

Conclusions

by

Ivan BEGHIN, Georges STOOPS & Eric THYS

1. Introduction

The two short term objectives of the Symposium were met : the gathering of elements that would allow to proceed effectively with the writing of guidelines for evaluation, and a consensus about the reconsideration of the problems of bibliometrics when used for evaluation of research and researchers in the South. The quality of the presentations as well as the contribution of the Round Table indeed permitted to collect a wealth of relevant information, suggestions and facts.

In addition the Symposium went even farther than originally expected : it indeed did answer the first three questions (see the President's introduction) and then focused on the fourth question (*What should we do so that countries in the South themselves produce the best possible research useful for their development ? Note : two levels of answers could be considered :*

- *what researchers in the South and their institutions can do ,*
- *what researchers in the North and their institutions can do).*

As a result the presentations and the discussions yielded valuable recommendations about two important points : the strengthening of research capacity, and the nature and practice of inter-institutional cooperation.

2. Main conclusions

1. While scientific quality is an essential requirement for a meaningful evaluation of any research it must be emphasised that this requisite needs to be as strict for the South as for the North. A double standard would simply be unacceptable.
2. For effectively contributing to sustainable development not only research **for** development must be conducted, but also research **on** development. Researchers in the South should be encouraged and be given the means to do so.
3. The availability of good methods for evaluating development research is a necessary condition (prerequisite) for the strengthening of such research.
4. Existing methods for evaluating the scientific quality of research (and/or the way such methods are being used) - such as the current bibliometric indices - are not presently satisfactory, and do discriminate against researchers in the South when the latter are compared with their peers in the North. New methods and tools to either substitute or complementing the existing ones urgently need to be developed and duly tested.

5. Scientific quality and relevance to development are compulsory/inevitable dimensions of any evaluation. But other dimensions must be taken into consideration, in a proportion to be determined by the circumstances and the objectives of the evaluation : valorisation, applicability, performance, innovation, etc.
6. The general principles for a good evaluation are the same for all overseas sciences, and the requisite of quality always remains the first. But with reference to the criteria and the evaluation tools there indeed are differences between the social sciences on the one hand, and the natural, medical and technical sciences on the other. This may have important implications when conducting inter-disciplinary research.
7. The great diversity of stakeholders, of objectives, or of situations does not allow a single, multipurpose evaluation method. In each situation the person in charge of evaluation will have to choose or to build a specific evaluation tool, and decide upon the most appropriate criteria. Yet general principles can be enounced to this effect. Guidelines, based upon the Symposium conclusions would be extremely useful to the researchers and their evaluators. A rich source of information can be found in the meeting's communications and discussions.
8. When the issue is to evaluate researchers, the tools will have to be adapted to their intended use : either the evaluation of an individual researcher, or that of a team (or a department, or an institution).
9. Inter-institutional collaborations between universities and research institutes or centres from the North and from the South contribute strongly to strengthen the research capacity both in the South and in the North. They in addition offer opportunities to develop better ways of evaluating research.
10. Regarding research capacity building, emphasis should be laid on research design and on encouraging researchers in the South to publish more. Publishing must be made more appealing to them, particularly through greater international recognition.
11. A strong trend exists towards more genuine partnership in inter-institutional cooperation, thanks to more balanced and equitable exchanges between the participants in joint research projects. Such a trend should vigorously be pursued, and the obstacles to this trend should be studied by researchers from both the North and the South.
12. Priorities for the next future are to :
 - prepare guidelines for the evaluation of development research
 - reset in motion, in collaboration of interested partners, the study of bibliometrics and of the problem of its use,
 - bend upon inter-institutional cooperation, study current principles and practices, and come up with recommendations for achieving a more balanced, mutually beneficial partnership.
13. The Academy, thanks to its independence, its tradition of inter-disciplinarity, and the experience of its members with development research, possesses all the needed assets for taking initiatives and acting as a catalyst of actions aiming at improving the evaluation of development research. Because of the very nature of the Academy, its contribution should come in addition to actions taken by other, genuinely interested, partners.

3. Follow-up of the meeting

The Academy will actively seek in the immediate future, together with other interested agencies, to implement the two activities that were already on its agenda (and also were the explicit objectives of the Symposium) : the drafting of **guidelines for evaluation of development research**, and the reconsideration of **the problems of bibliometrics**.

In addition, as a result of the interest generated by the debate around **strengthening research capacity** and **inter-institutional cooperation**, the Academy will explore – again with interested partners – the possibility of conducting a study of both topics.
