to impose Western knowledge systems, institutions and cultural norms onto the Global South. This approach often disregards and diminishes the knowledge, ideas, technologies and practices originating in the Global South to the extent that it erodes indigenous, local and traditional identities and cultures. Practising decolonial research and engagement methodologies promotes a paradigm shift where knowledge transfer is replaced by dialogue. Revitalising indigenous, local and traditional knowledges and languages and promoting mutual learning creates a more inclusive and equitable approach to knowledge production and dissemination.

Consider the following:

Encourage open and transparent interaction and dialogue between all stakeholders and consider all their interests, whether similar or differing, and acknowledge them all, seeking ways to acknowledge and document different types of knowledge(s).

TIP

Let ethics be the guide throughout the partnership cycle

If you are looking for additional resources to further develop inclusive and equitable practices in academic partnerships, consider the following:

**The ACU Equitable Research Partnerships Toolkit** (Association of Commonwealth Universities, 2023) is a collection of practical resources to assist in analysis and action for addressing equity in research partnerships. The toolkit stimulates critical thinking and dialogue about how equity is manifested and suggests practical steps to establish, enhance and maintain equity in a partnership.

**Ethical Action in Global Research: A toolkit** (Reid et al., 2019). Two hundred researchers representing 30 countries around the world participated in developing this toolkit. The toolkit offers a comprehensive, free-of-charge set of guiding material to critically discuss ethics in the 12 stages of a research journey, from helping identify the different research cultures in the project to discussing what to do to ensure a sustainable positive impact and mitigate adverse impact ethically.

The **Research Fairness Initiative** (RFI) (Council on Health Research for Development, COHRED, 2017) helps research organisations work towards fair research partnerships. The RFI is an organisational learning tool designed to assess practices in academic partnerships to help strategise towards being more equitable partners over time. It offers different support services, including reporting and certifications. The RFI is a reporting system and learning platform outlining the RFI domains, topics and 45 indicators required to produce an organisational RFI Report, addressing fairness, efficiency and impact principles. The RFI has a subscription-based model.

Other practices that promote academic partnership integrity from an institutional perspective

- **Promote awareness of ethics and integrity in academic partnerships at all higher education levels.** Higher education institutions should be able to articulate what the values of responsible global engagement are and to share best practices with their academic community.

- **Establish shared institutional ownership of academic partnerships** alongside individual researchers’ ownership to promote added responsibility.

- **Establish robust and collaborative ethical review processes,** where ethical review boards in the Global North institutions collaborate more closely with their counterparts in the Global South.
Concluding food for thought

Allocate time and resources for building a solid partnership. Think of ethics as a dialogue, a journey, a process of everyday encounters.

If in doubt, seek guidance from colleagues about successful partnerships in the culture, community, institution or country you intend to partner with — what works and what does not?

The ethical journey is dynamic and often uneasy. What works in one context may not be replicated in others. Recognise, reflect, and become responsible for your and your team’s ethical journey.

The benefits and societal impact of partnerships may not always converge. Idealistic, romantic and normative views of academic partnerships sometimes overlook the ethical complexities that may arise while engaging in actual partnerships, assuming a somewhat uncontested positive outcome. Attention to how partnerships are built and in what conditions the partnership is carried out is essential for identifying inequalities and actively contesting them. How can we responsibly end academic partnerships?

Sometimes, harm is done in attempting to do good, and it is crucial to evaluate responsibility versus risk. For instance, research disclosure may unintentionally put research participants at harm and risk of persecution and grave security threats. Researchers may face safety and security risks, regardless of their Global North or Global South association.

Use your academic partnership as a lab to diminish global inequalities and enhance cultural, contextual, interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary exchange.
The following existing guidelines on research integrity and responsible academic partnerships helped inform the development of these guidelines:


All European Academies. 2017. European code of conduct for research integrity.


Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales (CLACSO). 2015. CLACSO’s Declaration on open access to knowledge managed as a commons by the scholarly community

Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales (CLACSO). 2022. A new research assessment of socially relevant science in Latin America and the Caribbean


Lund University, KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Karolinska Institutet, and STINT. 2020. Responsible internationalization: Guidelines for reflection on international academic collaboration


Sustainable Futures Africa Network. 2020. A critical resource for ethical international partnerships

Swiss Commission for Research Partnership with Developing Countries. 1998. Guidelines for research in partnership with developing countries


Finnish National Board on Research Integrity. 2019. The ethical principles of research with human participants and ethical review in the human sciences in Finland

Finnish National Board on Research Integrity, TENK. The Finnish code of conduct for research integrity and procedures for handling alleged violations of research integrity in Finland


TRUST Consortium, Equitable research partnerships. 2023: Global code of conduct for equitable research partnerships

University of Helsinki. 2023. Guidelines for language awareness at the University

University of Oslo. 2013. Guidelines for North-South Cooperation


World Conference on Research Integrity. 2023. The Cape Town Statement on Fostering Research Integrity
Messages from the steering group

Laura Rovelli  
Latin American Council of Social Science  
“I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in this steering group, and we highlight the valuable exchanges and learning obtained in this space. We hope the guidelines will promote responsible, less asymmetric, and more collaborative research cultures and practices in and with the Global South, as well as more holistic and participatory research assessment schemes. We hope that the global discussion around research ethics and integrity can be continued and expanded in a context of transition towards open science research assessment systems reform.”

Veikko Ikonen  
Representative nominated by the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity  
“The guidelines should be taken into account at the very beginning of the preparation of projects. It is essential to try to accommodate diverse stakeholders in the process in that phase and allocate resources to them to work authentically both in the preparation phase and the actual project (if funded). Naturally, projects should be flexible in that, in many cases, project plans need to be revisited and modified according to contextual factors, along with further co-design of the understanding of the desired outcomes.”

Élise Féron  
Representative nominated by the Rector’s Council of Finnish Universities  
“As academic partnerships with researchers and institutions in the Global South have become increasingly popular, ethical guidelines such as these are more necessary than ever. The challenges these partnerships can entail include power imbalances, lack of inclusivity and diversity, financial constraints, or unfair recognition of knowledge contributions. Rather than simply listing dos and don’ts, these guidelines invite us to self-reflect and adapt our research practices throughout the research journey.”

Päivi Kolu  
Research Council of Finland  
“International cooperation and ethics lie at the core of high-quality research. Supporting the ethical nature of research is a shared responsibility of the whole research community. Doing so safeguards the quality and credibility of research and society’s trust in science. These guidelines invite us all to embrace inclusivity, respect and fairness as crucial elements strengthening international research partnerships and, ultimately, the quality of research.”
Liisa Laakso  
Academies of Sciences

During the process of developing these Ethical guidelines I have served as a chair of the Human Rights Committee of the Council of Finnish Academies Council of Finnish Academies, which is a cooperative body of science academies representing Finnish science academies in international scientific organizations. Our committee has closely followed the work of the Scholars at Risk network and the International Human Rights Network of Academies and Scholarly Societies (IHRNASS), for instance. In addition to appeals for scholars suffering from serious human rights abuses and attempts to provide sanctuary and assistance, the focus has also been on positive initiative to support universities’ responsible academic partnerships on a global level. This includes the structures of knowledge production, services provided to researchers and students in the Global South and making the knowledge produced in the Global South accessible and familiar to global science community.

Kaija Pajala  
Finnish National Agency of Education

“I have been impressed by the thorough preparation work by UniPID that has awoken a broader consideration of the themes. Working with the best international experts in this field has also been a pleasure! The guidelines are essential in higher education and will be distributed in different contexts. Our agency will also define guidelines for our activities.”

Masaki Nakamura  
Association for the Promotion of Research Integrity

“As repeatedly emphasised within these guidelines, more than a single definitive solution exists for ethical considerations in academic partnerships with the Global South. Therefore, sincere dialogues with stakeholders are of paramount importance. This necessity transcends the confines of relationships with the Global South and is a universal principle applicable to ethical considerations in general. Such issues may only become more pronounced in partnerships with the Global South. We hope readers will utilise these guidelines as a frame of reference to enhance their practice of responsible academic collaboration with the Global South.”
Acknowledgments

The work on developing ethical guidelines for Finnish higher education institutions involved in academic partnerships with the Global South was initiated in October 2021. Indeed, it has been a long but rewarding process.

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This work remains by Finnish universities for Finnish universities.

By the UniPID Task Force,
Kelly Brito and Roseanna Avento
Other references


Appendix 1

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