Equitable Research Partnerships Toolkit
Tool 10: Imagining and Understanding Equitable Research Impact

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This tool is designed to instigate thinking and analysis around the equity implications of any changes that might occur due to a research partnership, or a research project implemented by a partnership. Academics face increasing pressure to translate their scientific research results into impact. This is normally things like policy and/or programmatic change that will consequently lead to positive social change. Research and research partnering is assumed to have positive impacts, such as capacity strengthening, but may also have unintended (negative) impacts for the researchers involved, research communities and/or broader society.

Why use the Understanding Equitable Research Impact tool?

The nature and extent of impact within a research partnership or project will have important equity implications. This tool addresses equity by:

1. Increasing awareness of who may benefit, or who may experience negative consequences, as a result of a research project or partnership.
2. Enabling researchers to plan to maximise the positive, and minimise the negative impacts, of a research partnership or project, and to ensure that the positive impacts are equitably distributed.

When to use the Understanding Equitable Research Impact tool?

Phase	Rating	Descriptions
Planning	•••	The Imagining and understanding impact tool is designed to be used in the planning stages, when decisions that will influence the nature and extent of impact are being made.
Implementing	••	The tool can be used to think about impacts specific to the implementing stage.
Disseminating	••	The tool can be used to think about impacts specific to the disseminating stage.
Sustaining	••	The tool can be used to understand past, or imagine future, impact in the sustaining phase of a research partnership.

Ratings
••• Designed for this stage | •• Can be used as is in this stage | •Can be adapted for use in this stage

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How long does it take to use the Understanding Equitable Research Impact tool?

Rapid approach

- An individual could rapidly create a mind map of potential impact in 20-30 minutes.

Intensive approach

- A group-based approach to developing a mind map of potential impact, and discussing the equity implications, would require a two-to-three-hour meeting.

What other resources do you need to use the Understanding Equitable Research Impact tool?

- [Research Impact Concept Map](#)

- Face-to-face or virtual meeting space, with breakout room facility

- Facilitator and/or notetaker

- Stationery, such as pens and poster papers, or an online whiteboard app such as Miro

Tool links for the Understanding Equitable Research Impact tool

Before using this tool, it might be useful for the facilitator and/or participants to read one or more of the following resources:

- [What is research impact](#) (York University)

- [Defining Impact](#) (United Kingdom Research and Innovation)

- [Conceptualizing the elements of research impact: towards semantic standards](#) (Nature)

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How to use the Understanding Equitable Research Impact tool?

For virtual and face-to-face implementation:

- Access the [Research Impact Concept Map](#).

- Create a copy of the template in your Miro dashboard.
    - Click the Miro logo in the top left section of the screen to navigate to the dashboard view.
    - Click the three dots button in the top right corner of the Research Impact Concept Map Template board and select duplicate.
    - Select the 'Owned by me' option from the drop-down list (to the right of Boards in this team).

- Adapt the template to suit your purpose, for example by entering the name of a specific research partnership or project or modifying the impact types.
    - If you'd rather use a different electronic whiteboard app, replicate the template using your preferred app.
    - If you are implementing face-to-face, recreate the Concept Map template on poster paper.

- If you intend to have multiple groups, create copies of the template for each group. Create different impact concept maps in the workshop.

- Convene the group in your face-to-face or virtual meeting space.

- Introduce the concept of research (partnership) impact and allow participants time to discuss their understanding of his.
    - Research impact is broadly defined as the real-world changes that occur because of the research process and/or results. The background reading suggested above provide more detailed definitions, which could be used in the introduction.

- Introduce the focus of the impact assessment. You could focus on the impact of a research partnership process or a research project that will be implemented through a research partnership.

- Display the mind map template and discuss the different categories (e.g. policy, scientific) that the impact is to be divided between. Modify the template to include any additional required impact categories and remove any redundant ones.

- Ask participants to imagine any impact that might occur, because of the research partnership or project, and identify the category into which this fits. Add ideas to the mind map as they are raised.
    - If there are more than six to eight participants, break into smaller groups (breakout rooms for virtual implementation), each of which will develop a mind map.
    - Encourage participants to think broadly and creatively and identify the likelihood of specific impact occurring.

- If participants were split into groups, reconvene as a single group.

- Display the completed mind map/s.

- Ask participants to discuss the equity of some of the impact (see below for suggested questions). The amount of discussion that takes place will depend on the time available. Expect to need around five minutes to discuss of each specific impact.

- Ask participants to discuss how equity might be optimised (see below for suggested questions).

Suggested question to explore using this Understanding Equitable Research Impact tool

- For specific impact:
    - Who benefits?
    - Who does not benefit or is disadvantaged?
    - How important is this impact?
    - What needs to be done to ensure the research (partnership) generates this impact?
    - Which individuals and groups need to be involved in planning the research to maximise the likelihood of this impact occurring?
    - How should research results be communicated to maximise this impact? With which individuals and groups? Using which forums or media?

- What is being done to ensure positive impact occurs for less powerful people, including those affected by the research focus, and academics in the Global South?
    - What else could be done?

- Thinking about the specific types of impact identified:
  - Which ones are most feasible in this research partnership?
  - Which ones are most important for achieving equity?

- What unintended impact might occur? What would be the equity implications of this unintended impact?

- What would equitable impact from this project look like?

Tips for using the Understanding Equitable Research Impact tool

- Take a break for refreshments, between creating the mind maps, and discussing the equity implications.

- Use the results of the discussion to think about items that might be included in a research costs list [see Tool 12 in Section 4].

Expected outputs and outcomes from using the Understanding Equitable Research Impact tool

Outputs
- Implementing this tool will produce one or more mind maps detailing the potential impact of the research partnership or project.

Outcomes
- Implementing this tool will increase awareness of the scale and range of intended and unintended impact of the research project or partnership and the equity implications of this impact.

Completed example of the Understanding Equitable Research Impact tool

Download the completed example.

The completed example details the potential impact of dementia research in Southern Africa. There have been some cases in South Africa of people associating Symptoms of dementia, such as wandering and disinhibition, with witchcraft. The research will be implemented through a Global North-South partnership and will focus on assessing dementia prevalence and caregiving in a rural community. The prevalence study will involve the development of a

novel software application, to collect data from cognitive tests designed to predict dementia, as well as funding for the related infrastructure for data collection, storage and management. The caregiving study will involve quantitative and qualitative assessment of how and who cares for people with dementia and the support needs of sufferers and their caregivers.

As there is limited knowledge about dementia prevalence in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), the research is expected to improve scientific knowledge about dementia prevalence and caregiving, as well as advancing methods of measuring dementia in research in LMICs. It may also contribute to developing theories of caregiving.

The research is intended to influence policy and practice, for example to draw attention to dementia and the education and support needs of people living with or affected by dementia. This might impact on understanding and awareness among health professionals and community members.

Conducting the research in a Global North-South partnership is expected to enable capacity building and to increase access to resources for the academics in the South African university. The research partnership has received funding to develop new infrastructure at the South African institution to collect, manage and store data for the project. These are all positive impacts. However, participating in the research partnership and project might have the unintended negative consequence of increasing the workload of academics in South Africa, or diverting outstanding academics away from teaching and into full-time research positions, affecting the quality of teaching programs.

For research participants, positive impacts include free access to health care and tokens of appreciation for participation, which are provided as part of the research. However, there is potential for a negative impact for participants and study communities, such as feeling burdened by research, jealousy (e.g. from people who are not participating but want access to free health care) and/or stigmatisation which may occur because of the dementia stigma that exists for some and the associations with witchcraft.

References and further reading for the Understanding Equitable Research Impact tool

Development of this tool was informed by:

- Belcher, B., & Halliwell, J. (2021). Conceptualizing the elements of research impact: towards semantic standards. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications, 8* (1), 183. doi:10.1057/s41599-021-00854-2
- Better evaluation. Concept mapping. Available from: https://www.betterevaluation.org/methods-approaches/methods/concept-mapping