



RESEARCH FAIRNESS INITIATIVE



The **Research Fairness Initiative**

Reporting for Fairness in Research Partnerships for Global Health

Global Consultation 3
May 2016



www.rfi.cohred.org

The Research Fairness Initiative (RFI)

Partnerships are essential to deliver research and innovation for global health and development. **Sustainable Development Goal 17** emphasizes that all the other Sustainable Development Goals rely on partnerships for their achievement. *Yet, there is no agreed framework, benchmark, or standard of best practice on which to model governmental, corporate, non-profit, or academic partnerships – particularly not which consider the ‘fairness’ of international research collaborations with partners in low- and middle-income countries.*

To address this critical gap, the Research Fairness Initiative (RFI) aims to **create a reporting system that encourages governments, businesses, research organisations and funders to share their efforts to develop fair partnerships by describing their policies and practices** – and, in the process, develop better guidelines and benchmarks that will increase global capacity and quality of the research undertaken to deal with the challenges of global health, equity and development.

Research partnerships are the *only* way to rapidly develop and scale this capacity, *provided such partnerships are fair*. That is precisely what COHRED’s **Research Fairness Initiative** aims to encourage and achieve.

What is the Research Fairness Initiative (RFI)?

The RFI is a reporting system that promotes and encourages fairness in research collaborations and partnerships.

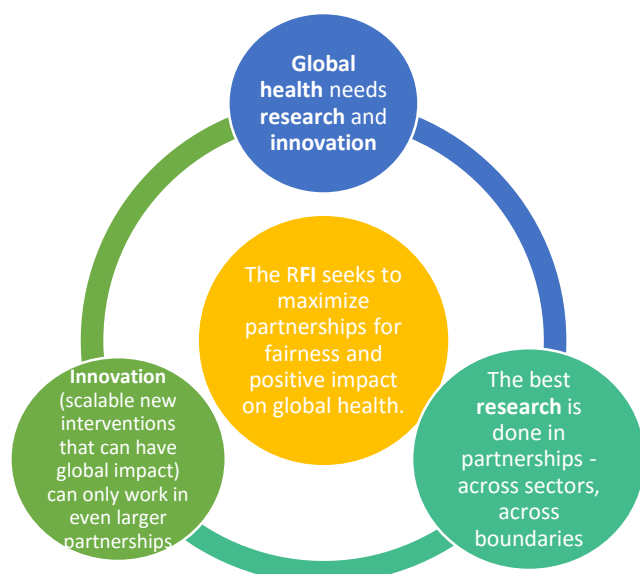
The RFI fills a major gap in research for global health by providing a reporting framework that describes what institutions or governments do to increase the fairness of the research partnerships in which they participate, or those which they fund for all partners.

The RFI covers the entire research continuum. It delivers a reporting guide that deals with **fairness of opportunity** (i.e. what happens even before research gets underway), **fair process**

(i.e. how partnerships in research are operationalized) and **fair benefit sharing**.

The RFI has relevance and real benefits for all **key users**:

- **Government Departments** (Health, Science & Technology, Higher Education)
- **National Research Agencies**
- **Business** (Health, Technology, Food, Pharmaceutical and more) conducting, funding partnering research
- **Academic and Research Organizations**
- **Research funders**
- **Any other organization engaged in research or research engagement**, such as NGOs, regional organizations, professional associations, UN bodies, and others.



Why is the RFI important?

Health research, globally, is an industry of hundreds of billions of dollars annually, but there are no generally accepted conventions, frameworks or accepted guidelines on how research should be conducted to benefit all stakeholders in the research process, nor to optimize impact on global health and equity. There are certainly no guidelines that provide research partners with credible and measureable steps that can be taken to increase the research capacity in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) and enhance the total global capacity for research and innovations needed to achieve health and development goals.

Everyone recognizes ***the need for more and better knowledge to deal with increasingly complex development challenges***. From finding solutions to Ebola and other emerging infections to improving road safety, from designing personalised medical interventions to changing dietary practices, or from using big data to guide urbanisation and ageing to finding new ways to reduce impact of climate change; all are directly or indirectly related to promoting global health, equity and development. All of these are crucially dependent on research and innovation.¹

While few would argue with this statement, it takes on a different meaning when dealing with solving health and development problems in LMICs. In this case, the problems are in LMICs but the financing and science needed to address them are mostly located in high-income countries. 'Global health research' usually means exactly this: expert institutions located in and funded by high-income countries select and work with 'partners' from low-income countries.² However, these partnerships are not necessarily explicitly geared towards building the research and innovation capacity in LMICs so that ***the ingenuity and inventiveness of all countries can begin to contribute to global health and development research and innovation***.

What specific problem does the RFI address?

Low investment in research system development in LMICs generally – by countries themselves as well as by external funders and partners – perpetuates the reliance on a small number of exceptionally well-resourced public funders, private philanthropies, and private industry, which gives them disproportionate power to shape the global research and development agenda. In addition, the wealthiest and best-equipped institutions and organizations have a significant advantage in their competitiveness for research funding, for exercising control over the goals and terms of research partnerships and for decisions on sharing benefits resulting from research partnerships.

This results in systematically unfair outcomes between partners in their ability to shape the research agenda, their competitiveness for scientific productivity and impact and capacity building. The disproportionality also affects

partners' credit and recognition for contribution, access to data, access to intellectual property and compensation for participation in research partnerships among research institutions/organizations globally.

Partnerships are essential to virtually any research and to transforming knowledge into scalable solutions and to enable low-resourced countries and institutions to catch up in research and innovation capacity, provided these partnerships are 'fair.'

'The CFI is long overdue. Currently, there is a disproportionate distribution of research benefits among partners, with the "junior" partner receiving a "token" of the benefits of research. The CFI, which seeks to promote fair practices, transparency and accountability, will ensure that due recognition is accorded to each partner's contribution for equitable access to research benefits.'

- Prof. Oyewale Tomori, President of the Nigerian Academy of Science

There is a Southern call for change in partnerships and allocation of benefits in North-South collaborations. A fair partnership is one that would provide equal opportunity for contribution in the study and for the adequate benefit sharing based on the contributions made by each partner.

How does the RFI aim to address these problems?

This is where the ***Research Fairness Initiative*** wants to make an impact. By creating a ***reporting system*** for governments and institutions engaged in research and innovation for health, ***the RFI will promote sharing of information on the creation and maintenance of research partnerships through capacity building and the sharing of all benefits of research***. In doing so, the RFI will benefit research institutions, governments, research funders and sponsors, business, non-profits and, ultimately, LMIC populations that are in need of improved health systems and research and innovation results.

¹ Bill Nye. Unstoppable: harnessing science to change the world. 2015.

² Costello A, Zumla A. Moving to research partnerships in developing countries. BMJ. 2000;321:827-829.

1. What will be reported?

Partnerships or Conditions for Fair Partnerships?

Ideally, we should be able to measure partnerships directly, but this is not feasible. Imagine measuring thousands of partnerships every year, many with multiple partners, each having to rate the partnership from their own perspective.

Therefore, **the RFI is designed to encourage reporting by individual countries and institutions on measures they have in place, or will put in place in future that are aimed at creating fairness in research partnerships**. It also encourages reporting of areas that are unresolved, difficult or complex, as this focuses attention to needs for future action.

Through wide global consultation involving representatives of critical user groups, the RFI has developed 15 Areas for Reporting. In each of these, we indicate what should be reported and how. These Areas for Reporting translate 'fairness' into practical steps that should be in place in any good research organisation.

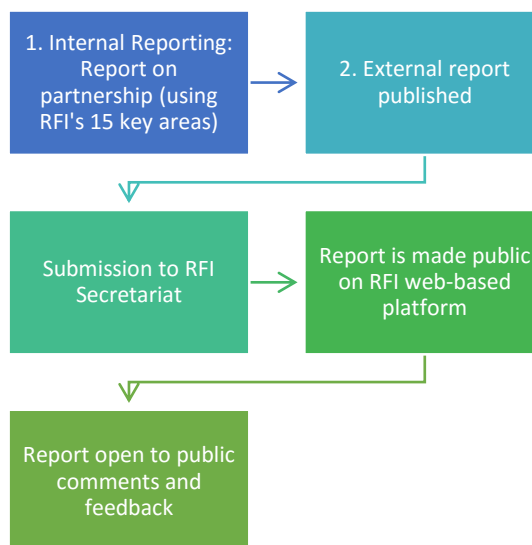
A full listing is given at the end of this document. A full description of how to do this is provided in the RFI Reporting Guide that can be downloaded from the RFI website.

2. Who will write the RFI Report?

Given the strategic benefits and purpose, we strongly suggest that the Executive Management of any user appoints one responsible person to compile the annual RFI Report. This person should be of sufficient seniority to convene the different divisions of larger departments, business, funders or institutions which are tasked to provide the information most relevant to their expertise and be able to present finding and recommendations back to the Executive.

This is the first edition – the '**internal RFI Report**'.

The RFI Process



3. How will it be published?

The full benefits of the Research Fairness Initiative are listed in the section below. To realise these benefits to the full, users should publish their RFI Reports. It is up to the user to decide what to publish externally – including intentions for future developments in this field.

We propose that users produce an **annual RFI Report** in addition to their normal annual reports or as integral part. Whether in hard-copy or on websites, the key is to get information out.

COHRED will add to this by creating an **RFI Portal** in which all RFI reports will be accessible. It will add value by enabling searches, graphics, grouping, and other analyses. Some will be accessible to registered users only, but as the purpose of the RFI is to create transparency and new knowledge in an area where there is little now, the goal is towards open access.

4. Validation and certification

The principle mechanisms of certification – at this stage of the RFI development – are the following:

- **Reporting according to the RFI Reporting Guide** is essential and, where it cannot be done, it is necessary to provide adequate explanations and alternatives. The COHRED RFI team will

validate the reports and interact with users to get up to standard.

- Where possible, we ask users to **upload evidence**: policy documents, public statements by CEO / Government Minister, actual case studies, or institutional publications.

- The **RFI Portal will offer the opportunity for partner and public engagement** – confirmation by partners, suggestions for improvements, provision of examples, comparisons and more.



In this first version of the RFI, certification will be done on the basis of completeness of reporting. As the RFI develops, the presence of evidence and public commentaries will be included.

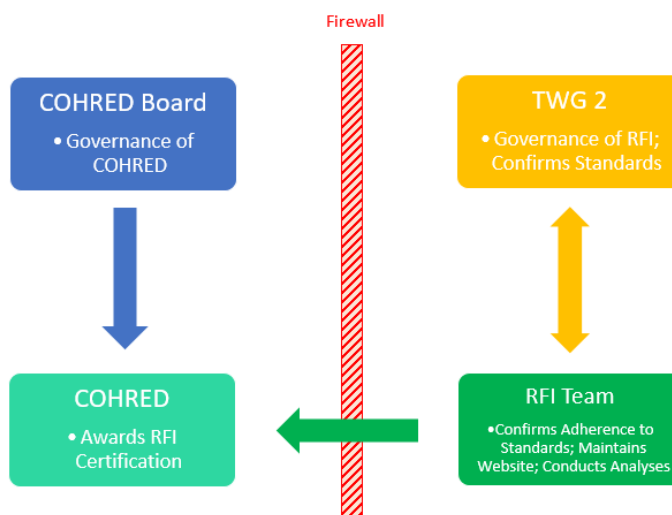
5. Governance and Management

The Research Fairness Index is a logical extension of COHRED's global work in support of strengthening research and innovation for health in LMICs. Its origins are found in our constitution. In our usual way of work, we are and have been very inclusive, so that the RFI is the result of a global effort 'with' rather than 'for' users.

For cost-effectiveness reasons, the RFI Team (which includes COHRED staff but also many from outside COHRED) is hosted by COHRED, and the RFI Team provides secretarial support to the Technical Working Group (which is globally representative of the 6 groups of 'critical users').

At the moment, the RFI Team operates behind a 'firewall' in relation to COHRED's other work. In the near future, it is intended that the Technical Working Group becomes the Governance Board of the RFI, independently deciding on standards for reporting and its future evolution. This is resource dependent: the RFI should become user-funded. Therefore, as users increase, so will the ability for RFI independent governance and management.

RFI Governance and Management



What institutional and global benefits does the RFI create?

In particular, previous consultations with key stakeholders has shown that the Research Fairness Initiative will deliver the following benefits to its users and to global research in general:

Benefit 1: Improved Internal Management –

All institutions and governments successfully engaged in research have extensive partnership arrangements. Yet usually this is done *without explicit internal management process*, leading to potentially serious miscommunications between different divisions – and *without explicit or transparent partnership management process* - leading to missed opportunities, protracted contracting, and unnecessary conflict. An annual RFI report to top management can greatly improve governmental guidance and institutional competitiveness and impact.

Benefit 2: Trust, confidence, resilient partnerships –

A published RFI Report will make clear to current and prospective partners the value institutions and governments place on good partnership arrangements and allows clarity of expectations on all sides. This advances contracting, clears misconceptions, reduces negotiation time, makes expectations more realistic, helps make the implicit explicit and builds trust, confidence and resilience in partnerships.

As an added advantage: The RFI encourages sharing and encourages others to improve by sharing information as well.

Benefit 3: Towards benchmarks and best practice standards –

In contrast to an 'Index' system in which there are accepted performance standards, the Research Fairness Initiative starts from the reality that there are no defined criteria for partnership performance. This is partly because there are so many ways in which to construct partnerships and partly because there simply are no commonly agreed guides or benchmarks. Over time, the RFI Reporting system will create a global pool of knowledge on research partnerships that will enable pragmatic benchmarks and standards of best practice to evolve. This is why we chose a 'reporting system' rather than an 'index.'

Benefit 4: Fairness – Building research and innovation capacity around the globe –

By creating the awareness of the current level of research and innovation capacity and the missed opportunities for all of us, the RFI can make a major contribution to sustainable health, equity and development.

Besides having impact for several SDGs, the Research Fairness Initiative is a significant stepping stone towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goal 17 on Partnerships needed to achieve global development.³



Given COHRED's historical engagement with health research in low- and middle-income countries, the Research Fairness Initiative has a strong link to improving global health as one major outcome of any global action. At the same time, the RFI is clearly not limited to 'health research' – but to all science and research collaborations – and not limited to 'research partnerships' – but, with modifications, can apply to other development partnerships as well. At this early stage, however, we limit ourselves to 'research for health.'

Acknowledgements

In the creation of the **Research Fairness Initiative**, we were inspired by the Global Reporting Initiative, an established and successful effort that promotes environmental sustainability through improving reporting by industry on their respective impacts,⁴ and by the iSEAL Alliance,⁵ a consortium of many certification initiatives that are grouping their own experiences to create a 'best practice standard' for initiatives such as the RFI.

We also want to acknowledge the energy and efforts of many people and institutions that believe in the RFI and have supported us through comments, endorsements, financial support, hosting meetings and as advocates. Please see our website for more details: www.rfi.cohred.org.

³United Nations, 2015. Sustainable Development Goals: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300>

⁴ Global Reporting Initiative (2014). An introduction to G4: The next generation of sustainability reporting. <https://www.globalreporting.org/resource/library/GRI-An-introduction-to-G4.pdf>

⁵ ISEAL Alliance <http://www.isealalliance.org>

The Research Fairness Initiative – proposed core areas for reporting

Fairness of Opportunity – “BEFORE Research”

1. **Relevance to communities** – *in which research is done*
2. **Early engagement of all partners** – *in deciding about aims, methods, implementation*
3. **Making contributions of all partners explicit** – *before projects reach a ‘no-return’ phase, ensuring ‘fair value’ for all before, during and after research*
4. **Ensuring that ‘matching’ and other co-financing mechanisms do not undermine opportunities for fair participation of all partners**
5. **Recognition of unequal research management capacities between partners and providing for appropriate corrective measures** – *negotiation, contracting, language, financial management systems*

Fair Process – “DURING Research”

6. **Minimizing negative impact of research programmes on health and other systems** – *divert human and other resources away from essential services and care*
7. **Fair local hiring, training and sourcing** - *staff, consumables and other support*
8. **Respect for authority of local ethics review system** – *possible measures to enhance this*
9. **Data ownership, storage, access and use** – *during and after research*
10. **Encourage ‘full cost recovery’ budgeting and compensation for all partners**

Fair Benefit Sharing – “AFTER Research”

11. **Research System Capacities** - *improvements to ensure local research systems become more competitive, better able to take the lead in future*
12. **Intellectual Property Rights and Technology Transfer** – *specific measures to share IP Rights in collaborative research*
13. **Innovation System Capacities** – *Measures to optimize localisation of spin-off economic activities, scaling ability and culture of innovation*
14. **Due diligence efforts** – *minimizing negative environmental, social and cultural impact; achieving SDGs; increasing women in science*
15. **Expectation of all partners to adhere to a best practice standard in research collaborations** – *such as Research Fairness Initiative or other such efforts (see the RFI website)*

These are the 15 key areas for RFI reporting so far. COHRED is engaging in a global consultation – through meetings, reports, virtual conferencing to improve this list. Please help us do this.



RFI

RESEARCH FAIRNESS INITIATIVE



COHRED

Research Fairness Initiative

1-5 Route des Morillons
PO Box 2100
1211 Geneva 2
Switzerland
Tel: +41 22 591 89 00
Fax: +41 22 591 89 10

www.cohred.org

GET INVOLVED WITH THE RFI

We are looking for early adopters, sponsors, and advocates for the RFI

Visit our website: www.rfi.cohred.org

Contact us: Lauranne Botti, RFI Manager
Email: botti@cohred.org
Tel: +41 22 591 89 06