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A narrowed perspective

A review of (in)equities
in knowledge systems related
to economic advisory work

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About the Project

As part of a learning partnership, the [Open Society Foundations](#) (OSF), [OTT](#) and [INASP](#), are jointly exploring effective models for supporting to progressive government reformers in the Global South. Through consultations, reviews and participatory workshops, OTT and INASP have documented learnings and identified best practices for using government engagement and political philanthropy to bolster progressive reforms. This Review is informed by some of these learnings and is part of the series '[Political philanthropy? Perspectives on engaging with governments in the Global South](#)'.

About OTT

OTT is a global consultancy and platform for change.

We support and strengthen the work of research organisations, foundations, governments and others in support of better-informed decision making.

We are made up of two parts – OTT Consulting and On Think Tanks – known collectively as OTT.

Our consultancy work focuses on developing tailored solutions to specific challenges. Through services spanning research, learning facilitation, strategy and evaluation, we partner with organisations to drive evidence-informed change.

On Think Tanks is a leading global source of information, support and community for people working in, with and funding think tanks. We create a space to connect, learn and exchange knowledge, ideas and resources.

About INASP

INASP works in partnership with organisations across the majority world to strengthen teaching, learning, and research capabilities, with a focus on gender-responsive and inclusive solutions. We have a 30-year history of partnership with universities, and research institutions, and a global team of experts spanning Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Our vision is of research and knowledge at the heart of development – where decisions are informed by relevant and rigorous evidence, and where knowledge is created with the communities it is intended to serve. That requires many voices, many institutions and many types of knowledge. We call it an equitable knowledge ecosystem. Our mission is to support Southern individuals and institutions to make that possible.

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Table of contents

Executive summary.....	5
What commonalities exist	5
What implications for knowledge equity	6
What considerations for redressing knowledge inequity	6
1. Setting the scene.....	8
1.1. Introduction and background	8
1.2. Objectives and methodology	8
1.3. Defining the terms	9
1.4. Limitations and gaps.....	10
2. What we know.....	12
2.1. Where inequities stem from	12
2.2. How inequities manifest	14
2.3. Whose expertise counts	17
2.4. Decision makers and decision-making	20
2.5. How donor practices influence inequity	20
2.6. What progress towards equity	21
3. Implications of knowledge inequities	27
4. Implications and conclusions	29
References	32

Executive summary

This review characterises the structural inequities in global knowledge systems, with a focus on Southern knowledge systems, and explores answers to the question: **What and whose knowledge counts in economic advisory work and in engagement with governments in Southern countries?** It locates this issue in a much broader landscape in which Southern researchers and consultants, especially women, and individuals and organisations based outside the main epicentres of research, encounter significant barriers to making their voices heard as credible producers of knowledge. In that way, the review seeks to inform philanthropic organisations who are seeking to intentionally advance diversity, equity and inclusion in support of economic advisory work in the Global South.

What commonalities exist

While there is relatively little published that reflects specifically on economic advisory work and policymaking, triangulating existing literature with work on broader dynamics of research, evidence and expertise in the Global South and first-hand accounts of selected experts enables us to draw some clear themes.

- **Misleading binaries:** Many analysts are concerned with North-South comparisons, given that they disguise a much more nuanced set of dynamics. In reality, knowledge is valued and used based on multiple and sometimes shifting identities, which in turn lead to formal and informal relationships and proximity to other experts. ‘International’ and ‘local’ are also often unhelpful binaries – identities are more complex, and individuals move across these boundaries – but they are also material: decisions are made and resources allocated based on these designations.
- **Deep structural faults:** Inequities stem from the various intersections of historical conditions, including lasting legacies of colonial and post-colonial knowledge structures, biases such as location or gender, as well as the hegemonic, structural conditions these have created – from foundational education systems to epistemologies. Within countries, physical proximity to metropolitan centres, being better connected to global networks, and having studied and/or worked abroad or for international agencies means some people are better able to position themselves than their peers. The same is true for gender – men’s expertise is more prominent than women’s.
- **Silenced knowledge:** Identity and historical inequities in knowledge systems are also coupled with inequities in access to resources for establishing and maintaining knowledge infrastructure leading to gaping holes in what is considered ‘valuable’ knowledge. The under-representation of Southern researchers in prominent journals and development policy and practice, for example, is symptomatic of these inequities. While discourses on ‘localisation’

have received growing attention, efforts to localise have remained largely rhetorical, reinforcing knowledge hierarchies that implicitly devalue other forms and sources of knowledge.

- **Biased and exclusive:** Trust, credibility and reliability are critical when governments select experts, but they are also complex and not impartial – informed by perceptions of experience and education, political and ideological affinity, proximity to influential figures, and informal networks. ‘Shortcuts’ or markers, such as foreign experience or academic credentials, are often important but may also be instrumentalised as political strategies to secure support or resources. These patterns are reinforced by donor practices, based both on biases and on patterns of familiarity, connectedness and convenience.

What implications for knowledge equity

- **Stifling creativity:** The narrowing of expertise and the hegemony of particular frames has real impacts, limiting the ideas that are used to inform critical policy decisions and the allocation of resources. This is all the more important when problems are complex and ‘wicked’, requiring inputs from multiple disciplines and contexts, genuinely new thinking, and when successful design and implementation requires successfully uniting different interest groups.
- **Lack of ownership:** This limited voice and presence for local experts often means Southern countries lose out on opportunities to take ownership of their economic and development agenda, counterbalance power asymmetries and better negotiate terms within a highly competitive global economy.
- **Weakening systems:** This over prioritising of ‘foreign’ expertise also hinders the future evolution of knowledge systems – how priorities are determined, what is funded, who is trained, what knowledge is produced and how those knowledge systems are sustained.

What considerations for redressing knowledge inequity

- Choosing to focus on redressing knowledge inequities is both timely and opportunistic, considering the growing recognition of the need for both inclusivity and diversity. Overcoming deeply entrenched inequities, however, is a complex, resource-intensive process, without a single, clear solution. Moreover, there is a marked tension between politically viable approaches and equity-driven policies and processes, particularly in a space where governments hold more power.
- It is important to work on improving both the supply of relevant expertise and the demand for diverse sources of knowledge. One clear opportunity is in the long-term investment and reinforcement of alternative structures to address inequities, through piloting innovative practices and progressive approaches. This will need to be accompanied by strategic partnerships with stakeholders, such as funders, national organisations and regional bodies, to build stronger economic knowledge systems.

- Achieving equity will require redefining what makes for ‘expertise’ beyond single indicators, such as published journal articles. This could be achieved by reassessing the diversity of economic consultants on the roster to consider factors such as location/origin, gender, race, age, economic approach and methodological expertise.
- Philanthropic organisations must be comprehensive in their understanding of national contexts and proactively engage individuals who possess a good understanding of the local culture and politics. This could involve pairing typical options with usually excluded consultants who could offer a different perspective to government policy dialogues and decision-making processes.
- Generating more evidence on how economic advice impacts political and policy processes will be key to bridging the gap between a government’s economic policy advice needs and available experts. Much can be gained by engaging various stakeholders to ensure greater localisation or fruitful partnerships, including the representation and interests of marginalised groups, socio-economic outcomes and diversity in public debates.

1. Setting the scene

1.1. Introduction and background

This review was produced as part of learning partnership between the [Open Society Foundations](#) (OSF), [OTT](#) and [INASP](#) to jointly explore effective models for support to progressive government reformers in the Global South. This report responds to the following learning question: **What are the structural inequities in Southern economic knowledge systems and how can economic advisory work address them?**

By exploring this question, we aim to strengthen understanding of how economic advisory work can be deployed in support of political and economic reform. Here, the selection of local, diaspora and international experts to provide advisory support in response to government requests (and the nature of the partnerships between international and local experts) is a key element.

Key informant interviews reflected an awareness of and discomfort with the exclusivity of ‘experts’ and an ambition to diversify the pool of advisors to government. In supporting demand-led economic advisory work in the Global South, philanthropic organisations have to carefully manage and balance governments’ needs and preferences with the expertise that is available in the field. At times these preferences, needs and constraints affect organisations’ capacity to incorporate a more diverse and inclusive range of expertise in the support it provides to inform government discussions and decision-making. The result is often an over-reliance on expertise from relatively few sources and a relatively narrow field of experts.

This report locates this issue in a much broader landscape in which Southern researchers and consultants, especially women, individuals, and organisations based outside the main epicentres of research, encounter significant barriers to making their voices heard as experts, whether in academia, consultancy, or public decision-making processes. The field of economics is not an exception nor is the practice of economic advisory work.

1.2. Objectives and methodology

This review explores responses to the following questions:

1. What are the structural inequities within knowledge systems (both between North and South and within Southern knowledge systems)?
2. How do these structural inequities manifest in the knowledge sector? Are there particular ways that these manifest in the economics field/sector?

3. Whose expertise counts in economic advice given to governments? What are governments looking for in terms of experts? What about international organisations? How do inequities manifest in these preferences in selecting experts?
4. What are the consequences of inequities in economic advisory work in policy processes in the Global South?

To answer these questions, we reviewed over 60 pieces of academic and grey literature. The literature was complemented with key informant interviews, all of whom are long-standing and renowned academics, practitioners or former decision makers working in and on the economies of Southern countries.

Taking economic advisory knowledge systems as our focus, we examine power dynamics within and between knowledge systems. While we have not followed a classic political economy structure, our analysis is strongly inspired by a political economy lens. We explore structural factors, ‘rules of the game’, key stakeholders and incentives,¹ as well as dimensions of knowledge, politics and power in international development, and decolonisation of knowledge.

This review represents the first step to inform the identification and/or development of tools and practical advice to support philanthropic organisations in their efforts to advance diversity, equity and inclusion in the economic advisory work in the Global South.

1.3. Defining the terms

Knowledge systems² organise and regulate the way knowledge is produced, communicated, evaluated, and applied in practice, as well as how it is funded and commissioned. In these systems, different types of knowledge producers and users “*interact in order to produce, provide, demand and use knowledge to support the development of public policies*” (Pellini et al., 2019, p.2). In knowledge systems, stakeholders such as universities, public research institutions, civil society organisations, governments, citizens, international organisations, for-profit firms and other actors collaborate to create new knowledge. Knowledge systems may also form around specific technological or societal challenges (Dougherty and Dunne, 2011) or among geographically co-located organisations in complementary fields (Van der Borgh et al., 2012).

¹ Some of the approaches that have informed our analysis are the Thinking and Working Politically of the TWP Community of Practice, the Political Economy Analysis of the UK AID, the Applied Political Economy Analysis Framework of USAID, and the work of the Strengthening the Use of Evidence for Development Impact (SEDI) programme.

² The concept of political knowledge regimes is also relevant to this review and has, as well, informed our analysis. Introduced by the Uruguayan political scientist Adolfo Garcé (Garcé et al., 2018), this concept refers to the institutional and organisational structures within a given country or region that produce, disseminate and use policy-relevant knowledge. These regimes encompass a variety of actors who seek to shape the policy agenda, influence public opinion and ultimately affect the governance and political outcomes in a society. Political knowledge regimes can vary significantly from one country to another, influenced by factors like the political culture, the level of democracy, the structure of the media landscape, the independence of academic institutions and the presence or absence of strong civil society organisations. Understanding these regimes is crucial for comprehending how policy decisions are made and how political discourse is shaped in different contexts.

For this review, we adopt a broad definition of economic advisory work, also labelled as ‘economic consulting’ or ‘economic policy advice’:

any evidence-based advice provided to governmental, inter-governmental, or non-governmental organizations, including data collection, research reports, IT-based tool development, capacity-building interventions, evidence-based advocacy and outreach-services, or policy engagement. (Mabugu et al., 2022, p.1)

In general terms, advisory is provided by experts, whether they are contracted as individuals or as organisations. These are typically “*professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area*” (Haas, 1992, in Koch & Weingart, 2016).

While a distinction could be made between the practices of economic advisory work and the practices of policy research, for the purpose of this review, and considering the scarcity of reflection in the literature about the former, we will refer to both. As Mabugu et al. note, in the Global South “*researchers and consultants skilled in one of these streams frequently transition to the other when changes in priorities occur or new incentives are offered*” (2022, p.5).

Finally, for purposes of this review, we take ‘Global South’ to refer to low-income, lower-middle income, or upper-middle income countries according to the World Bank country classifications by income level 2022-2023 (Hamadeh et al.; 2022). However, it is important to acknowledge that the Global South is not a homogeneous bloc and that significant differences exist in the knowledge systems and infrastructures of Global South countries, and the contextual inequities these may reproduce.

1.4. Limitations and gaps

As stated by Mabugu et al: “*Despite the important role played by economic-development consulting in developing countries, very little evidence exists regarding how researchers or consultants from developing countries are actually hired, deployed, or compensated in consulting projects, particularly with respect to their counterparts from the Global North*” (2022, p.1). One feature of consulting that helps explain the scarcity of reflection in the literature is that it “*is often undertaken discreetly, making these activities largely opaque about even the most basic characteristics such as prevalence and pay rates*” (Del Rossi & Hersch, 2020, p.1200).

Given the scarce published literature directly examining inequities in economic consulting, advisory work or policy advice, we have broadened our scope to identify lessons and evidence about knowledge inequities from several areas of relevance to this review: knowledge production, decolonisation, access to publishing, participation

in policy debates, and epistemic (in)justices. We broadened our review from ‘economic policy’ to ‘development policy’ literature and explored inequities within the economic profession itself. In the literature, exploration of these topics mostly focuses on academic knowledge production. There is also more literature that discusses the inequalities faced by Southern individuals and organisations relative to their Northern peers, as compared to inequalities based on gender, race and geographic location (within countries).

While we have concentrated on what the literature reflects on the topic, the picture would no doubt be made richer with accounts from the ‘frontline’ of practice. The nature of much policy advice and consulting (including economic) means it is often done discreetly, in closed sessions, and often only possible to reconstruct trails of expertise and patterns of influence historically. This makes it difficult to assess the nuances of practice without talking to those involved in different roles: funders, decision makers and commissioned consultants or experts. Enriching this review with interviews with selected key informants would be a potential next step and could enable us to draw specific examples of successful practices that have challenged some of the dynamics described in this review and to find new ways to introduce more diverse ideas.

2. What we know

The power dynamics of knowledge production, communication and use result in injustices and exclusions within and between knowledge systems. These extend to how that knowledge is incorporated into decision-making, and into policy and operational responses to a whole host of social, environmental and economic questions (Harle, 2020). Part of those injustices and exclusions are explained by the historical legacies of oppression and discrimination, especially by the deeply-rooted hierarchisation of knowledge established since the colonial period (Mignolo, 2002). Together these structural factors have a strong influence on the dynamics of knowledge systems today.

2.1. Where inequities stem from

Colonial legacies

Colonisation imposed two phenomena that help explain the power imbalances in knowledge systems. On the one hand, the creation of structural knowledge hierarchies (Indigenous vs colonial, Western vs African, Northern vs Southern) (Mabugu et al., 2022). On the other hand, the universalisation of Western knowledge traditions and epistemologies and the global acceptance of the West as the source of expertise and science (Harle, 2020; Vadiya, 2018), which in turn contributed to pushing other forms of knowledge to the periphery (Obeng-Odoom, 2019).

'International' versus 'local'

The patterns of exclusion in today's global knowledge economy are both a result and means of reproduction of those colonial legacies. In particular, "*the 'knowledge for development' agenda brought the differentiation between Western scientific and local knowledge to the fore*" (Koch & Weingart, 2016, p.12). Indeed, the distinction between 'international' and 'local' or 'national' experts is a common differentiation in aid circles: "*the former...is meant to be the universal standard, while the latter, by contrast, is deemed specific to a locale, implying its limitation in focus*" (Musarin et al., 2023, p.4). Moreover, the differentiation between international and local or national comes with consequences for the respective status of experts, as it responds to the idea of knowledge hierarchies that place international institutions, individuals, agendas and methodologies at the top and local or national ones at the bottom (Girvan, 2007; Koch & Weingart, 2016; Obeng-Odoom, 2019) and as secondary options (Arunatilake 2022; Koch, 2020; Kumi & Kamruzzaman, 2021; McKay, 2022; Ronconi et al. 2021; Sundberg, 2019).

Furthermore, the privileged status of Northern knowledge allows international experts to better navigate the different opportunities provided in the aid sector: "*non-African scholars enjoy the status of being the (real) Expert, but they can also slip into local expertise when and where it suits and benefits them. For us African scholars, however, we cannot stake a claim to (real) Expert status, and when local expertise is imputed on us, it is mostly to box us in and remind us of our position*" (Musarin et al., 2023, p.14).

This also suggests the limits of the differentiation between international and local when referring to experts, since even if experts from Southern countries can frequently use their international expertise and learning in their work (e.g. when they bring their expertise to other countries, to regional forums, to multilateral forums), they may still be labelled as ‘locals’.

Intersecting identities and epistemic justice

The international-local/national divide (also Northern-Southern, among other labels) intersects with identity markers such as gender, race, class, ethnic group or geographic location, both within and between countries. These establish hierarchies that run alongside other forms of disadvantage and determine whose knowledge is appreciated and valued (Mormina, 2022), with non-white experts, women and experts located outside major cities facing greater barriers to participating within knowledge systems.

Several authors (Koch, 2020; Mormina, 2022; Cummings & Hoebink, 2017; Cummings et al., 2023) use the term ‘epistemic injustice’³ (coined by Fricker, 2007) to refer to the structural inequities ingrained in knowledge systems and systems of expert advice that perpetuate the dominance of particular experts and cultures of expertise (Mormina, 2022) while considering some agents to be epistemically lesser than others (Koch, 2020). Irrespective of qualifications, in advisory processes, epistemic authority seems to be tied to identity-based prejudices: “*The reference frame for the assignment of credibility has shifted from the actual capability of experts to their social identity*” (Koch, 2020, p.484), such that “*not always what is known but who knows that signifies ‘expertise’*” (Kothari, 2006, p.16).⁴

Inequitable resources

Historical inequities in knowledge systems are also coupled with inequities in resources for knowledge infrastructure due to differential funding for science and technology across countries. While investment in research and development is concentrated in the North (Blicharska et al., 2017; Kassouf & Ronconi, 2022), funding (public and private) for science and technology, including higher education, in most Southern countries is relatively low⁵ (Amarante & Zurbrigg, 2020; Bayer & Rouse, 2016; Blicharska et al., 2017; Chelwa, 2021; Mabugu et al., 2022). The constraints of science systems in the South determine differential access to opportunities to develop successful academic careers generating credibility deficits (Mormina, 2022) and diminishing the competitiveness of local experts: “*the academic records local experts are able to provide are usually less comprehensive and, again, less recognised*” (Koch & Weingart, 2016, p.131).

³ Epistemic injustices occur when there is a mismatch between the level of knowledge an individual possesses and the credibility the individual is afforded’ (Medvecky, 2018; p.1397). Related terms include ‘epistemic narrowing’ (Mormina, 2022), ‘epistemic violence’ (Naidu, 2021), ‘epistemological racism’ (Goitom, 2019) and epistemicide (Sousa Santos, 2014).

⁴ For instance, when addressing the race problem in development, Kothari states that ‘whiteness and the west provide symbols of authority, expertise and knowledge’ (2006, p.10).

⁵ With some exceptions of countries in Southern regions whose expenditure is relatively high, e.g. Brazil, India, Malaysia, and South Africa (UNESCO, 2021).

Educational foundations

This structural inequity also operates within countries with some groups (based on class, gender and race) having privileged access to better quality education at the expense of other groups that lag behind. One consequence of low spending in the knowledge sector and low levels of tertiary education in Southern countries is the brain drain to academic and research institutions in the Global North (Chelwa, 2021; Blicharska et al., 2017; Mabugu et al., 2022; Kassouf & Ronconi 2022). This, among other factors, has contributed to the relative shortage of researchers, which has in turn constrained Southern countries' ability to contribute to the global knowledge pool (Amarante & Zurbrigg, 2020; Chelwa, 2021).

2.2. How inequities manifest

The structural inequities and power imbalances described above are propagated through a constellation of formal and informal relationships between a wide range of actors, including governments, donors, academic institutions and publishing companies, whose interests and incentives shape the production and use of knowledge. Certain groups, typically of well-connected individuals and organisations, are awarded privilege in knowledge creation, reproduction and dissemination processes, and whose ideas and advice gain relatively greater influence compared to other groups who are under-represented in the spaces in which their country's development is being discussed (Burger et al., 2022; Bhathacharya, 2020; Fricker, 2007), and whose practice as researchers or experts is marginalised.

Participation and visibility in academic publishing

Publication patterns in journals are important because they signal whose expertise is to be trusted, listened to and valued. They enable authors to position themselves in global academic networks and participate in global dialogues, and to get recognition in the knowledge community of their own countries. Several authors have examined patterns of publications across academic fields with a strong convergence in their findings: Southern researchers, especially those based in Southern countries, are largely under-represented in top scientific journals (largely dominated by the US and the UK), not only as authors but also as editorial board members (Amarante & Zurbrigg, 2020; Cummings & Hoebink, 2017; Chelwa, 2021). This marginalisation in the sphere of academic publishing manifests across disciplines (Gray, 2021), e.g. in development studies (Cummings & Hoebink, 2017), in medicine (Sumathipala et al., 2004), in health economics (Hirvonen, 2020), in women and gender studies, HIV/AIDS, climate change and politics (Medie & Kang, 2018; Connel et al., 2018). Language also works as an important barrier for Southern researchers since non-native speakers are forced to publish in a language different than their own due to the dominance of the English language in academic communications (Amarante, Burger et al., 2022; Cummings & Hoebink, 2017; Gray, 2021), a challenge they also experience in the consulting industry (Blicharska et al., 2017; Layode et al., 2021; Mabugu et al., 2022; Narayanaswamy, 2016).

In the field of economics, authors have found that Southern researchers publish less often in ‘top’ journals compared to their Northern peers (Amarante, Burger et al., 2022, Chelwa, 2021; Das et al., 2013; Kassouf & Ronconi, 2022, McKay, 2022; Rodrik, 2021; Kandpal, 2023), that a large majority of journals have a tiny editorial contribution from academics located outside of North America and Europe (Angus et al., 2021; Chelwa, 2021), and that researchers from developing countries are under-represented at the most important and prestigious development economics conferences (Burger et al., 2022). Moreover, authors also found that the bulk of economic research on the South is conducted by researchers from the North (Amarante, Burger et al. 2022; Liverpool, 2021). According to McKay: “*What is considered good-quality research in economics...is clearly shaped by the type of work that can be done at elite institutions in North America and Europe*” (2022, p.11). The discipline also values quantitative evidence over qualitative evidence, which also crowds out Southern researchers and institutions who may face additional challenges when generating and collecting large sets of and/or multi-level quantitative data (due to the higher cost of carrying out, for example, large surveys and experiments such as randomised control trials, but also the quality of available information systems). In addition, editorial boards in fields such as development studies are also primarily composed of men (Cummings & Hoebink, 2017).

Participation and visibility in policy advisory work

The under-representation of Southern experts is also seen in development policy and practice, for instance in the development of economic agreements, policy instruments and policy agendas (e.g. as identified by Chelwa (2021) in World Bank reports), climate change (e.g. as identified by Blicharska et al. (2017) in UN frameworks, and Hunter et al., 2021), or development at large (e.g. as identified by Cummings et al. (2023) in the UN Sustainable Development Goals and by Amarante, Burger et al., (2022)). In each case, the authors note that very few researchers from the Global South are included as authors, advisers or editors, and particularly in development projects supported by external donor aid (Kumi & Kamruzzaman, 2021). As Ronconi et al. note: “*a strong tradition in economics, inspired by the ‘one-size-fits-all’ Modernization Theory, has considered the participation of local researchers irrelevant or at least of a second order of importance*” (2021, p.1). Moreover, this exclusion in part is a feature of the relatively better pay and resources available to those experts in Northern institutions. Although advisory and consultancy positions will often pay a fee, there is usually a considerable amount of upfront investment required to reach that stage, such as serving as an unpaid adviser or reviewer. Experts with higher salaries in Northern countries are more likely to be able to afford this investment of time and energy than their counterparts in Southern institutions.

Women’s under-representation

Interviewees have reflected on how economics is a male-dominated discipline, especially macroeconomics and finance, with women being confined to niches such as social and developmental areas, and not seen as proficient in managing projects. The Women in Economics Index 2022, which monitors and tracks the share of women economists in leadership positions in the academic, private and public sectors globally,

shows an overall low share of women across sectors: 33% in the academic, and 32% in the private and public sectors (Beatty et al., 2022).

Exclusion in the South

The political economy of knowledge production and use does not play out only on a global level. Domestic knowledge inequities interact with unequal global systems, also influencing which groups become valuable sources of expertise for both government agencies and donors (Girvan, 2007). Typically, experts located in capital cities and metropolitan areas have more access to education opportunities, which creates privileged access to information, greater visibility, and connection to spaces of power from where they can influence decision-making (Harle, 2020), becoming part of the inner circle of international financial institutions and finance ministry officials (Narayanaswamy, 2016). For instance, Porteous (2022) points to the uneven distribution of economics research both across and within African countries, where research is concentrated in regions with higher incomes and large urban areas. According to one interviewee, universities outside the main cities do not have a market for consultancy, rendering their expertise less central, and giving their experts fewer opportunities to build their consulting experience, unless they spend considerable time in the capital to build their networks and gain visibility.

Moreover, the practice of hiring former senior civil servants or former senior officers from international financial institutions to provide advice to governments (both in the Global South and the Global North) crowds out young economists who cannot compete with their credentials and connections (also contributing to the brain drain to Western institutions to accumulate experience and build reputation). In many cases, early-career researchers and economists face limited opportunities for consulting compared to their senior colleagues and peers in Northern countries. In addition, it is often challenging for early-career researchers and academics, including economists, in both the Global South and Global North, to build their portfolio of expert services due to their more fragile and short-term contracts compared to their more established peers.

Exclusion in the North

The marginalisation of women, racial minorities, people located outside capital cities and metropolitan areas, and the youth in economic knowledge systems is seen both within Southern countries and within Northern countries (Narayanan, 2019; Wessel et al., 2019; Akee, 2020). Bayer & Rouse's (2016) research on diversity in economics in the United States found that, compared to the overall population and to other disciplines, the profession includes disproportionately few women and members of historically under-represented racial and ethnic minority groups. Also, for the United States, Del Rossi & Hersch (2020) found that men are more likely to have consulting experience than women. The corollary is that where international or foreign experts are drawn into Global South advisory work, they are more likely to be from already privileged groups in their countries of origin: white and male, not black or female.

2.3. Whose expertise counts

Trust, credibility and reliability

Selection of experts by government and by international organisations tends to rely on trust (Mabugu et al., 2022). And trust can be complex – determined by credibility and reliability, but also by proximity to particular networks and individuals, and at an informal level by political and ideological affinity.

Credibility and reliability are related to competence, which is understood as consulting and academic reputation and with pragmatic knowledge of government processes and a proven track record (Haynes et al., 2012). In their study exploring how consultants, academics and policy researchers based in the Global South are hired by development organisations for economic development projects, Mabugu et al. found that criteria include “*experience, competencies, education, academic achievements, leadership, and teamwork*” and that other factors included “*the ability to deliver on assigned task(s), familiarity with the organization, track record of delivery, expertise, and quality of past work*” (2022, p.11).

Mormina reflects on how these ‘markers of credibility’ (education, qualification, peer recognition, track record, etc.) represent a bias against some experts and groups: “*in societies where some groups systematically struggle to access opportunities to develop markers of credibility, using such markers will further exclude them from exercising epistemic agency and contributing to public life*” (2022, p.678). In that sense “*the social capital that policy makers often take as a proxy for expertise is linked to class and other forms of social stratification*” (2022, p.676). From that perspective, the education of Southern experts in Western academies confers on them added legitimacy to lead technocratic projects, and places them ahead of their peers who trained “*at home*” (Da Costa, 2011; Blicharska et al., 2017). Layode et al. (2021) also found the prevalence of Western communication styles, and ideas of what ‘polish’ and ‘professionalism’ mean (which may vary across cultural contexts) put African organisations at a disadvantage. This bias in judging the quality of advice is also perceived by Southern experts themselves, who feel they are assessed against foreign experts to whom are ascribed higher-level expertise and competence (Koch, 2020).

Perceived objectivity

Credibility and reliability are also linked to the ‘objectivity’ or ‘independence’ of the expert. In that regard, the literature brings different perspectives about which experts are perceived as more objective. While foreign advice can be seen to foster foreign policy agendas (Chelwa, 2021), other authors have found a tendency to perceive international expertise as more neutral than local expertise, which is seen to be potentially biased (Koch & Weingart, 2016; Sundberg, 2019). Moreover, reliability is linked to the capacity of the experts to perform according to the expectations, and as discussed, perception of risks tends to make donors lean towards working with foreign experts. Furthermore, many consultancy commissioners surveyed in Mabugu et al.’s study indicated that Southern experts tend to be at either end of the spectrum – either too academic or too

advocacy-driven – whereas “*what organizations often needed was policy-oriented work that addressed real-life problems or challenges*” (2022, p.18).

Formal versus informal knowledge

All these forces combine in such a way that the development research and policy space in the Global South comes to be occupied by foreign expertise (Chelwa, 2021). Formal qualification criteria and certified technical competencies are given more weight when selecting experts, compared to what local experts claim as a competitive edge: the knowledge of their countries’ political structures, societal and cultural issues, and local language skills (Koch & Weingart, 2016). Looking specifically at adverts for international advisory positions, Koch & Weingart found that “*in most cases, previous experience in the country and/or basic skills of the local language in the country of assignment is – if at all – mentioned as an asset, but not as a decisive requirement*” (2016, p.133).

Comparative experience

Another important criterion noted by the literature and by interviewees was experts’ knowledge from comparable countries (Ronconi et al., 2021). When working on a policy reform or decisions, governments want to know “*Where in the world have we seen things like this working?*” (interviewee). To get information on what works in different contexts, governments also seek advice from experts outside their countries. While different places cannot be treated the same through one-size-fits-all models, this demand for comparable evidence is a caveat to more intransigent discourses in favour of contextualisation in policy and practice. As Pike et al. state: “*Over-emphasising context risks portraying local and regional development as particular, unique and unrepeatable episodes from which other people and places can learn little*” (2014, p.26).

Informality

Trust is also linked to informal relationships and to having more political and ideological affinity. Without ‘institutionalised’ relationships of mutual acquaintance, esteem and recognition, individuals may be experts but may not become advisors (Mormina, 2022). This suggests not only that networking is critical for experts’ advice to be requested by decision makers, but also that informality in recruitment is a common practice (Haynes et al., 2012).

‘Foreign’ socialisation

The intellectual socialisation of Southern decision makers (Girvan, 2007) matters in their preferences of experts, especially if they have developed their academic careers in the Northern centres. Related to this, the predisposition of decision makers to see foreign advice as better than local advice is also underpinned by a widespread practice in developing countries of appointing former officials from international financial institutions as planning and finance ministers (Girvan, 2007). Moreover, interviewees have indicated that even as technical assistance projects tend to be led by Northern experts, local experts, typically former senior civil servants or former officials from international financial institutions, are frequently embedded in the government agencies to manage its implementation. In that way, governments can benefit from

foreign-acquired expertise while still maintaining autonomy in decision-making, by keeping international staff outside of their national ministries.

Political affinity

Political and ideological affinity is also a recurrent criterion for decision makers when seeking expert advice (Ronconi et al., 2021), which makes drawing experts from trusted networks commonplace, rather than seeking a spectrum of diverse views that may not fit (Georgalakis & Siregar, 2023; Mormina, 2022). This preference for like-minded individuals can result in the formation of closed circles composed of trusted individuals which reinforces the mechanism of ‘in-group favouritism’, “*a bias in favour of the group to which one belongs*” (Mormina, 2022, p.679). In policy advisory work, in-group favouritism can lead to ‘shared reality bias’, also known as ‘groupthink’ which is “*the tendency of individuals who interact frequently to converge in their views*” (Mormina, 2022, p.697). The insulation of a group of experts from the views and perspectives of other groups can lead to bias in making sense of social problems or in what constitutes good evidence for decision-making. Moreover, if groupthink takes place along lines of identity markers such as race, class, gender or geographic location, it can exclude the reality of most disadvantaged groups from policy advice.

Relationships

Trust in terms of the relationship between experts and their counterparts can also determine the impact of the advice (Ronconi et al., 2021), thus the importance of building long-term relationships. However, in policy advisory work, especially when advice is brought from abroad, the building up of relationships and trust is hindered by the typically short time span of employment cycles prevailing in the aid community (Koch & Weingart, 2016) but also by political horizons and intra-government shuffles that do not always allow for the long-term embedded support needed to build stronger relationships between experts (especially local ones) and decision makers. Moreover, changes in government may also come with distrust towards those experts who have provided advice to the previous administration, thus making incoming government lean towards their own group of advisors (see also *Political affinity*). On the other hand, experts, especially local ones, may be reluctant to advise certain government administrations if they perceive it may damage their reputation.

Lending credibility and cover to existing agendas

The importance of trust also suggests that the appointment of policy advisors can be perceived as lending technocratic justification credibility to leadership’s preconceived policy agendas (Da Costa, 2011; Evers & Menkhoff, 2015; Mormina, 2022). In order to get their ideas and policy reforms approved, politicians and decision makers need trusted messengers (Georgalakis, 2023), and foreign experts are perceived as more legitimate (and successful) when they are trying to sell an idea to their superiors, to the Parliament or even to donors (interview) and public opinion, especially if these ideas are outside of economic orthodoxy, which again puts local organisations at a disadvantage. Moreover, using expertise as a legitimiser often reaffirms decisions, as opposed to challenging hegemonic political agendas. Evers & Menkhoff (2002) suggest that the legitimacy

provided by ‘world-class consultants’ can protect decision makers from being blamed if the advice given is not applicable or leads to poor results.

2.4. Decision makers and decision-making

Facilitators and brokers

Decision makers in the Global South may also lean towards working with economic experts who can facilitate access to funding or other concrete material benefits given their bonds to international financial institutions, development banks or funders (Chelwa, 2021), whether it is a loan approval, a debt relief, or a trade concession. Here again, the decision to hire an expert is not based on an assessment of the relative technical competence or the quality and value they may provide, but on the assessment of ‘positive externalities’ which create powerful incentives for decision makers to opt for international experts as opposed to local ones (Girvan, 2007). Especially in the field of economics, many consultants are provided to the government under international financial institutions contracts, such as International Monetary Fund or the World Bank, and even when they may be ‘local’ experts, the nature of the contract relationship makes them closer to Washington circles than those of the country they are serving as advisors. The same rationale can be applied to the appointment of men or women economists: the former tend to be in top positions, whether in academia, government or the private sector, thus managing a broader pool of influential networks that can be mobilised later.

Design versus implementation

Another related consideration is that decision makers may be more interested in supporting policy implementation rather than in accessing new evidence or advice for policy design. The challenge is that policy advice is usually commissioned on a short-term basis with limited concern for the applicability of recommendations in the local context (Koch & Weingart, 2016), thus creating a vacuum after the expert leaves, which affects government capacity to move on if local experts have not been properly involved in the process.

2.5. How donor practices influence inequity

Structural inequities in knowledge systems also manifest in and are reproduced by donors’ employment and procurement practices (Koch, 2020; Koch & Weingart, 2016; Mabugu et al., 2022) which reflect biases that act as a barrier to entry for Southern experts (Mabugu et al., 2022; Georgalakis & Siregar, 2023). This is due partly to the fact that global grant making tends to be dominated by privileged groups in the Northern countries (Koch & Weingart, 2016), especially in economics: “*Economics and the funding devoted to it have long been dominated by white men from rich countries*” (Kandpal, 2023). The application of assessment criteria, such as university degrees, publications, previous assignments and the quality of technical proposals, also tends to marginalise experts from developing countries (Koch & Weingart, 2016). As a result, Southern experts, but also other groups such as women in economics (Del Rossi & Hersch, 2020), get limited chances

to accumulate experience in the market, thus being less conversant with the codes of the consultancy industry⁶ (Blicharska et al., 2017; Koch, 2020). In addition, the excessive bureaucracy that characterises donors' procurement processes makes hiring new and diverse experts even more difficult as it is much easier to hire people they have worked with in the past whose due diligence has been already completed (interview).

Moreover, many times funders do not have enough knowledge of the existing expertise across Southern countries, especially outside capital cities and metropolitan areas. This is often because (bilateral) funders get posted for a few years, or are based at headquarters, so again their structures as well as their biases affect how much they invest in diversifying the expertise they commission. Government representatives interviewed by Koch & Weingart stated: *"In their perception, donors come with a 'mentality that there's nothing on the ground'"* (2016, p.109). The interest in obtaining visible results as fast as possible and the need to avoid risks (e.g. delivery on contracts, quality of reporting, etc.) when pairing experts with government agencies favours the mechanism of 'familiarity bias' (Layode et al., 2021), which ends up in experts being brought from elsewhere (Goldman, 2023; Koch & Weingart, 2016) or being pulled from privileged groups within Southern countries: *"The donors want to ensure that development projects are led by the people who are already well known as top consultants and know how to play by the donors' rules"* (Kamruzzaman, 2017, p.52).

Understandably, donors often seek to connect governments with reliable experts. However, building trust and fostering strong relationships takes time. For donors who are interested in supporting advisory work while also promoting diversity and inclusion, some of the organisations and initiatives outlined in Box 3 (see page 21), along with UN regional economic commissions, could be a valuable resource, as they can provide access to trusted networks of Southern experts.

2.6. What progress towards equity

'Localisation'

In the last decade, discourses on 'localisation', 'locally owned development' and 'partnerships' have received growing attention in the development sector.⁷ Notwithstanding the more fundamental problems with the 'local' versus 'international' designation, 'localisation' (see Box 1) has come to be understood as recognising and investing in the importance of expertise and knowledge that derives from and is rooted in the places, locations, cultures, systems of interest and of study (Sundberg, 2019). It is based on the understanding that local actors occupy a unique position in the policy

⁶ The pressure on Southern experts to catch up with these codes creates perverse incentives to mimic foreign behaviour. Naidu has called this Northern ventriloquism: 'Northern ventriloquism occurs when LMIC [low-income and middle-income countries] scholars enunciate HIC [high income countries] ideas to access globally competitive grants and publish in high-impact journals... Northern ventriloquism results in researchers mimicking foreign poses for foreign ratification, thus strengthening HIC dominance while extinguishing the LMIC episteme' (2021, p.333).

⁷ For instance, USAID is among the stakeholders that has strongly encouraged localisation in the last decade 'to ensure our work puts local actors in the lead, strengthens local systems, and is responsive to local communities': <https://www.usaid.gov/localization>.

landscape of many developing countries due to their contextual understanding of national development issues (Amarante, Arunatilake et al., 2022; Burger et al., 2022; Kassouf & Ronconi, 2022; Mabugu et al., 2022; Rethinking Research Collaborative, 2018) and that channelling more support to local experts and organisations is not only ethical but will also achieve more impact in the respective societies (Pul & Levine, 2023).

In their open letter to suggest adjustments funders could make to contracting and funding practices to facilitate working with small and solo local firms, Pul & Levine (2023) stress six strengths of local evaluation firms: locally rooted with a deep understanding of cultural context, highly networked, quick and easy access to local evaluators, relevant experience, innovative, and responsive. On that point, authors such Lebel & McLean (2018) share evidence that research conducted by local researchers out-performs work produced by Northern peers if judged against criteria that include relevance to local knowledge needs and connections to local communities as well as its scientific rigour (Harle, 2020).⁸

BOX 1. BEST PRACTICE COMPONENTS FOR LOCALISATION

Research undertaken by the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) for Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) found six primary components that can drive successful localisation when analysing these frameworks:

- **Partnership:** Treating local partners as long-term strategic partners instead of implementing partners; and working together in an open, egalitarian and complementary way.⁹
- **Funding:** Direct and multi-annual (core cost) funding, including the use of pooled and network funding.
- **Capacity:** Capacity-building is a two-way street, and a greater value must be placed on local context-specific knowledge of culture, politics and governance.
- **Coordination:** Effective coordination between international and local partners using existing platforms with collaborative governance structures.
- **Policy and decision-making:** Integrating local actors in the entire programme and project cycle (including design, implementation, evaluation and decisions on internal and external policies that govern all arrangements), and the decentralisation of decision-making processes.
- **Participation:** Including local communities in the development of initiatives and promoting downward accountability.

Source: CAF, <https://www.cafonline.org/about-us/blog-home/best-practice-in-fulfilling-the-localisation-agenda>

⁸ Kraemer-Mbula et al. (2019) also point to the need for a pluralistic view of what quality means in research and a better understanding of what it means to recognise the ‘best’ researchers, as well as a drive to operationalise and systematise knowledge on the issue.

⁹ Long-term strategic partnerships extend beyond and between funded projects. A strategic partnership is built on mutual interests and a shared vision of what an organisation is trying to achieve, and how working together might enable both organisations to prosper and achieve their goals. It is essential to keep in touch, share information, discuss emerging priorities and explore new opportunities for collaboration. Achieving this kind of partnership requires a significant investment of time and energy, which should come from the resources of each organisation, not just a project.

However, localisation efforts have remained largely rhetorical and have struggled to break the patterns of exclusion of local expertise, with development cooperation still characterised by an asymmetric flow of expertise from the North to the Global South (Koch & Weingart, 2016). Many times, the inclusion of Southern experts, especially women and racialised groups, has become a tick-box exercise to demonstrate commitment to more progressive and inclusive development (Narayanaswamy, 2014). Furthermore, this rhetoric reinforces binary knowledge hierarchies between international and local experts, which implicitly downgrade the expertise and experience of local actors (Koch & Weingart, 2016), rather than contribute to dismantling them (Sundberg, 2019).

Despite the challenges faced by the localisation agenda, the authors and reviewers of this document suggest that there are some examples of donors meaningfully involving Global South experts in their programmes. One such example is UK Research and Innovation's International Development Peer Review College, which has at least 90% of its members from countries eligible to receive overseas development assistance. The college aims to ensure that developing country perspectives are a key part of the expert review of overseas development assistance research opportunities, build fair and equitable partnerships, enable developing country researchers and non-academics to contribute to decision-making, and help with closer working relationships with expert reviewers from developing countries, as well as provide training and capacity-building in expert review.

Partnership

Together with the localisation discourse, the idea of partnerships between 'international' and 'local'/'national' experts has also emerged as a way of mitigating power imbalances in the knowledge for development sector by pairing 'international' expertise (e.g. knowledge from a range of countries and often better statistical skills) with 'local' knowledge, specific epistemological positions, contextual, cultural and linguistic expertise, and access to people and places (see Box 2) (Amarante, Burger et al., 2022; Rethinking Research Collaborative, 2018; Ronconi et al., 2021). According to this discourse, 'local' experts' presence in research and development projects has implications in terms of ethics, academic and social impact, and sustainability (Rethinking Research Collaborative, 2018).

However, in practice, the language of equitable partnerships and co-production remains largely rhetorical (Georgalakis & Siregar, 2023) and is undermined by the practices of strongly asymmetric power positions and imbalances in who controls the funding and related decisions regarding project, including themes and interests prioritised (Mabugu et al., 2022), but also roles and access to data (Goldman, 2023). More often than not, these partnerships position 'international' experts as the leads, while country-based consultants do much of the work, and are often paid much less (Koch, 2020), many times on the premise that 'local rates' reflect lower cost-of-living¹⁰ (Mabugu et al., 2022):

¹⁰ But the premise fails to acknowledge the many additional costs that are incurred in places with relatively poorer public health and education services, power, transport, and other infrastructure.

‘Development aid often fails in treating its target population as equivalent partners and valid agents of knowledge production’ (Dübgen, 2012, p.74).

BOX 2. 8 PRINCIPLES FOR FAIR AND EQUITABLE RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS IN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

1. **Put equity first:** ‘constantly question how the process and activities of the research are addressing the end goal. This requires consideration of whose knowledge and agendas count.’
2. **Critically engage with contexts:** ‘a systematic mapping of the relevant stakeholders, as well as consideration of the representativeness of partnerships and agenda-setting/evaluation committees...Assessment of national and regional inequalities that might be exacerbated by an over-reliance on partners from higher-income countries and capital cities.’
3. **Redress evidence hierarchies:** ‘different stakeholders will have different expectations as to what “quality evidence” means to them. This influences whose knowledge is valued, how research is designed and implemented, what types of research outputs are produced, and which audiences are considered.’
4. **Adapt and respond:** ‘take an adaptive approach that is responsive to context: review and renegotiate all the research parameters’.
5. **Respect diversity of knowledge and skills:** ‘explore the knowledges, skills and experiences that each partner brings...take time to understand institutional contexts of partners’.
6. **Commit to transparency:** ‘in all aspects of the project administration and budgeting; and set out clearly the rights of all partners regarding acknowledgement, authorship, intellectual property and data use’.
7. **Invest in relationships:** ‘significant investment in creating spaces for new partnerships to emerge and for existing relationships to develop and sustain’.
8. **Take a learning approach:** to ‘enable partners to challenge and subvert traditional knowledge hierarchies and create opportunities to do things in new and different ways’.

Adapted from Rethinking Research Collaborative:
<https://rethinkingresearchcollaborative.com/the-principles>

Initiatives towards diversity and inclusion

To break the patterns of exclusion in knowledge ecosystems, several initiatives led by Southern experts, and also specifically by women in economics (and other development disciplines) have emerged in recent years (see Box 3). These initiatives tend to acquire the form of global networks that, by strengthening bonds across borders, aim at raising the voices of experts that face barriers to make their voice heard globally but also within their countries.

BOX 3. GLOBAL NETWORKS PROMOTING DIVERSITY IN KNOWLEDGE GENERATION AND USE

Partnership for Economic Policy (PEP)’s mission is to promote Southern-driven development where policy decisions are informed by high-quality, locally generated evidence. With researchers based in more than 64 Southern countries, PEP supports the work of local researchers in developing countries, while strengthening their capacity and promoting their findings worldwide; facilitates engagement and collaborative working between researchers and policymakers at the national level; and, brings together researchers from across the globe, creating a space for learning, knowledge-sharing and discussion.

African Economic Research Consortium (AERC) aims to strengthen local capacity for conducting independent, rigorous enquiry into problems pertinent to the management of African economies, through a synergetic programme combining research with postgraduate training in economics and supported by an interactive communications and policy outreach.

IDEAS is the largest bibliographic database dedicated to economics and available freely on the internet. Based on Research Papers in Economics (RePEc), it indexes over 4,500,000 items of research, including over 4,100,000 that can be downloaded in full text.

ESCR-Net - The International Network for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights is a collaborative initiative of groups and individuals from around the world working to secure economic and social justice through human rights. ESCR-Net seeks to strengthen the field of all human rights, with a special focus on economic, social and cultural rights, and further develop the tools for achieving their promotion, protection and fulfilment. Through ESCR-Net, groups and individuals can exchange information, develop a collective voice, amplify their actions, and develop new tools and strategies. By facilitating joint actions, enhancing communications and building solidarity across regions, the network seeks to build a global movement to make human rights and social justice a reality for all.

Diversifying and Decolonising Economics (D-Econ) is a charitable organisation that aims to decolonise and diversify the economics field, both in terms of its academic content and its institutional structures, in order to ultimately support movements and struggles for global justice and achieve a more just society. It takes a holistic approach that involves three goals: (i) decolonising economics by tackling the historically produced Eurocentrism in our field and its claim to neutrality and universality, (ii) creating more openness in terms of theoretical and methodological approaches, and (iii) tackling structural exclusion in the economics discipline in order to remove barriers to equal representation in terms of identity.

Decolonising Economics identifies ways in which individuals and institutions can divest from whiteness and create the infrastructure that organises those with wealth to redistribute towards marginalised communities who are investing in the solidarity economy.

Women in Leadership in Economics is a multi-year project by the International Economic Association (IEA) focusing on enhancing the role of women in the global economics profession by undertaking research in multiple countries focused on understanding and removing obstacles to women in the profession and engaging in a variety of activities to amplify women economists’ voices in the global public sphere.



Women in Economics Initiative (WEI) is a volunteer-run, non-profit association established to advance gender equality in the field of economics. Its goal is to encourage equal opportunity and balanced representation of genders in the economics profession across the academic, business and public sectors.

AuthorAID is a digital learning and knowledge community for early-career researchers, hosted by INASP, and increasingly led by Southern researchers. Its membership of 14,000 spans over 140 countries, and around 10,000 learners participate annually in its online courses. AuthorAID aims to equip researchers with the skills, knowledge and confidence to navigate the early years of their careers, offering advice and support on how to secure grant funding, how to publish and communicate their work and how to engage more successfully with policy and practice.

Southern Voice is a network of 66 Think Tanks from Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Asia dedicated to leveraging quality local data and research. The ultimate aim is to address the existing 'knowledge asymmetry' and 'participation deficit' in the dialogue on development. It does this by producing, promoting and disseminating evidence-based policy analysis by researchers from Global South countries.

3. Implications of knowledge inequities

Create biases and potential blind spots in policy decisions

Inequities in knowledge systems can lead to epistemic narrowing in economic advisory work for policymaking which crowds out relevant knowledge of country context, culture, politics and values. This marginalisation of local knowledge risks foreclosing policy options and creating biases and blind spots that can make policy decisions inappropriate and ineffective with possibly detrimental consequences (especially for the most disadvantaged) (Amarante, Arunatilake et al., 2022; Burger et al., 2022; Mormina, 2022; Nunn, 2019). A more prominent presence of local experts in economic advice (and research), as well as of women experts, experts located outside the main cities and other knowledgeable groups, would derive benefits in terms of the achievement of higher connections between political, social, economic and cultural situation, institutional conditions and policy recommendations, thus leading to greater policy impact, more sustainable development policies, and more inclusive policymaking (Amarante & Zurbrigg, 2020; Arunatilake, 2022; Blicharska et al., 2017; Ronconi et al., 2021; Rethinking Research Collaborative, 2018). In addition, local experts can provide policy makers and stakeholders with a more continuous and rapid source of expertise on emerging issues and policy windows (PEP, 2023; Ronconi et al., 2021).

Preclude broader policy debates and shared understanding of policy problems

Inequities in knowledge systems can create vicious circles in which the views of a relatively small and homogeneous group of experts acquire privileged access to policy circles at the exclusion of others. But multiple knowledge is required to achieve sustainable development, especially in front of wicked policy scenarios that require thoughtful deliberation and shared understanding (Amarante & Zurbrigg, 2020; Cummings et al., 2023). In those scenarios, expertise should embrace greater pluralism, especially by valuing the context expertise among groups typically excluded from decision-making spaces (Mormina, 2022).

Reproduce hegemonic theories, frameworks and methodologies

Inequities in knowledge systems, and particularly in economic advisory work, risk reproducing dominant theories and narratives such as those that present Southern countries as contexts of policy failure, of impending tragedy or as failed states. These narratives, raised by both groups of Global North or Global South politicians and experts (and encouraged by international financial institutions and mainstream economic curricula), tend to emphasise a one-size-fits-all view of policy (e.g. neoliberal policies) and reject economic policy heterodoxy. In addition, inequities in knowledge systems tend to privilege mainstream theoretical models and quantitative methods over alternative expertise, slower observation and data gathering, and methods that engage more with communities, which represent valuable inputs for more inclusive policy advice.

Affect ownership of economic and development agenda

The political economy of global development policy results in actors such as the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund exercising power in Southern countries with limited fiscal space and precludes decision makers from benefiting from alternative economic and policy ideas. Funding dependence not only affects Southern countries' capacity to control their own political and economic agenda and realise their own policy visions (Girvan, 2007; Haelewaters et al., 2021; Koch & Weingart, 2016), but it also favours epistemic narrowing which prevents Southern experts from taking the lead in interpreting their own societies' realities (Koch, 2020). The involvement of local experts in economic policy advice is crucial to help Southern countries better negotiate with big players in the global economy and counterbalance power asymmetries and foreign interference, as well as for achieving a sense of local ownership of policy decisions.

Hinder the development of knowledge-related capabilities in Southern countries

If not fairly paired with local expertise, the over-prioritisation of foreign experts in economic advisory work in Southern countries can hinder the accumulation of local capabilities for knowledge generation, problem solving and policymaking (Girvan, 2007). A more balanced representation of local experts, but especially women and experts outside the main cities, in economic policy advice, can act as a driving force for the strengthening of national advisory systems in Southern countries. Moreover, investing in building a more diverse ecosystem of expert economic advisors could ensure that the support will have staying power over a longer time horizon (Layode et al., 2021). In addition, governments and civil servants in the Global South must have the capacity to commission and manage experts. This includes ensuring proper systems and processes are in place and providing adequate training that will allow them to get the necessary expertise as well as push back when needed.

4. Implications and conclusions

A key part of economic advisory work reviewed involves the support of experts and their connection to governments in the Global South. The review has characterised the structural inequities in global knowledge systems, with a focus on Southern knowledge systems, and explored answers to the question of what knowledge counts in economic advisory work and the engagement with governments in Southern countries.

The concern about the existing inequities in economic knowledge systems is growing among experts and funders. As this review shows, this is particularly evident in the practice of economic policy advice. Philanthropic organisations have an opportunity to join with others to contribute to a global conversation on how to enhance the diversity of expertise informing economic policy. Based on the reflections presented in the previous pages, the following are points of consideration for philanthropic organisations that wish to help bridge governments' economic policy advice needs with more diverse sources of expertise.

Overcoming long-accumulated and deeply entrenched inequities is a complex process that takes time, and there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Moreover, there is a tension between taking a politically smart approach and an equity-smart approach, and the relevance of an approach depends on the context in which it is applied. While an approach may be relevant to transform inequities in economic policy advice, it may not be politically feasible if the politics of the decision-making processes require a different approach. Achieving perfection in balancing equity and the political economy is not the purpose. Rather, efforts should focus on anticipating opportunities to experiment with new approaches.

Philanthropic organisations may also be limited by the existing structures within which they operate, such as a lack of trained economic experts who can provide policy advice in certain countries. However, by investing in alternative structures, they can help shift the existing paradigm and make progress towards addressing these inequities.

Systems strengthening

- It is important to focus on improving both the supply of necessary expertise and the demand for more diverse expertise, to include Southern researchers, women, younger experts, among others. Seeking out existing expertise and matching it with government needs, to make lasting change, means that investing in developing the next and future generations of experts is needed. Philanthropic organisations could accompany experts, especially local ones, with research grants to allow them to invest in their capacities to act as advisers in the future.
- Philanthropic organisations could also identify partnerships with stakeholders such as funders, national organisations and regional associations, which would enable

the organisation to strategically invest in building stronger economic knowledge ecosystems, thus contributing to the future of Southern economic expertise.

- Balancing equity with political reality requires a nuanced approach, which does not involve completely disregarding international experts in favour of local ones. Rather, it is about finding a balance between the two, while at the same time recognising policymakers' agency and capacity to choose who they want to work with.

Redefining terms

- Development partners could redefine their understanding of 'international expertise' and support inter-regional advice by matching Global South governments with Global South experts based in other regions. For example, an economist in Latin America could advise a government in Southeast Asia, without necessarily having to rely on experts from the United States or Europe. This would be a more equitable approach that considers the diverse perspectives and experiences of experts from different regions.
- Broadening the criteria for evaluating expertise is crucial; for example, not relying substantially on publication in international journals since it is an unreliable signifier of experience that unfairly disadvantages local, racialised, and female experts.
- There is a need to generate more evidence that is better oriented towards addressing the practical needs of bridging governments' economic policy advice needs and available experts. One way to achieve this could be to talk to economic policy experts who regularly consult with governments; government representatives who demand this type of expertise; donors; and international organisations that bridge experts with governments. By engaging with these stakeholders, the organisation can gain a better understanding of their approach to localisation or partnerships, among other things. This will help in generating more evidence that is better aligned with the practical needs of the process of bridging governments' economic policy advice needs and available experts.

Filling in the gaps

- Building on the inequities in economic advisory processes outlined in the review, it would be worth delving deeper into how economic advice impacts various aspects of political and policy processes, including the representation and interests of marginalised groups, socio-economic outcomes and diversity in public debates.
- It is crucial for any philanthropic organisation to recognise any biases they may hold when connecting governments with economic experts. This can be achieved by reassessing the diversity of its pool of economic consultants, considering factors such as location/origin, gender, race, age, economic approach and methodological expertise. For instance, the organisation could include Global North experts based in the Global North, Global South experts based in the Global North, Global South experts based in the Global South, and Global North experts based in the Global South, working both in and outside the main districts.

- A funding organisation must have individuals who possess a good understanding of the local culture and politics. This would enable them to engage and represent themselves effectively in conversations with governments and experts. Such an approach would also help them gain insight into the politics and processes of change in a particular region.

Expanding the options

- Within philanthropic organisations, staff should have a comprehensive understanding of the context in which the request for or need for economic policy advice arises. This includes recognising the diversity of stakeholders who possess the required expertise.
- These staff should be intentional in finding the flexibility to present a range of diverse consultant options to government counterparts and encourage them to be open to working with and listening to a more diverse pool of advisors. This could involve pairing government-preferred options with another consultant who can bring a different perspective and provide access to usually excluded consultants to government policy dialogues and decision-making processes. By doing so, the organisation can help ensure that a broader range of voices is heard and that a more inclusive approach is adopted in economic policy discussions.

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