



MEERWISSEN

African-German Partners
for Ocean Knowledge

PLANNING AND CONDUCTING CO-DESIGN

The MeerWissen Initiative is aiming to support a new kind of science that supports societal transformation. This is not your usual research project! Here, emphasis is placed on partnership and societal impact.

A central objective of the MeerWissen initiative is to find solutions to societal problems and to support partnerships of equals, which means that “activities and measures are developed together by all partners, responsibilities are shared among African and German scientists in decision-making, project management and implementation, and the distribution of the budget reflects a partnership of equals.”



PART 1 JOINT VISION AND COMMON UNDERSTANDING

DEFINITION AND MEANING

Developing a joint vision for a research project forms the initial step in a co-design process, and leads to a co-developed project proposal tailored to societal needs and with a scientifically innovative conceptual/theoretical approach. The vision must include the realm of society and policy in order

for the project to be impactful and sustainable, and starts with transparent exchange of views and capacities, as well as knowns and unknowns.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

A joint vision pulls together a team to achieve a common goal. Projects require members to work together and bring

diverse strengths and backgrounds to bear. However, each team member has their own view of a system, their own motivations, agendas, and opinions that can render a shared understanding of processes and desired outcomes elusive. These differences can slow down decisions and lead to conflict and misunderstandings during the

project. Setting your agenda together (i.e., determining research questions, approaches, and methods jointly) is the prerequisite for more equity in cooperation, mutual trust, and shared ownership.

*"A vision is a positive mental image of the future... A shared vision can be developed through a group exercise that encourages people to think broadly and idealistically about the project outcomes."
(Thom, 1997)*

STEP 1: **Develop a (rough) project idea** → STEP 2: **Analyse the framework conditions where the research takes place** → STEP 3: **Collaboratively define a positive joint vision for the project**



PART 2 STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

DEFINITION AND MEANING

Partners describe those members of organizations (scientific and non-scientific) that apply for a research project, design it, and carry it out together. All partners hold responsibility for the project.

A stakeholder is anyone affected by or able to act on a particular issue regarding the research project. Their potential roles and engagement should be considered early on, particularly with regards to

the necessary resources. Stakeholders may be engaged to varying degrees in the co-design process (e.g. to integrate perspectives and receive feedback, to develop a joint vision, or to identify other stakeholders). Stakeholder engagement is a continuous, iterative process throughout the project cycle. The level and timing of engagement needs to be tailored to the stakeholder and development stage of the project. While there is no blueprint, successful

engagement activities benefit from a structured and logical approach that follows basic principles.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

The co-design phase represents a good opportunity to understand and build connections with stakeholders. It is vital to develop a good understanding of the various stakeholders' interests, preferences, motivations, expertise, capacities, and needs. Proper

engagement of stakeholders throughout co-design serves a range of goals. These include broadening the knowledge base and gaining a more holistic understanding (e.g., of different disciplines, non-academic knowledge, contextual knowledge), ensuring relevance of the research project to (local) stakeholders, increasing stakeholders' buy-in, acceptance and ownership, and thus project sustainability.

*"Engaging stakeholders as early as possible in the research [...] can increase the likelihood that research meets the needs and priorities of stakeholders, who are in consequence more likely to feel ownership of research outcomes."
(Durham et al, 2014)*

STEP 1: **Identify all potential stakeholders** → STEP 2: **Understand stakeholders, their motivation, and their relationship towards the project** → STEP 3: **Analyse or map stakeholders to prioritize: who is relevant?** → STEP 4: **Early stakeholder engagement during co-design** → STEP 5: **Plan for stakeholder engagement during project implementation**



PART 3 PROJECT AND PARTNERSHIP MANAGEMENT

DEFINITION AND MEANING

The co-design phase offers a dedicated time for exploring and agreeing on how you want to work together in this project and in this partnership. This includes coming to an understanding of your

partnership, fostering equity through distributing responsibilities and sharing in decisionmaking, supporting team- and trust building and joint learning. This requires effective and open communication: finding a common language and

fostering an appreciative rapport.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Clear communication and effective management leads to successful projects, as it keeps team members motivated

and guides their work. Defining the “how” of your partnership breaks down processes, tasks, and responsibilities clearly, while giving team members space to be equally heard. This increases productivity, creativity, and team success.

*"Partnerships with respect for the interests and limitations of other partners last longer, work more efficiently, and create more resilience to overcome inevitable partnership stress productively."
Research Fairness Initiative (RFI) Reporting Guide (2020)*

STEP 1: **Trust- and team-building** → STEP 2: **Schedule time to talk about project and partnership management** → STEP 3: **Identify roles and responsibilities in your partnership** → STEP 4: **Exchange about communication and decision-making** → STEP 5: **Compare, listen, and discuss** → STEP 6: **Come to an agreement and put it into writing** → STEP 7: **Boost joint learning in your partnership**



PART 4 SUSTAINABILITY

DEFINITION AND MEANING

Fostering sustainability with your project means maintaining momentum beyond the end of the project at site and with the partners. This includes a continuation of the partnership, implementation of

post-project activities, such as further dissemination, monitoring, use and maintenance of equipment, but also to further foster the uptake of research results. This part outlines aspects of sustainability that partners can

factor into the co-design and into the implementation of a project.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

To achieve a lasting, meaningful societal impact, the outcomes of co-designed

projects – from partnerships to institutions, structures and information – need to be sustained, beyond the duration of the project.

*"Many North-South partnerships are tied to individual research projects. The short-term nature of these partnerships often leads to loss of existing achievements, particularly in the South, with capacities left unused and researchers migrating away in search of other employment opportunities (brain drain). This need not necessarily happen if efforts are made early on, before a partnership ends [...], to secure what has been achieved."
KFPR (2018)*

STEP 1: **Invest in the creation of well-working and equitable partnerships** → STEP 2: **Schedule time to talk about project and partnership management** → STEP 3: **Ensure relevance to stakeholders and communities in which research is done** → STEP 4: **Encourage sustainability and equity in financing (budgets, purchasing and maintenance)** → STEP 5: **Share benefits: ensure data, information and material is shared and intellectual property is respected** → STEP 6: **Minimise adverse environmental, social and cultural impact** → STEP 7: **Secure outcomes and plan for dissemination and uptake**



MORE INFORMATION:
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On behalf of



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