



Partnering for Change: Link Research to Societal Challenges

Video Transcript

International research partnerships

[Prof. Dr. Jakob Zinsstag] Transdisciplinary research happens in many different contexts, in high-income countries as well as low-income countries. In each context, the same principles guide cooperation. International collaborations, however, need additional attention, especially if there is an asymmetry of technical infrastructure and funding between partners. I would like to explore this topic with guests who are specialists in the field.

Let me introduce Dr. Jon-Andri Lys and Professor Guéladio Cissé. Dr. Jon-Andri Lys is the head of the Commission for Research Partnerships with Developing Countries, also called KFPE in short, by the Swiss Academies of Sciences.

Professor Guéladio Cissé is a former director of the Centre Suisse de Recherches Scientifiques, the Swiss Research Centre, in Côte d'Ivoire, and today, a professor at the Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute and the head of a research unit. Welcome to both of you.

Jon-Andri, you were quite at the beginning of these 11 principles that create actually the ethical code of how to conduct research in partnership. How was this for you?

[Dr. Jon-Andri Lys] Yeah, I mean, you have very often in this situation – in this research partners situation between high- and low-income countries – you have an asymmetric situation. So be it funding, be it infrastructure, competencies, access to knowledge, et cetera. And that's why in the 90s, there were researchers from the Global South who asked for a code of conduct, that this asymmetric situation is not abused.

So the KFPE, the Commission for Research Partnership with Developing Countries, tried to change the situation. And that's why these 11 principles were developed, which help during the whole process of such a research partnership, to a common goal, to guide the situation. And they were developed in 1998 and became an international standard. In many different programmes also, they were asked to follow, et cetera.

And then in 2012, the KFPE decided to renew them completely because the situation changed also. You have different power situations. The north-south divide is not so strong anymore, et cetera. And we developed – or we renewed them completely. And we developed, beside the 11 principles, also seven

questions. So the 11 principles, they guide the process to a common goal. On the other hand side, these seven questions point to hindering – or to hindering factors or the problems you can have in this – or the challenges, also, that you can have in such research partnership situations.

[Prof. Dr. Jakob Zinsstag] Thank you very much, Jon-Andri, for this introduction. Guéladio, you were the first African director of the Centre Suisse de Recherches Scientifiques on Côte d'Ivoire. You witnessed the development of these 11 principles right from the beginning. How was this for you?

[Prof. Guéladio Cissé] It was as a younger researcher that I saw for the first time these principles, around the end of the 90s. And I may say that they impressed me a lot. They touched me, I can say. Because they were conveying a message of a mark of consideration for a number of critical things and a mark of respect of the interests of southern partners.

And then when I became the director of the Swiss Centre for Scientific Research in Côte d'Ivoire, I was the one managing the process for endorsing proposals coming from northern researchers. And the process has included already that every proposal should consider the KFPE principles. So they were like a lightning reference for me and for the scientific counsel of the Centre Suisse for the review of proposals coming from the north. So they played a major role in my professional career.

[Prof. Dr. Jakob Zinsstag] So what were the major changes that you observed before and after?

[Prof. Guéladio Cissé] As I said before, the process has been inserted in a systematic way in the review of the proposals. I think the first change that it's brought – it increased the awareness of the northern researchers to a balanced design of proposals and involving even research partners from the south at the stage of research write-up. The second thing is that it increased also the awareness of the northern partners to take better care of a balanced interest – balanced interest budget-wise, rewarding-wise. And a third thing that came on board, as I said, for the CSRS, is that the research funders themselves in Switzerland – they had to take those principles in endorsing research proposals.

[Prof. Dr. Jakob Zinsstag] Thank you very much, Guéladio, for these insights. Clearly, the 11 principles are a good start, but they remain a constant challenge. And we always have to convey it to the next generation of young scientists, not to forget that and to get introduced to that. Now, Jon-Andri, what do these 11 principles have to do with transdisciplinarity?

[Dr. Jon-Andri Lys] They have a lot to do with transdisciplinary because in these research partnerships, you very often have to involve – or you have to involve the stakeholders – different stakeholders, communities, authorities, et cetera. Because it's very important that you have this co-creation of knowledge. So the joint – setting principle is very important. That's the first principle, and I always say it's



the most important one, because when you do that very well and very good, then the process will be on a good way.

And out of these 11 principles, you have five principles with a point of focus to this interaction between the different stakeholders and the researchers. So I think there you have this importance of this transdisciplinary also for the transfer of knowledge or for the results at the end – that you have always these interactions and exchanges between the researchers and different stakeholders. That at the end you do research that is really important for the different stakeholders and not for yourself.

[Prof. Dr. Jakob Zinsstag] This shows well how transboundary international research adds a very important component to transdisciplinary research. First, the multicultural aspect, but also a multilingual aspect.

We would now like you to read the 11 principles and the seven questions and discuss them with your peers, as indicated in the text.