Peer assist support on aligning existing support to/via northern organisations

Date: April 25, 2023
Time: 3-4:30 pm (WAT)
Venue: Zoom

The challenge:

An analysis of a sample of the Consortium's members' grants suggests that while most grants/contracts go to organisations in Africa, most of the funds go to organisations in North America. In fact, North American grantees receive between 4.5 to 8 times more funding than their peers in Africa. In some cases, these northern grantees subcontract or sub-grant African organisations.

The opportunity:

During the March 2023 Quarterly Call, participants agreed to join an additional session to discuss existing grants/contracts with northern organisations and collectively explore ways to better align them to the 5 recommendations.

The peer assist focused on two case study scholar programs funded by AERFC members but managed/implemented by northern-based organisations. Participants rub minds together on how the grants could be improved and be better aligned with the relevant recommendations.

Learning questions explored during the peer-assist session

- **How can the grant/contract be improved to be better aligned with the relevant recommendations?**
    - Meaningful participation is key. Specifically, have people with lived experiences involved from onboarding to completion/dissemination.
    - Ensure that scholars/researchers can set their own agendas.
    - Push northern organisations who have been appointed as the implementing partners to work harder for the large overhead cost provided to them.
    - Figure out the structural barriers to engagement and inclusiveness.

2

AFRICAN EDUCATION RESEARCH FUNDING CONSORTIUM | Peer assist on aligning existing effort to support to/via northern organisations

- ▪ Have an African advisory board to guide the selection of grantees. [PEP's mentoring program](#) has lots of good experiences where mentors are from the global south.
- ▪ For policy-related research, funders need to think about who is best placed to rate proposals. Be thoughtful about who is on the review board for the research and how to diversify that decision-making body.
- ▪ Leadership outside the context is a big challenge. Rethink a kind of leadership that allows, facilitates, and enables the kind of agenda that shifts power and uses collaborative methodology.
- ▪ Let grantees/researchers be more involved in shaping the design of the program. Who designs it will matter.

- **How can funders avoid replicating strengthening power imbalances between northern and southern partners (e.g., the northern organisation is the funder/trainer!) when the northern organisation is "re-granting" or "building capacity"?**
  - ▪ Have forums to discuss the grants offered to the various organisations involved and timelines.
  - ▪ Consider hosting scholar programs in global-south-based institutions — with those who are more connected with people working on some of the same barriers they are working on. Northern organisations who are implementing partner can play a facilitator role in promoting more south-south collaboration – not north-to-south or south-to-north collaboration. Having the fellowship geographically placed in the global south would transfer the benefits directly to Global South academic institutions.
  - ▪ Ask scholars/researchers for feedback during evaluation –and not only from the north-based implementing partner organisation.
  - ▪ Set metrics around how the scholars might/can influence the program/project, including how scholars/grantees are influencing the thinking within global partner organisations. There should be emphasis on the program being more of a two-way exchange between the global north and global south.

- **How can donors work better together in supporting organisations to align with the 5 recommendations? (How funders can be more responsive in their evaluations of the program)**
  - ▪ Strengthening the mentoring component is important going forward. As funders think of shifting power to the south, they should think of a type of mentorship that will help start the process and build a type of mentorship where fellows can get access to funding for quality research and build all-round support.
  - ▪ Adjust program/grant to ensure recruitment criterion captures the type of people highlighted in Recommendation 4 – not those who are already established in their field but those that are mid-career or just starting out. Place value on getting people who are more likely to work together and share ideas.

3

AFRICAN EDUCATION RESEARCH FUNDING CONSORTIUM | Peer assist on aligning existing effort to support to/via northern organisations

- Encourage two-way exchange metrics that are not only about what the organisation is planning to do or what the fellows/scholars are going to learn but also on what the fellows/scholars can contribute to the program.
- Strengthen south-to-south relationships.
- Push for more local presence (regional centers, physical space, or network) and influence e.g., encourage them to have regional centers and build on existing networks.
- Respond to local needs by supporting local organisations in a way that supports their own mission. There have been reports from local researchers that research questions are driven by the funders and there is no space for local researchers to push for their own agenda.
- Have collective influence on what happens and how the grants are executed. E.g., pay more attention to diversity across the advisory boards, teams, reviewers, mentors, budgeting, etc.
- Agree on nuanced principles on budget, mentorship, language, mentoring that support local context.
- Connect the fellowships and share evaluation on them: Have a resource that provides information on all existing programs that are working on supporting similar fellowships/programs or bringing south-based research(ers) into focus to know who is doing what, what they are focused on, and evaluations of those programs, to avoid duplicating efforts. This dossier will allow funders to see areas of commonalities and provide a learning opportunity for those who are planning to work in this field to build on existing models rather than start from scratch.
- Similarly, it's important for funders to see how linkages can be created with local researchers so that whatever is done is preparing the shifting of power to the global south –so they don't end up duplicating effort.
- Funders can pull resources on similar ideas that already exist and use existing models to improve/strengthen the impact of existing programs/fellowships.
- At the risk of being extractive, do a broad survey that multiple funders could use to evaluate their fellowship programs – capturing researchers/academics who are part of fellowships or might want to be.
- Agree on a set of questions that may be used by funders who have fellowship programs to solicit insights from their scholars and understand the demand more broadly.
- Develop ideas on how to use this network to get other networks going.
- Demand-side intervention – create demand for local researchers by encouraging mentorship and training as part of research training and funding global south leading scholars to buy their time to mentor future scholars.

4

AFRICAN EDUCATION RESEARCH FUNDING CONSORTIUM | Peer assist on aligning existing effort to support to/via northern organisations

Generally, funders should consider the following questions amongst themselves:

Aligning efforts: How many fellowships are there? Where should they be based? Who are they targeting? How can they diversify the pool of applicants?

For those planning to do similar programs: How can they reach out to researchers and universities, especially those that are not affiliated to bigger organisations in the global south?

Connecting with the grassroots: How are the network properties like in the space funders are trying to work in? What does it look like for them? How does this information travel? In what language(s) or via what institutions? Good to look at the overlaps in networks – in some research space, it's the same folks.

Building and strengthening capacity: There is no deliberate effort on leading local researchers to that space where they can influence policy. How can funders and their grantees ensure that new researchers are well-connected or know the right channels where they can influence policy within their region? How can they get their research to a point where it is picked by policy makers to improve implementation of evidence-based findings? Or if they already know, how can they help to strengthen this?