

A change of perspective, please!

# Partnership in the field of global knowledge cooperation is not a one-way street

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Education, training and lifelong learning are key to the development of all countries and to the personal fulfilment of all people, as stated in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 of the 2030 Agenda. This goal is closely associated with the global partnership set out in SDG 17, as partnership skills are required in the global South (not least in the education and research sectors) and the global North alike.

Global knowledge has increased exponentially and become more accessible through the internet. At the same time, paywalls and insufficient infrastructure pose obstacles in many places. Researchers from emerging economies are contributing progressively more to this growth in knowledge, with a marked increase in the proportion of research publications issued by them in recent years. China, for instance, saw its share of global academic publications rise from well below three per cent in 1996 to over 17 per cent in 2016. The proportion of research publications from Mexico and South Africa has also nearly doubled during this period. Moreover, significant new knowledge centres (universities, research institutions and start-ups) have been established in other countries, such as Silicon Savannah in Nairobi, for example.

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To make knowledge shareable, we require both sound intellectual tools and an openness to discovering and understanding different perspectives. It is only then that we will be able to work together to bring about a transformation in terms of sustainable societies.

**Prerequisites for mutual knowledge acquisition**

There are three prerequisites when it comes to effective knowledge-sharing and peer-to-peer knowledge cooperation based on partnership: symmetry, inclusion and transfer.

Symmetry is achieved when all parties recognise their identity in terms of (knowledge) culture, as well as the associated gaps. No one can claim to have universal knowledge; the value of knowledge to the global common good depends in every case on how it is applied in different contexts. Local partners are always the better experts at this level, while outside perspectives can play a supporting role. The same applies to transformation knowledge in Germany. A number of African nations are significantly more

advanced than central Europe in terms of cashless payment and eBanking.

The first step in joint knowledge production is to move away from established patterns of thinking and ways of doing things. Specialist knowledge about new challenges from developing countries and emerging economies can also prove helpful at the global level. This is why inclusion is a crucial aspect. There is often a prevailing attitude of: “What is there for us to learn from African countries?”. But, if you consider individual aspects such as in health care (vaccination coverage), for instance, Tanzania is more advanced than Germany.

Transfer is the third and perhaps most fascinating aspect of partnership-based knowledge cooperation. The transfer of research findings has become significantly more relevant in recent years. Those who follow the University of Pennsylvania’s annual Global Go To Think Tank Index will have seen that the number of think tanks in the global South has increased, with several of them also moving up the index. Among those that have risen up the ranking are many of the Institute’s partner institutions, including several from its Managing Global Governance (MGG) network in which it carries out training and joint research activities and delivers advisory services with partner institutions from emerging economies.

**Individual skills**

We need to recognise changed realities in order to succeed globally, including in the Institute’s training activities, its Postgraduate Training Programme and the MGG network. Soft skills are just as sought-after within international cooperation as technical skills. Partners require both outstanding expertise (symmetrical, inclusive and transfer-oriented) and an open and dependable character. Both of these levels require training of managers from Germany, Europe and partner countries.

We need to adapt our perspectives to 21st Century challenges rather than to the memories of our technological and political dominance of yesterday’s world. This gives us new opportunities for partnerships and requires us to gear our skills to new and future needs.