Changing Roles for the Global South in International Collaborative Learning

Susan Cozzens, Ravtosh Bal, Elena Berger, Dhanaraj Thakur and Jian Wang

Technology Policy and Assessment Center (TPAC)
School of Public Policy, Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta, USA

Abstract: International collaboration is an important contributor to learning, innovation, and competence-building systems. International collaboration in research has been growing rapidly for several decades. The implications of these emerging patterns for developing countries are a matter for debate. New opportunities could be opening up for reciprocal learning involving researchers in the global South, through more equal research relationships and ones that go beyond historical colonial ties. This paper looks for signs of that new pattern in two specific energy-related fields, biofuels and neutron science. Literature-based data indicate that several developing countries are strong players in biofuels and that international collaboration is growing faster there than in neutron scattering. However, interview data suggest that several kinds of collaboration could be involved: career-oriented, project-oriented, and sponsor-initiated. Growth in the first or last would indicate continuing asymmetric relationships, while growth in the latter would indicate growing equality. Indicators of international collaboration are probably skewed towards project-based collaboration, which appears to be dominant in instrument-intensive fields like neutron scattering. But the interesting dynamics are probably happening in fields like biofuels, where global learning relationships could in fact be shifting.

Keywords: biofuels, international collaboration, neutron scattering, North-South relationships

JEL classifications: D83, P28, P48, Q16