The Botswana Statement:

Global Challenges, Research, Innovation and Impact: A Research Management Perspective

Summary

Research plays a major role in driving the discovery of solutions to the challenges faced across the globe. The growth in investments in research and development has skyrocketed over the last twenty years, promoting economic growth and driving competition for international research funding and staff. The emerging focus on research has put new constraints on accountability regarding how funding is used and increased societal expectations for impact that benefits the society. The establishment of an effective framework to promote and sustain high-quality research has become a critical priority in both national and international policy agendas.

Background

On 24th May 2023, a group of research managers and administrators from different parts of the world had the opportunity to engage in dialogues with colleagues in Gaborone, Botswana in the Colloquium "Global Challenges, Research, Innovation and Impact" organized by Botswana Open University. The discussions were led by Mr J. Andersen, Senior Executive Advisor of the University of Southern Denmark, along with Prof. R. Tabulawa, Director of the Office of Research and Development Research, University of Botswana, and Dr. B. Mbongwe, Director Research and Innovation, BITRI. The lively panel of discussants were facilitated by Prof. Sunny Aiyuk, Dean School of Science & Technology, Dr. Mogodisheng Sekhwela, Director of Research Innovation and Partnerships, Prof. K.H. Moahi, Ag. Vice Chancellor, and Dr. G. Gatsha, DVC Student Services. Further the INORMS 2023 Pre-congress Study Tour members participating from Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Norway, Saudi Arabia, Slovenia, Spain, the UK and the USA contributed with their insights. The colloquium had over 100 participants both on-site and online viewing from the BOU Facebook platform. The purpose of the colloquium was to discuss and share experiences on global challenges that surround research. This statement is the culmination of the colloquium's deliberations and discussions.

Role of research in providing solutions to global challenges

The UN Sustainable Development Goals have become a beacon for governments and organizations in setting priorities, including within the realm of research. Research plays an important role in promoting any of the SDGs[1]. To ensure a mutual commitment between the governments that fund and sustain research, and the research sector that bring social impacts, research support offices play a pivotal role by ensuring that funding is used in accordance with society's and governments' expectations and that the outcomes of research are realised for the benefit of society through education, innovation, and knowledge sharing.

The global investment in research has increased in recent years; the spending on research among the OECD countries has risen from 2,1% of GDP in 2000 to 2,7% of GDP in 2021[2] with a growth in GDP per capita around 2% in the same period[3]. It is therefore key for

higher education institutions to create and retain effective environment to train and secure highly qualified students and academic staff.

Importance of research managers and administrators as a profession

The internationalisation of research has resulted in an increase in joint research projects, cross-national research collaborations, and co-authorship of scientific journal articles[4]. The increasingly global nature of the research environment has called for professionals who support researchers in acquiring funding, managing sustainable projects, securing ethical standards, and ensuring financial accountability that are necessary components and vital for allowing academics to focus on their complex research endeavours. The ability to handle the complexity of the 21st Century research environment is essential for success in the global competition for nations to increase its visibility, secure funding, and promote collaboration. A long-term vision to secure career opportunities for research support staff along with recognition of the valuable contributions of professional research managers and administrators will be crucial as the nation advances its research endeavors.

Signed by:
Participants of the Colloquium “Global Challenges, Research, Innovation and Impact”, Botswana Open University, May 24th 2023.

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[1] https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/sdg-literacy-and-relating-your-research-global-challenges

[2] https://data.oecd.org/rd/gross-domestic-spending-on-r-d.htm

[3] Except for 2009 and 2020, where the global GDP was negative: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.KD.ZG?end=2022&start=2000

[4] https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/sti_scoreboard-2009-47-en.pdf?expires=1688474414&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=3AFC439AB7AD951CCDFC4262533DF747