



Research Fairness Initiative – Vignette 15

- *Leaving the research systems of all partners better off* -

- *Even problems that do not attract large global research funding can be very serious – and may also need the world’s best research minds to find solutions*
- *It is only fair that research partnerships leave behind institutions, systems and countries that are better able to deal with future problems – of any nature.*

[The scenario]

Research is a competitive environment, in no way less than any business or finance environment. Status and financial rewards, dedicated laboratories and research programmes, shared intellectual property rights and tenure – all this and more forms part of the incentives to get the best brains into well funded programmes – especially in high income countries, institutions and businesses. In the absence of such incentives in many low income settings, there a real and major risk that global research is skewed towards areas and topics in which such incentives can be offered.

In global health research, this is already happening as is shown in the instance below – *but there are many similar scenario’s possible* –

- 80% of externally funded health research in Africa goes to just 3 conditions: HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. While these conditions are clearly very important, it is also true that more Africans die and get ill or disabled from other diseases than from these three combined. Yet, there is almost no research being done to address these problems by researchers and research institutions in countries, and it is exceedingly difficult to get funding or make a scientific career on other conditions.

[The problem]

Research and innovation capacity of low and many middle income countries is not able to deal with many other conditions, such as ‘neglected diseases’. Global action usually happens only when diseases impact high income countries and populations. For example, in terms of research or vaccine development, Africa is not better able to deal with Ebola Virus Disease now than it was in 1976 when the virus was first identified.

[The consequences]

- Mortality of some very common conditions – such as diarrhoea and pneumonia in childhood, women during labour and birth, traffic accidents or mental health – are not able to attract researchers, research funders and business partners even though this could have a major impact on health, reduced disability and economy in many low income countries or even minority populations in middle or high income countries.
- Should we speak about ‘neglected research’ rather than ‘neglected diseases’ ?



[How can the RFI improve this situation ?]

The RFI encourages all partners to report visible efforts made to improve research capacity of the countries, institutions and people they partner. In practice, all partners can contribute and leave the other better off for future research. Transparency in listing efforts, intentions or policies will greatly help partners to see opportunity and create a more fair distribution of all benefits of research.

Because the RFI assumes that all partners have responsibilities – the reporting of efforts to improve research system capacity in low and middle income countries is aimed at both high and low income countries. Governments, institutions and businesses on all sides have their role to play. Whereas most funding may come from high income countries, for example, there is absolutely no reason why low income countries should not develop line items for research and development in their own health or science & technology budgets. Other examples of the balance that the RFI promotes:

- Low income countries may have better contracting policies and begin to allocate research funding; low income country institutions may develop dedicated labs that can compete for future grants or partnerships.
- Business may find that investing in local research and innovation capacity is profitable, generates trust, and buffers against reputational risks.
- Sustainable Development Goal 2 “No Hunger” – may be advanced by including many more countries, institutions, researchers and innovators in the struggle for global food security for all. Food aid needs substantial replacement by food security research capacity – and all partners have key roles to play ...
- Please add your own thoughts, ideas, proposals ...



The RFI Vignettes are being developed to illustrate how the RFI can impact on research and innovation for health, equity and development – around the globe – prioritizing low and middle income countries. Many are based on real cases. Where possible, references are provided to source documentation.

We are always looking for more and better examples and illustrations of how the RFI creates change – please help us and send your suggestions, ideas, comments for improvement to rfi@cohred.org