

The EquiPar Tool Pilot Evaluation Report

Supporting Equitable Research Partnerships
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ABBREVIATIONS

ECR	Early career researcher
IDI	In-depth interview
LAG	Local advisory group
LMIC	Low- and Middle-Income Country
LSHTM	London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine
PI	Principal Investigator

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Partnerships are fundamental to global health research, with equity and inclusion being central to their success. The London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) is committed to fostering research partnerships that prioritize understanding, fairness, context awareness, trust, and mutual knowledge exchange from the outset. However, historical legacies of colonization, power imbalances, disparities in opportunities and resources, perceived knowledge hierarchies, and cultural norms can all lead to inequitable partnerships, particularly in collaborations involving institutions from low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).

Recognizing the need to address these challenges, a group of staff at LSHTM developed the [EquiPar Tool](#), to support equitable partnerships at the level of the individual research project. Drawing on established guidelines and staff experience in global health research, EquiPar was designed to prompt research teams to systematically consider and address partnership issues. It covers three themes: (i) People Management and Relationships, (ii) Research Activities and Outputs, and (iii) Contracting and Resource Management. Under each theme are domains which contain a set of open-ended questions for project teams to reflect upon, together with links to helpful resources.

To assess whether EquiPar would be a useful tool for wider adoption, and to gather insights for its improvement, it was piloted over a six-month period in 2023 with six diverse research projects involving LSHTM and LMIC partners. The pilot was evaluated to assess the perceptions and experiences of LSHTM staff and our partners in using EquiPar in their teams. We explored how and why teams used EquiPar, their views on its usefulness, changes made to their partnership as a result, challenges encountered, and suggestions for improvement. The evaluation used a mixed-methods approach, including an anonymous online survey (n=26 respondents), in-depth interviews (IDIs) (n=22), and four workshops.

All participating projects had engaged with EquiPar in some way. A majority of survey respondents had reviewed the Tool, over a third had participated in EquiPar-focused meetings or workshops, and around a quarter had discussed it during regular project meetings. Projects chose different strategies for using EquiPar; for example, three projects developed EquiPar-related surveys for their team members, and two projects used a “Traffic Light Tool” to highlight domains needing attention.

Most respondents viewed EquiPar’s content as comprehensive and well-structured. Its flexibility was valued, with the potential to use it across multiple issues, activities, and stages in the project cycle. Many participants found EquiPar user-friendly, though a minority struggled to understand it due to linguistic barriers, or found it complicated and lengthy.

Overall views on EquiPar’s usefulness are positive. The survey found that 100% of LSHTM and 80% of partner respondents found it to be ‘quite’ or ‘very useful’. Around half of LSHTM and partner respondents agreed or strongly agreed that it had led to positive changes. All LSHTM respondents and over two-thirds of partners agreed or strongly agreed that they would use the tool again, and more than two-thirds would recommend it to others.

A key benefit of the tool was in enhancing awareness and encouraging reflection on equity issues. While many team members spoke of already being committed to fostering equity, they appreciated the structured framework EquiPar provided for addressing fairness and equity. It was said to have empowered several partners to question inequitable practices that may otherwise be normalized, and also helped to highlight some unexpected concerns. For example, in addition to raising Global North-Global South disparities, attention was also drawn to inequities related to gender and professional

hierarchies. A key benefit of EquiPar was said to be in acting as a catalyst for dialogue, facilitating open conversations, and in some cases promoting deeper reflection and critical thinking.

In terms of changes stimulated by EquiPar, some respondents mentioned taking a more process-orientated approach to their partnership, placing greater emphasis on communication, expectations, and opportunities for all team members. Using EquiPar was also said to lead to greater clarity on roles and resources required, contributing to mutual respect and understanding. In some projects drawing attention to equity issues had prompted additional capacity-strengthening activities, or supported more inclusive authorship practices, and one project had found important links between EquiPar and their environmental sustainability goals. However, several respondents noted that it could be challenging to attribute specific changes to EquiPar, which formed just one input into broader, ongoing conversations about fair practices and equitable behaviours within their teams.

There was also some evidence that respondents had used EquiPar beyond the research collaborations included in the pilot. Several staff had found it useful in their other research partnerships, or in new funding proposals, and some had used it to support partnerships with non-researchers, such as community members or advisory groups.

Key enablers for EquiPar use included support from project leads, overall team interest in equity, having an EquiPar Champion within the project, and integrating EquiPar into the project planning process. Conversely, common challenges mentioned were time constraints, and a lack of funding for an EquiPar Champion. Respondents also noted that ingrained gender and professional hierarchies could be a barrier to frank discussion of equity issues. Finally, most participants felt that funder requirements and LSHTM's contractual processes created inequities that could not easily be dealt with at the level of individual projects.

Overall, the findings indicate that EquiPar could be a useful tool for many partnerships, and warrants further investment, development and dissemination, both within and beyond LSHTM.

Specifically, we recommend the following next steps:

1. Make minor amendments to the EquiPar Tool content and wording, and enhance its readability and clarity.
2. Commission a designer to develop a user-friendly online version.
3. Develop enhanced guidance on options for using EquiPar within projects, ranging from a light-touch to an in-depth approach
4. Review and expand the links to resources, examples and case studies.
5. Encourage use within LSHTM research partnerships, through awareness raising communications, orientation and training sessions, highlighting equitable partnerships issues in the Leo ethics form, and establishing a Community of Practice on Equitable Partnerships
6. Disseminate information on EquiPar to the broader Global Health community, through publication, and the LSHTM website, newsletters and social media channels.
7. Address outstanding concerns with LSHTM structures and systems that inhibit equitable partnerships.
8. Continue to advocate for change to enhance equitable partnerships in the wider sectoral environment.

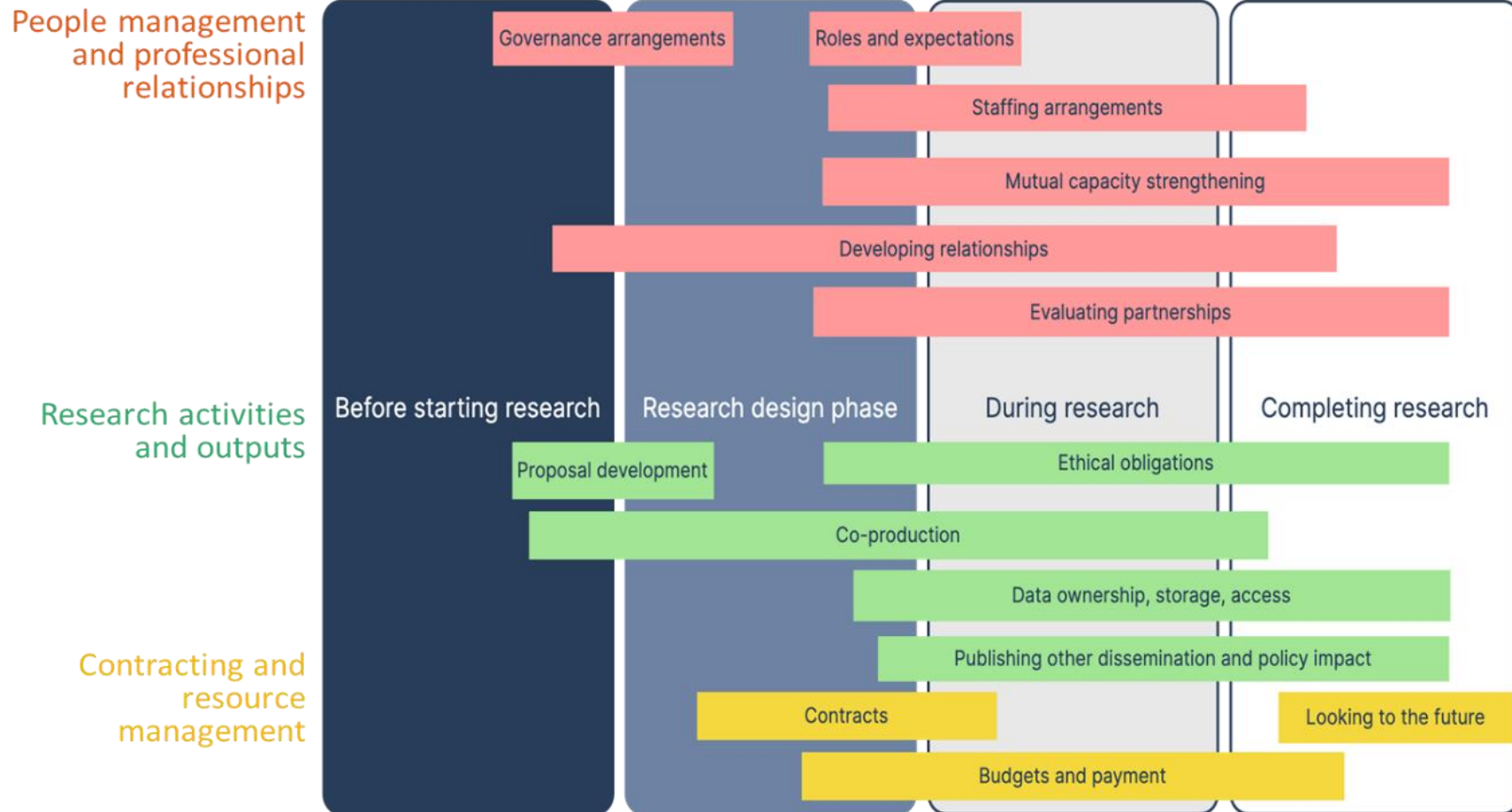
INTRODUCTION

Partnerships are fundamental to global health research, with equity and inclusion being central to their success. Equity involves principles of fairness, justice, and the distribution of resources according to needs. The London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) is committed to fostering research partnerships that prioritize understanding, fairness, context awareness, trust, and mutual knowledge exchange from the outset. However, historical legacies of colonization, power imbalances, disparities in opportunities and resources, perceived knowledge hierarchies, and cultural norms can all lead to inequitable partnerships, particularly in collaborations involving institutions from low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) (1-3).

In 2021-22 a group of staff at LSHTM investigated approaches to improve the equity of our international research partnerships. We reviewed the key principles and guidelines available at the time, including the Canadian Coalition for Global Health Research (CCGHR) Partnership Assessment Toolkit (4); the Research Fairness Initiative Reporting Guide (5); and the Swiss Commission for Research Partnership with Developing Countries' (KFPE) Guide for Transboundary Research Partnerships (6). Drawing from these guidelines and our collective experience, we developed "[EquiPar](#)" to support equitable partnerships at the level of the individual research project (Appendix 1). EquiPar was designed to prompt research teams to systematically consider and address partnership issues, thereby promoting effective and equitable collaboration. The Tool is one part of LSHTM's broader effort to enhance partnership equity, led by the Equitable Partnerships Coordinating Group, which also considers institution-level factors, such as research ethics, research grant finance, and contracting. These initiatives have been part of LSHTM's Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity (EDI) Strategy, and align with the Research Equity workstream within LSHTM's Decolonising Global Health group.

EquiPar is organised around three key themes: (i) People Management and Relationships, (ii) Research Activities and Outputs, and (iii) Contracting and Resource Management (Figure 1). Each theme contains a number of domains. For example, the "People Management and Relationships" theme addresses Governance, Roles and Expectations, Capacity Strengthening, Equitable Staffing, Relationships, and Partnership Evaluation.

Figure 1: Domains across the three themes in the EquiPar Tool



Each domain contains a set of questions for project teams to reflect upon, and links to a set of helpful resources. For example, questions under Governance are:

What are our governance arrangements?

- *Do they support equitable partnership?*
- *Have we considered opportunities for distributed leadership?*
- *How will we communicate? (e.g. regular check-in calls / emails / platforms such as MS teams)*
- *What principles or approaches will we follow to foster transparency in our partnership?*
- *How will we deal with any conflicts / concerns that may arise?*
- *Do partners know who to contact at LSHTM if they feel their concerns are not addressed properly within the project?*
- *Are all partners given the opportunity to read and comment on these guidelines?*

This Tool is intentionally structured as open-ended questions, recognising that the appropriate responses will vary across projects, depending on their size, complexity, experience of the partners, funding available etc. While suggestions are provided on how to use EquiPar within projects, this is intentionally left flexible, with no obligation to complete checklists or reports, though internal documentation of discussions is encouraged.

There is considerable interest in such approaches to improving the equity of partnerships, with EquiPar being one of a number of tools and frameworks proposed in recent years (7-15). It was therefore important to assess the utility of EquiPar and identify any areas requiring improvement before recommending it more widely for use within and beyond LSHTM. A research group involving LSHTM staff and LMIC partners was therefore set up to pilot and evaluate the EquiPar Tool. The Tool was piloted over six months in a selection of research projects involving collaborations between LSHTM and partners from low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), to assess the perceptions and experiences of both LSHTM and partner staff. While recognising that equity is important in all partnerships, the pilot focused on collaborations with LMIC partners due to the heightened inequities that often arise when institutions in low-resource settings partner with those in high-resource environments.

This report presents the findings from the evaluation of the EquiPar pilot, and a set of recommendations for further development and uptake of the Tool. It is hoped that the results of the pilot will help refine EquiPar, and ensure it is a valuable resource for LSHTM partnerships and the broader global health research community.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE EVALUATION

The aim of the evaluation was to assess the perceptions and experiences of LSHTM staff and our partners in using the EquiPar Tool in selected research projects, and to identify options for improvement.

Specific Objectives:

1. To describe why and how research teams used EquiPar (or why they did not)
2. To assess team members' perceptions of the utility of EquiPar in planning, managing and monitoring their partnership, and any challenges they identified

3. To document any changes to the operation of partnerships made as a result of using EquiPar
4. To identify areas for improvement in EquiPar in terms of its content, clarity and ease of use, and to provide advice on how it could be used by research teams.

The focus of the evaluation was on the research teams' experiences of using the Tool and operational changes made in the partnerships, rather than attempting to assess the impact of the Tool on the quality of the partnerships, which was considered too ambitious during this six month pilot period.

EVALUATION METHODS

We employed a mixed-methods study design, evaluating the use of EquiPar in selected research partnerships over a six month period. Although six months is relatively short within the projects' overall timelines, this period was chosen to gather early experiences with the Tool and to make an improved version available relatively quickly.

The pilot began with an introductory workshop to introduce the EquiPar Tool, followed by two subsequent workshops to gather early impressions and support the partnerships in their interactions with the Tool. At the end of the six-month period, the evaluation team gathered data through three methods: (i) an online survey of project staff who had engaged with the Tool; (ii) in-depth interviews with a subset of staff from each project; and (iii) a closing workshop where preliminary findings were presented and discussed.

3.1 Selection of pilot projects

We initially purposively selected eight projects to pilot the Tool, based on the following eligibility criteria:

- involved LSHTM staff, and researchers from one or more partner institution in LMICs (could also involve researchers from HICs and research consortia with several partners)
- involved partnerships where LSHTM was the prime recipient of funding
- did not involve staff from the pilot evaluation study team

We aimed to achieve diversity across the selected projects in terms of geography, discipline, partnership size, partnership type (e.g. large and established institutions v. smaller or newer ones), project location in fragile vs non-fragile settings, stage of the project (early, middle or late stage), and funder. We avoided selecting more than one project involving the same partner organisations, or the same LSHTM staff.

To identify potential projects, we circulated an LSHTM-wide email inviting projects to consider participating in the pilot evaluation. We encouraged staff to consult with project Principal Investigators (PIs) and their partners regarding their interest in participating. Interested teams were asked to complete a brief template detailing the research project and partnership. Selected projects were required to obtain and submit support letters from their collaborators, affirming their participation in the study. Eight research projects were initially selected, of which two were unable to continue: one due to the PI's transfer to another institution and the other due to time constraints.

Six projects completed the pilot, representing a diverse array of research partnerships. They involved between three and nine partners (including LSHTM), and lasted 2 to 5 years. Three projects were partnerships solely between LSHTM and LMIC institutions, while the other three included

collaborations with both LMICs and high-income country (HIC) institutions. Most LMIC partners were based in Africa, with one located in Southeast Asia. The projects included staff from all three LSHTM faculties, and the MRC The Gambia Unit. Four of the 6 projects had UK funders, with grant values ranging from £2.7million to nearly £12 million. The organizational structures of the teams varied: four were organized by work packages and expert teams, one was structured around country teams, and another was organised around topic focus. The projects were at different stages of their research cycles: one was in the early stages, three were midway, and two were in the late stages.

3.2 Online survey

At the conclusion of the six-month pilot, we conducted an anonymous online survey targeting all team members in the selected projects. The aim was to gather responses from LSHTM and partner organisations' senior research staff, early career researchers, administrative staff, and postgraduate students. The survey link was shared with 45 representatives across the selected projects, who were requested to share the link further within their teams. Periodic email reminders were sent to the project representatives to encourage responses.

The online survey featured a mix of open- and closed-ended questions (see Appendix 2: Survey Tool), addressing respondents' research affiliations, country of research organisation, awareness of the EquiPar Tool, use of the Tool across the different themes, perceived usefulness in planning, managing and monitoring the partnership, and any observed changes in project operations attributed to EquiPar. Additionally, it included Likert scale questions to gauge agreement with statements regarding EquiPar's usefulness, time burden, and future intentions around use and sharing it with others. The survey ended with a few open-ended questions that solicited further feedback and suggestions for improvement.

The survey was developed using [Jisc Online Surveys](#) (version 3) and piloted with five members of the research team. The survey was launched on 15th December 2023 and remained open for 3 months until 15th March 2024.

We analysed the survey data using descriptive statistics and analysed variations in responses between LSHTM and partner staff.

3.3 In-depth interviews (IDIs)

About 4-6 respondents were invited from each selected project for the IDIs. Interviewees were purposively selected from LSHTM and partner organisations to include those who had engaged with EquiPar and represented diverse roles in the project, including researchers and administrators. The EquiPar Evaluation Study Coordinator contacted project PIs in LSHTM and partner organisations and asked for their help in recruiting the initial respondents, including the lead team member from each institution, an administrator or manager, and an early career researcher (staff or student), aiming to ensure gender representation. Additional contacts were identified with help from initial respondents.

The IDIs were semi-structured, and the topic guide (see Appendix 3: IDI Topic Guide) covered the nature of the partnership, why and how EquiPar was used and the interviewee's involvement in that, their perceptions of the EquiPar's scope, utility and ease of use, the time and any other resources involved, any challenges they identified, changes to the operation of partnerships made as a result of using EquiPar, any unintended positive or negative consequences, and areas for improvement.

The Study Coordinator and at least one of the PIs conducted the first three interviews in order to assess how well the guide was working, and minor modifications were made based on this collective experience. The IDIs were conducted between late September 2023 and late February 2024. Interviews lasted around one hour and were conducted on Zoom by the Study Coordinator, recorded,

and transcribed using Zoom’s auto-transcription service, with the draft transcript reviewed and edited by the interviewer.

IDI data were analysed using the framework approach. Following familiarisation with the data, a coding tree was developed, and two researchers coded two transcripts in parallel. The transcripts were then coded in NVivo, and analysed thematically.

3.4 Study participants

Twenty-six respondents completed the online survey, with six from LSHTM (two each from projects 02 and 03, and one each from projects 04 and 05) and 20 from partner organizations (three from project 01, six from project 02, one from project 03, four each from project 04 and 06, and two from project 05)¹.

IDIs were conducted with 22 respondents. A total of 14 individuals from LSHTM were invited to participate, of which 13 completed the interviews (one from project 01, two each from projects 02, 03 and 05, and three each from projects 04 and 06), while one did not respond. From partner organizations, 20 potential participants were invited, of whom 10 responded and nine were interviewed (two from project 01, four from project 02 and three from project 05), with one respondent unavailable during the study timeframe. One project, which had not yet commenced at the time of the IDIs, was unable to provide any potential respondents. IDI respondents’ roles ranged from project leaders and managers/coordinators to early career researchers and a peer researcher (Table 1).

There were more partner respondents in the survey (20 partner vs. 6 LSHTM respondents) and more LSHTM respondents in the IDIs (9 partner vs. 13 LSHTM respondents).

Table 1: Distribution of IDI respondents by organisational affiliation (LSHTM and partners) and roles in the project

Respondents	LSHTM	Partners	Total
PIs/Co-Is	5	5	10
Key contacts/Early career researchers	7	-	7
Coordinators/Managers	1	3	4
Peer researcher	-	1	1
Total	13	9	22

3.5 Opening and closing consultative workshops

We conducted an opening or introductory workshop (March 31, 2023) at the start of the pilot to introduce EquiPar to staff from the selected projects, explain the study, and gather initial impressions and ideas around using the Tool. Participants worked in small groups to brainstorm and exchange ideas for bringing EquiPar into their projects, sharing suggestions for additional resources, and raising and discussing any questions about the EquiPar Tool and its implementation. Towards the end of the evaluation, a closing workshop was organised to present and discuss preliminary findings, and seek

¹ It was not possible to calculate a response rate for the outlet survey; we shared the survey link with 45 project representatives, but we do not have information on the total number of people that they passed this onto within their teams.

advice and recommendations on the future use of EquiPar. Each workshop lasted for one and a half hours, was held on Zoom, and included presentations, discussions, and interactive activities. Twenty-eight participants attended the introductory workshop, and 20 attended the closing workshop. The workshops were recorded, and recordings were made available for members of participating projects who could not attend.

Additionally, a couple of shorter follow-on workshops were organized virtually between the introductory and closing workshops. These were designed to maintain ongoing communication with the selected research projects and address any barriers and challenges in implementing EquiPar.

3.6 Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee of LSHTM (Reference: 28150). Informed consent was obtained from PIs of each selected research project participating in the pilot evaluation.

Informed consent was obtained remotely from survey and IDI respondents in accordance with ethical guidelines. Survey participants were required to read through an information sheet as part of the online survey, with starting the survey questions contingent on confirmation of consent. IDI respondents were provided with an information sheet and consent prior to the interviews and asked to return the signed consent forms via email. Workshop participants were informed that the sessions were recorded and that workshop discussions would be used in the evaluation.

To maintain confidentiality, we do not name individual participants or research projects in this report, and avoid any fine categorisation of respondents that could inadvertently identify them.

RESULTS

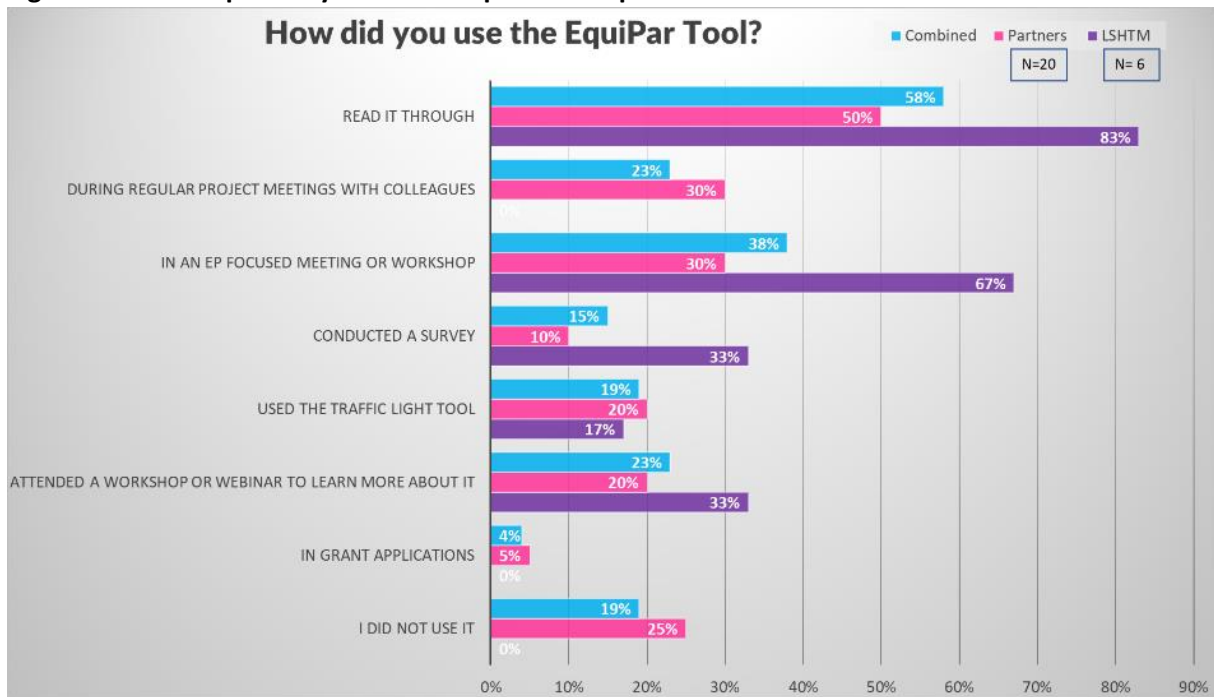
The results section begins with an overview of the EquiPar Tool's utilization by the pilot projects, and the implementation strategies they used. Following this, we explore EquiPar's perceived usefulness within project partnerships, highlighting both the enabling factors and challenges encountered. Finally, we consider respondents' perceptions of the impact on their partnerships of using EquiPar. We draw on both the survey and in-depth interviews across the results.

4.1 Use of EquiPar by the pilot projects

All projects had engaged with EquiPar in some capacity, reflecting their different stages in the project cycle. Familiarity with EquiPar was evident across the IDI respondents, with active engagement increasing and diversifying gradually during the pilot. In the online survey all LSHTM respondents said they had utilized the tool, but 25% of partner respondents said they had not. The survey further documented the extent and types of engagement (Figure 2). Fifty-eight percent of the respondents had read through and reviewed the tool. More than a third had participated in equity-focused meetings or workshops where EquiPar was discussed, while 23% (all partner respondents) reported using the tool in regular meetings with their colleagues. Fifteen percent had participated in an EquiPar-focused project survey, and 19% had used the EquiPar Traffic light tool. The Traffic light tool was developed by the EquiPar team and involves colour-coding the EquiPar domains: red indicating high concern, amber indicating minor concern, and green indicating satisfactory progress; in IDIs, two projects reported using this to highlight areas for discussion or action. One online survey respondent had mentioned the tool in a new grant application. In the IDIs, respondents from one partner also

reported using EquiPar to facilitate discussions with their local implementation partners and advisory groups.

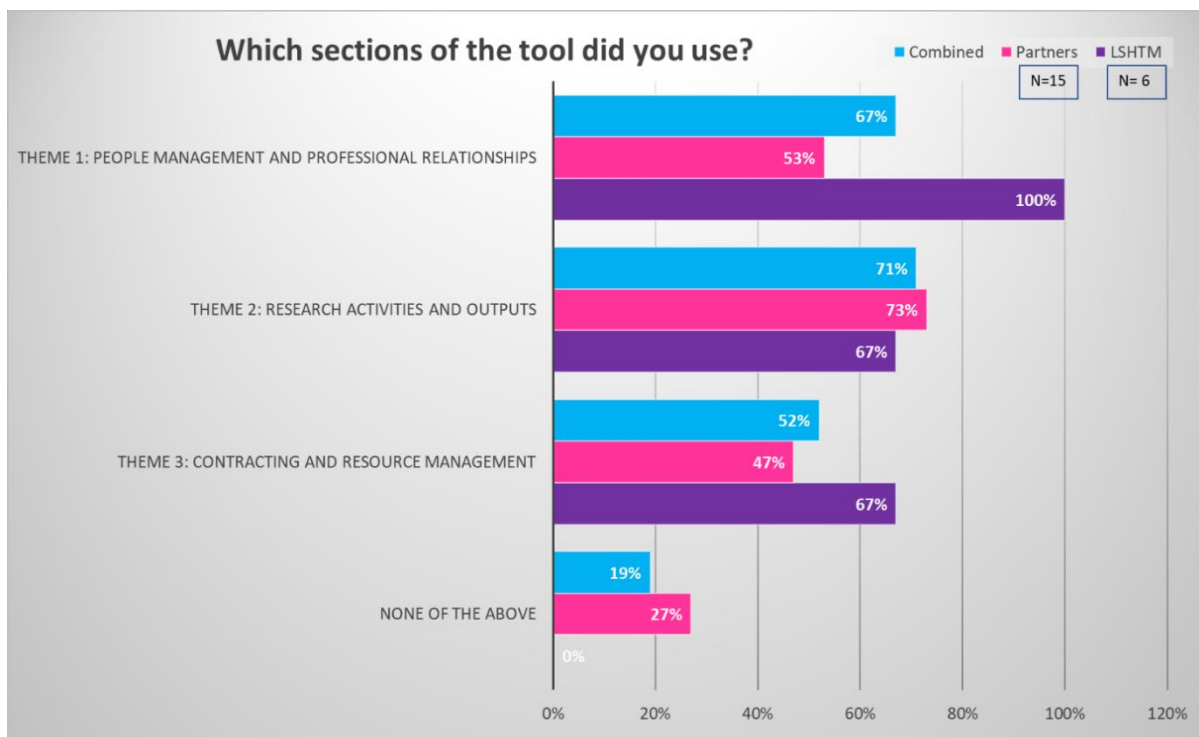
Figure 2: Use of EquiPar by LSHTM and partner respondents



Source: EquiPar online survey

Respondents who had used the tool had engaged with the three themes in varying proportions (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Use of different EquiPar themes by respondents who used the tool

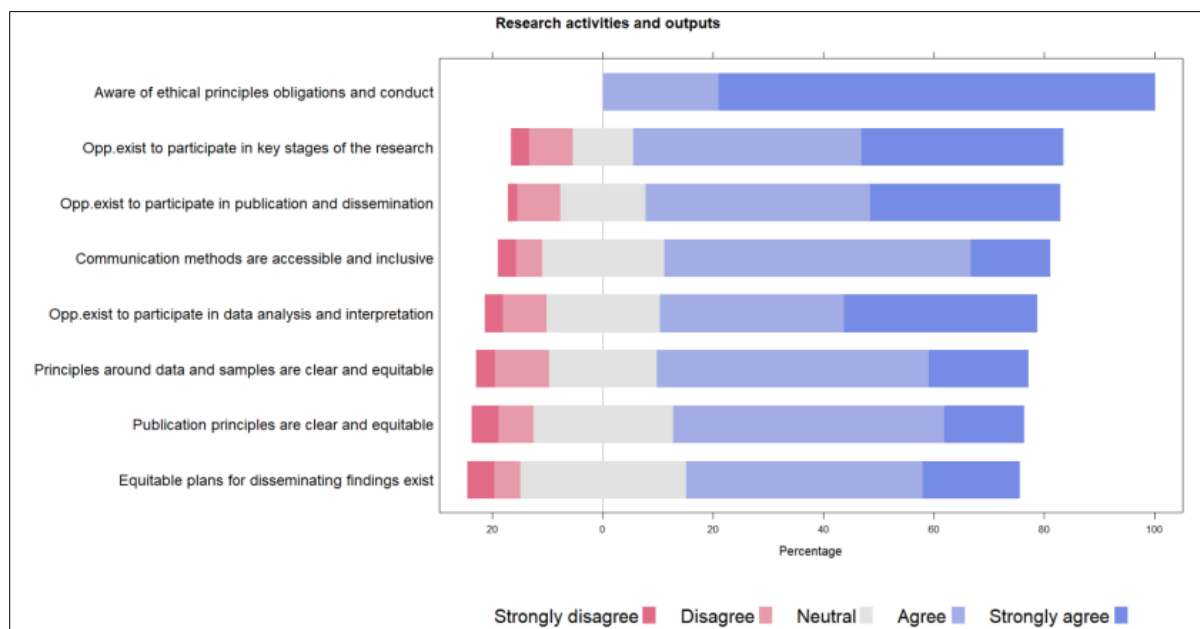


Source: EquiPar online survey

A higher proportion of LSHTM staff compared to partner staff had used the People Management and Professional Relationships theme (100% vs. 53%) and the Contracting and Resource Management theme (67% vs. 47%). A similar percentage of partner and LSHTM staff had engaged with the Research Activities and Outputs theme (73% and 67%). Although the Contracting and Resource Management theme was the least used by partners, the IDIs indicated that it nonetheless heightened awareness of equitable resource allocation and procedures among all the teams. Further, it was pointed out that not all staff had an influence on contracting and resource management, and this theme was mainly relevant to a more limited set of project staff.

Three projects had developed and administered EquiPar-related surveys to their team, typically including (at least initially) a comprehensive list of questions derived from the tool. These surveys were employed to gather baseline information and/or to facilitate team discussions based on the data collected from their team. Figure 4 provides an example of the findings from one of these surveys, showing domains in the ‘Research Activities and Outputs’ theme ranked according to the level of agreement of the respondents with each statement.

Figure 4: An example of adapting EquiPar to develop an online survey by a pilot project



Source: An EquiPar based online survey conducted by one of the pilot projects

Different teams experienced varying levels of success with their internal survey response rates, leading them to experiment with reducing survey length:

‘So now we’re at this point where I’m supposed to come up with a shorter survey with the questions that are super relevant. Takes no more than 10 min. So I’ve tried to limit it to just 10 questions...And that is something that we’re going to like now circulate once every 3 months before the all-team meeting, so that if there are any issues from it, we can discuss those in our meeting.’ (LSHTM ECR P01)

Several respondents, including those from projects that had not used a survey, regarded regular and focused meetings as equally important as surveys. These meetings were valued not only for their own merit but also for their ability to provide a deeper exploration of the issues identified through the quantitative survey data:

‘I think the criticism ...that came out with the traffic light system is... if you’re just recording green yellow red, you’re not really thinking much about how you can improve on it whereas a focus group

could get a lot more in depth information.. so we're going to conduct both the traffic light system and the focus group in parallel.' (LSHTM ECR, P03)

4.2 EquiPar content and structure

Comprehensiveness and appropriateness of content: Most IDI respondents perceived EquiPar as comprehensive and well-structured, covering important areas related to equitable partnerships. Although a few participants criticised the tool for being too broad, many others felt it successfully highlighted areas needing attention, even in familiar domains such as publication, and helped clarify responsibilities to address the gaps.

Adaptability and versatility: EquiPar was seen as flexible, with the potential to use it across multiple issues, and at all the different stages of the project cycle. This was reflected on by a Co-PI:

'I particularly liked the idea that you can actually use it at any point of your research relationship of your partnership either at the beginning or in the middle or even at the end. That makes it more open, you know...so depending on where you are in the research cycle.. And I am already thinking of using it even beyond the consortium research.' (Co-PI, P03)

IDI respondents appreciated the versatility of the tool, in that it could be implemented in many ways, ranging from diverse meeting and discussion forums, anonymous feedback mechanisms like surveys, traffic light tools, and through more introspective methods like self-reflection.

Early career researchers from three of the pilot projects appreciated the flexible ways that EquiPar could be integrated into a regular appraisal of equity principles throughout the research project, leading to habit formation:

'Some of the questions can be very well-integrated in general in the planning process...for example under the people management - something like what are you comfortable with... weekly meetings, monthly meetings...you could set up maybe 5 min at the beginning - what works well and doesn't work well. Those little things that may become habits rather than an additional task, that makes sense. I think the tool is broad enough to be used in a very versatile way. So you can be very strict about the traffic light system, but equally you can also just use it as I said...reflect and add maybe little habits here and there that could improve the equity of the partnership.' (LSHTM ECR P05)

While the tool's flexibility was a key strength, a few respondents said they were expecting a more structured tool, akin to a checklist that would guide them with more clarity, not only in use of the tool but also in addressing issues raised.

'I know that the intention of the tool is to map your own kind of way forward with it. But I do find that some people were getting caught up on, but what is the tool? Like what is the actual tool and what, you know, like what are the steps to use the tool rather than thinking about the tool as a starting point.' (LSHTM ECR, P03)

Structure and ease of use: Many participants found the tool to be user-friendly, well-structured, and not overwhelming. As it was organized into themes and did not contain overly complicated language, it was accessible to a wide range of users. This was not a unanimous opinion however and a few respondents encountered difficulties in comprehending the tool due to linguistic barriers. One partner said they found the tool quite complicated initially, and it was only after attending several workshops and meetings that it was comprehensible. Others also perceived the EquiPar as quite lengthy and complex. This could sometimes make it difficult to determine which parts were most relevant for the team at their particular research stage. PIs and EquiPar champions within different projects said they

faced difficulties in explaining some aspects of the tool to partner staff in a way that was easily understandable. As an EquiPar champion explained:

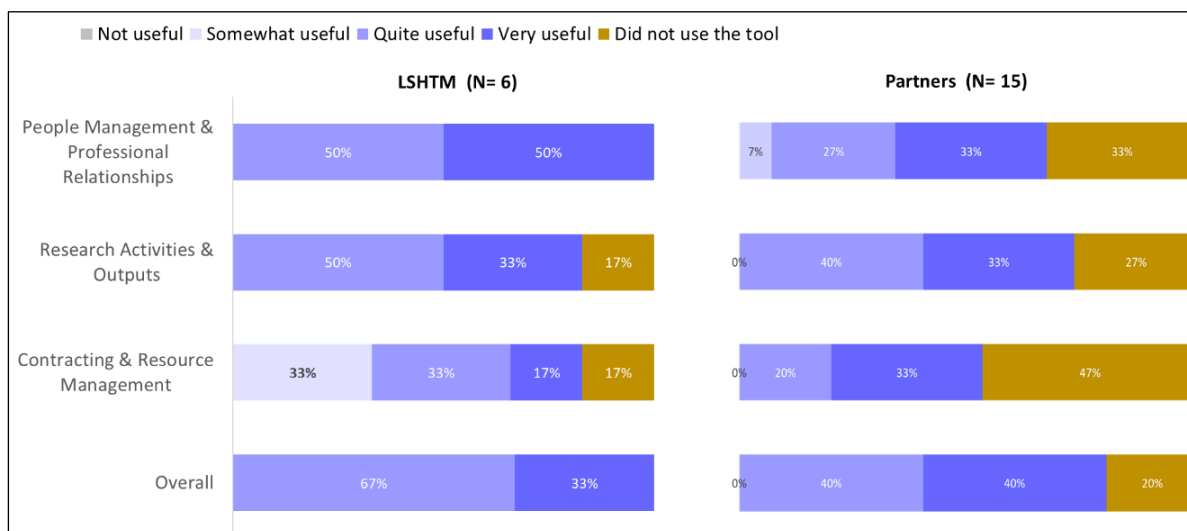
'The tool obviously is supposed to be flexible and adaptable which is good but it wasn't something we could immediately like show to partners and kind of go through...I think we did have to spend time understanding the different things we should consider and so converting that into like discussion points and questions in a way that are sort of understandable for everybody.' (LSHTM coordinator P06)

4.3 Perceived usefulness of EquiPar

4.3.1 Overall perceptions of usefulness

The online survey revealed that 100% of LSHTM and 80% of partner respondents found EquiPar to be 'quite' or 'very useful' (Figure 5). In terms of specific EquiPar themes, all LSHTM respondents and 60% of partner respondents rated the People Management theme as 'quite', or 'very useful'. Additionally, over 70% of both LSHTM and partner respondents found the Research Activities and Outputs theme to be 'quite' or 'very useful'. Comparatively, the Contracting and Resource Management theme was considered 'quite' or 'very useful' by only 50% of LSHTM and 53% of partner respondents, with 47% of the latter indicating that they did not utilize this theme. No respondent found any theme to be 'not useful'.

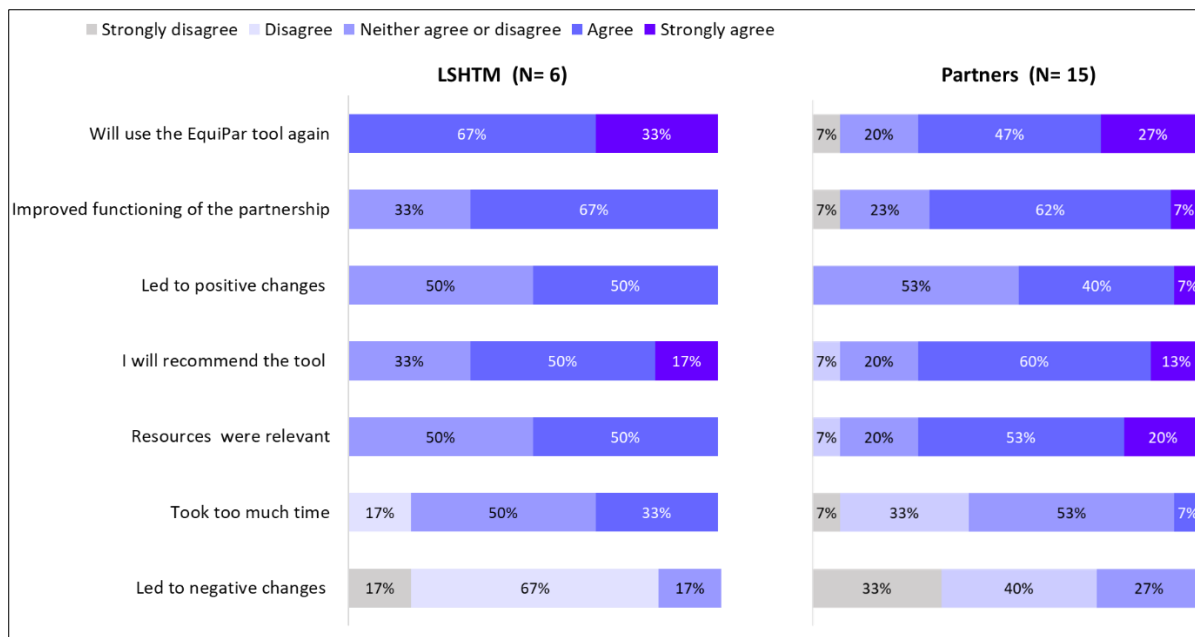
Figure 5: Perceived usefulness of the EquiPar themes by respondents who used the tool



Source: EquiPar online survey

Approximately half of the LSHTM and partner respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the tool had led to positive changes (Figure 6). More than two-thirds agreed or strongly agreed that the tool had improved the functioning of the partnership. All LSHTM respondents and over two-thirds of partner respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they would use the tool again, and more than two-thirds would recommend it to others. None of the LSHTM or partner respondents agreed or strongly agreed the tool led to negative changes.

Figure 6: Perceived value of EquiPar for research partnerships by respondents who used the tool



Source: EquiPar online survey

Data from the IDIs revealed additional insights into the usefulness of the tool, described below in terms of enhancing awareness and reflection, supporting processes to enhance equity, encouraging changes in partnerships, and, in some cases, use beyond the pilot projects.

4.3.2 Enhancing awareness and encouraging discussion and reflection

Providing a structured framework for considering equity: Although the issues about equitable partnerships were felt to be intuitive and well-known, EquiPar provided a structured method to address fairness and equity in partnerships, which was seen as a significant advancement to earlier discussions. This was a common response from senior and early career researchers:

'I've worked in.. in different countries with different partners and the way we measure equity is by sitting down and having a conversation about how it really feels and the... extent of what we've done. And to actually have a tool.....makes this more automated in a way but also harder to ignore in the sense that you have numbers and it is measured.' (LSHTM PI, P02)

'I think like it has a lot of value in the sense that it kind of tries to put like, a formal, structure in place like it's all very well to kind of talk about being fair and in the ways that things are done between institutions, but this is the first time that there's something that you can actually use in a systemic and structured manner.' (LSHTM ECR P01)

Introducing EquiPar into projects provided a focused approach to ensuring equitable partnerships rather than just considering partnership issues as a general project management task. A few participants found the tool helpful in holding themselves accountable for equitable practices, even if they already had a fair understanding of what this involved.

'I found it valuable to, again, give me sort of a starting point on things to think about which I've often probably been thinking about in a less structured way or you know, put on the back burner a bit or neglected. And in terms of how I think it's most important... useful I would say... I think for me it's a number of ways... like just as a tool for personal reflection on how maybe some things we've done well, some things I could have done better'. (LSHTM PI, P06).

Raising awareness of equity issues: For all the projects EquiPar had generated a greater awareness of equity. While many PIs and Co-PIs spoke of being committed to fostering equity in partnerships and had long considered these issues, EquiPar empowered several partners to question inequitable practices that may otherwise be normalized, such as exclusion from authorship due to limited involvement in paper writing. More generally, using EquiPar was said to raise awareness among staff of the importance of equity and the value of partners in research collaborations from early on in their careers. As one early career researcher explained:

'I think in general an understanding like... What are partners for? Like what do we want to get out of this.. simple as it sounds, but what do they bring to the table? What do we bring to the table? Why is it so important to work with other people who have other expertise....than we do. So I think that just a general understanding of what is a partnership even, that's important in research. And then I think, again, also critically thinking what does equity mean in this research context? For which I think again the tool is really useful because it covers such a broad range of things.' (LSHTM ECR, P03)

Some of the equity issues raised were unexpected for teams. For example, one project discovered through their EquiPar-based survey that many partner staff felt they did not fully understand the ethical procedures implemented within the project, despite project training on these. This issue was a surprise to PIs who had not expected ethics to be a source of concern in the partnership.

Several respondents reported that EquiPar helped identify inequities beyond the anticipated Global North - Global South disparities. These additional inequities included those related to gender, professional hierarchies, differential allocation of resources among different work packages, especially between qualitative and quantitative research teams, and data sharing imbalances between senior collaborating PIs and junior researchers. One valuable contribution of the project surveys was said to be raising equity issues between early career and more senior project staff members, which were harder to raise in face-to-face discussions.

Facilitating discussions, opening conversations, encouraging transparency: The tool facilitated team discussions on equity, with the thematic questions serving as catalysts for dialogue, and pinpointing areas requiring attention. By identifying issues and prompting conversations, the tool offered a flexible framework to prompt activities to align with equity principles.

'I think for me the tool is actually extremely useful. Because it exposes both.. partners to checks and balances to actually like understand what's working well. And what's actually not working too well, and what's not working at all. I think this is good for partners to know. And then...when you look at that tool, you know, you...and the partner will understand exactly who is responsible for what is not working well.' (Programme Manager, P03)

By facilitating open conversations, EquiPar in a sense permitted teams to be honest and open about their challenges and concerns and allowed them to discuss issues they might not have felt comfortable raising otherwise. It helped in communicating what was important in their partnerships from an equitable perspective, setting clear expectations, and ensuring everyone was on the same page about project goals and challenges.

Promoting reflection and critical thinking: As EquiPar prompted participants to reflect on various aspects of their partnerships, this also encouraged deeper introspection about the fairness and inclusivity of their practices, partnership dynamics, and collaboration. These issues were said to cut across all three EquiPar themes.

4.3.3 Encouraging changes to the functioning of partnerships

Promoted process-oriented thinking about equity issues: Using EquiPar shifted a few participants towards a more process-oriented approach to partnerships where they considered not only the outcomes but also the processes leading to those outcomes, including communication, expectations, and opportunities for all team members. There was a recognition of the need to hear from partners about their expectations and definitions of equitable partnerships, and the need for all partners to feel that they could express themselves clearly and that they would be heard. A few teams were proactively exploring the establishing of codes of conduct for current as well as future projects as a result.

Supported clarity on roles and resource allocation: Role clarity was an important aspect of equity for several partner respondents, as noted by this Coordinator:

'I think when we are talking about equitable partnerships, we should identify our contribution to the.. to the common project and then the role and responsibility of each partner to be clear' (Senior Coordinator P06)

Many partner respondents in particular said that EquiPar assisted in identifying and clarifying roles, responsibilities, and resources required for the project. It helped in better management and allocation of resources and staff, and in developing mutual respect and understanding. The emphasis within EquiPar on the importance of early engagement between partners and co-creation of research was also perceived to have supported the meaningful input of all research partners throughout the research process.

Promoted training and capacity building: By drawing attention to equity principles and clarifying roles, EquiPar was said to have helped to ensure that capacity sharing and strengthening was inbuilt in the projects. Examples of areas where EquiPar had stimulated additional training included research ethics, good clinical practice, and capacity strengthening in areas such as academic writing. This ensured that all team members were well-equipped with the skills and knowledge to carry out their roles effectively. This was said to particularly benefit early career researchers with use of EquiPar encouraging them to share their concerns in this area and for teams to take note of these. Both LSHTM early career and senior researchers spoke about the training activities they had created for their teams to enhance equity, including writing for publications and data analysis activities. A respondent from a partner organisation spoke about capacity strengthening as a vital aspect of equitable partnerships:

'And I think, capacity building is very, very important ..and it is already part of our project.. capacity building is important because sometimes what can create a gap or difference is when this partner, when this team is well capacitated, and the other team is not capacitated. Capacity is key to have a very strong partnership.' (Capacity Manager, P03)

Supported inclusive authorship: EquiPar was said to have enhanced approaches to inclusive authorship and equity in outputs representative of all partners and project team members, an area that was a significant concern amongst several partner respondents:

'I think the most important accomplishment I would say, for (Project 01) is we've developed you know.. a policy in terms of research outcomes, authorship and so forth.. who is the first author who is second author and who is the last author - we have discussed about this and we have agreed.' (Co-PI, P01)

Facilitating consideration of environmental sustainability: Respondents from one project identified important links between the equity issues raised in EquiPar and environmental sustainability. This

project articulated equitable partnerships as a way to build resilience and address challenges like climate change more effectively:

'The overall agenda, you know, of the projects...is to kind of drive away from the northern or western ivory towers telling everyone else what to do. So, wehave an ethos to try and remove ourselves from that. And then the sustainability agenda means that we are relying more on our partners for the intellectual stuff, for the quality, for the checking of things and for the troubleshooting. And so those in itself meant that the EquiPar tool was very kind of timely for us and useful for us and that the outputs from the tool have just been, you know, we've used those as a tool to further what we wanted to do anyway..the linking of the equitable partnership stuff to sustainability. The link is absolutely there. You don't do one without the other, really. You know that being equitable means that we're more sustainable, more resilient. It supports the kind of concerns of climate change..that if you want your partners to be more resilient so that they can deal with challenges as they arise and they're not dependent on the London School to help them out.' (LSHTM PI, P02)

Attributing changes to EquiPar: While the above changes were mentioned as stimulated at least in part by EquiPar it was also noted that it could be challenging to attribute specific changes to the use of the EquiPar tool. Several respondents perceived EquiPar as an important part of broader, ongoing conversations about fair practices and equitable behaviours within their teams, that existed in almost all the projects before the availability of EquiPar. Improvements were seen as a result of collective behaviours and efforts rather than any single intervention, reflecting the complex interplay of multiple factors in achieving equity.

'I would say it's always a problem of attribution, isn't it? I think we've been using the tool, we've been doing the surveys, we've been having discussions. It's very hard to pin one specific change down to one particular intervention as it were. I think it's part of a broader conversation. And as I say, everybody within the team is wanting to make sure that they are doing things in the right way. And that they are being fair. At the same time of course, they're also trying to preserve their own career development and I think people recognize there are tensions in that process but I think everyone's heart is in the right place. And therefore, I wouldn't say if there have been improvements, that they have been because of the tool or that they've been because of a particular conversation that was had because I think it plays out in the every day. I think it's about everybody's behaviour....that contributes to achieving a particular state'. (LSHTM Co-PI, P02)

4.3.4 Use of EquiPar beyond the pilot projects

Respondents from three projects said they had found EquiPar useful for evaluating their partnerships with other organisations from the Global North, and/or had included a plan to draw on EquiPar in their new funding proposals. Three projects had also used EquiPar to enhance partnerships beyond those with other research institutions. This included partnerships with community members, stakeholders and peer researchers. For example, one in-country Co-I had used EquiPar for working with their advisory groups and implementation partners, reporting that this had helped in fostering community and peer involvement, acknowledging lived experiences, and upholding inclusive research principles.

'So when we used that EquiPar tool with, with the local advisory group, we talked about 'How they feel about people management and professional relationships. Are they learning anything from us? Are we doing it the way they've been telling us to do it when they advise us? Are they happy with what we are doing?' And they gave us green for that! So we also talked about research outputs, you know, are they happy with them so far.. with our outputs, the way we have shared our research findings with them because remember I told you that for each LAG meeting we always tell them the findings of what we are, you know, where we are, what we have found out so far.. And are there areas where we can

improve. So we also asked about the research output. And I remember that they gave us.. some of them gave us green.’ (Co-PI, P03)

4.4 Enablers and Challenges in EquiPar use

While EquiPar elevated the significance of equity and partnership issues within all the teams, its use was said to be enabled and limited by several factors, both within the project teams and the wider research environment.

4.4.1 Enablers

Common enabling factors identified by the participating teams included:

Effective leadership: Securing buy-in from teams was essential for EquiPar’s successful implementation. Support from senior project leadership, both at LSHTM and among partners, played a critical role in driving this process. Although there were a few reports of implementation struggling due to the lack of involvement from PIs, there were also several successful examples where PIs and Co-PIs led the implementation effectively. This support from senior leadership fostered greater acceptance of the tool within the teams. One partner Co-PI shared her experience:

‘We had our consortium meeting...the whole consortium, the 4 countries and the UK team. They gave us about 15 min too, so we called the session Taking the EquiPar tool to the larger Project X team. So, XX (LSHTM ECR/coordinator) and I presented.. we had slides..and we talked about the important parts of the EquiPar tool. And then after we had presented, we had a discussion, like a brainstorming session on how we can use it and how we can incorporate it into our busy ..because right now, you know, because of the intervention, the project teams, country teams are really busy. So we talked about how we can use it, can make time to use it across all the 4 countries.’ (Co-PI, P03)

Overall team interest in equity: Another one of the common enabling factors, expressed by respondents from nearly all the projects, was the entire team’s interest in equity. Although some teams faced time challenges, this core interest was nonetheless a significant driver of engagement with EquiPar, and recognition of the tool’s value. For this reason, in-person meetings, like annual project meetings or regional multi-partner meetings were perceived as an important platform to gain the team’s attention as these platforms allowed all partners to share their perspectives and raise concerns.

Role of champions: Several respondents perceived that projects needed a staff member to be responsible for tracking the progress of EquiPar within their respective country or project and reporting back on its use and effectiveness. Several respondents emphasised the need for a funded project role for tracking progress within country teams, who would be supported by the PIs and Co-PIs.

Integration into the planning process: Participants from three projects recommended integrating EquiPar into the research planning process and regular meetings, rather than treating the tool as a separate checklist. This approach would facilitate its efficient and continuous use.

4.4.2 Challenges

Common challenges included:

Time constraints: One of the most common challenges faced by all teams was lack of time and conflicting priorities, though interestingly a much smaller percentage of partner (7%) compared to LSHTM respondents (33%) felt that EquiPar took too much time (Figure 6). Nearly all the teams were

busy collecting and/or analysing data and completing project activities, and even the project that was in its early stages was caught up in substantial contractual paperwork. It was therefore difficult to devote time to equity related activities and to fit in EquiPar related discussions during project meetings, while extending meeting times to accommodate the tool was considered inconvenient for participants. One team had received a project extension which provided them more time to apply the tool and see its benefits, but concerns about time and tight project deadlines still made the PI hesitant to fully utilize the tool. Another PI explained how time constraints combined with the late stage of their research might have been an obstacle:

'I think that may be partly why there was some obstacles to sort of employing it. Well, the fact that we were, you know, established...must have been time pressured with things that we're trying to do and to then undertake another layer of something that maybecome a little late to affect change. I think this was, you know.. a challenge.' (LSHTM PI, P04)

Funding constraints: Lack of funds to allow a staff member to dedicate sufficient time to this activity was a significant challenge experienced by most projects.

Infrastructural challenges: Access to good quality internet and technology where some partners and projects were located, could make implementing equitable data sharing commitments challenging.

Gender and professional hierarchies: A few participants described how gender and professional dynamics affected role distribution, full participation in research, access to data, leadership of analysis and manuscripts, and communication barriers. Female early career researchers in the Global North noted that they could also be disadvantaged due to these issues, with some senior male researchers within Southern based research partners said to be reluctant to acknowledge their roles seriously. While using EquiPar sometimes helped highlight these issues, these hierarchies could also act as a barrier to frank discussion of equity issues.

'If there are questions that are concerned with... things that are relevant to junior researchers more...then I don't know if team wide discussion is a useful way to air out these issues because I don't think any junior is gonna sit there in a room full of like senior people and PIs and say, well, I don't feel like this is fair, you know.' (LSHTM ECR P01)

Funder and LSHTM requirements: Most participants felt strongly that funder requirements and LSHTM's contractual, due diligence and financial processes created inequities that could not easily be dealt with at the level of individual projects. For example, in one project the funder had required LSHTM to identify partners only after the funding award had been made to LSHTM which, combined with demanding audit and reporting requirements relayed via LSHTM, created a situation un conducive to equitable partnership:

'As one of the partners once said, it feels like it's more like a commercial contract then, where, we're just fulfilling the requirements as opposed to a true partnership. And, and that's caused a lot of problems for us, I think, as the LSHTM team because that's not the way we normally operate..and we're sort of constantly having to try and counterbalance. That in effect in how we're working with the partners. But we have a very demanding funder. Good high level of audit requirements. There's a lot of sort of questions that get sent out that partners are having to respond to. They'd say they do really feel like they're under the microscope. And that it's not very horizontal in that sense that there is someone above who's looking down and asking lots of questions and it is like a cascade..... So it's not an ideal situation in which to be operating, you know. That doesn't sound like an equitable partnership.' (LSHTM Co-PI, P02)

Funder requirements that project leads are based in the UK was said to further distort equity:

'And so I don't know whether this is the right forum to talk about it. But for example, there are quite a number of UK funders that ask that a scientist from UK has to be the principal investigator and has to lead...and that doesn't bring equity. For me that is the first step that distorts the equity because when there's a funder who says that unless it's for my country, you can't lead...' (Co-PI, P04)

An LSHTM project manager described a number of options for LSHTM to improve its communication on due diligence and funding procedures, including documents such as budget guidance, live or recorded workshops, and shorter animated clips to highlight specific issues. They discussed the pros and cons of these approaches, noting that workshops provide the opportunity for Q&A sessions, but that some people might prefer approaches involving less time commitment.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

In a relatively short period of time, within six varied multi-country projects, EquiPar proved valuable for raising awareness, identifying equity issues, and encouraging critical reflection. It also played a role in supporting actions to redress inequities of various kinds, including not only those between partners from the Global North and Global South, but also those related to gender and other hierarchies. We recognise that the pilot covered only six, self-selecting, projects, which were relatively large in scope and funding, and looked at effects only in the first 6 months of use. However, the findings indicate that EquiPar could be a useful tool for many partnerships, and warrants further investment, development and dissemination, both within and beyond LSHTM.

Specifically, we recommend the following next steps, drawing on both suggestions from evaluation respondents, and reflections among the evaluation research team:

- 1. Make minor amendments to the EquiPar Tool content and wording.** In general, the themes, domains and questions within domains were considered comprehensive and appropriate, so major changes to the content of EquiPar are not recommended. Minor additions proposed include adding reference to professional hierarchies as a source of inequity, and including a domain on environmental sustainability issues. Given that some users found the content challenging to understand, the wording should be reviewed to enhance readability and clarity. We should also allow for continued updates in future; ongoing engagement with users will ensure that EquiPar remains relevant as our understanding of equitable partnerships develops.
- 2. Commission a designer to develop a user-friendly online version.** The EquiPar Tool design requires improvement to enhance attractiveness and clarity, ease of navigation, and user-friendliness. We suggest that a professional designer is used to develop an online version, that allows users to collapse the tool to its main domains to give a clear overview, and expand each domain to see further details, as well as providing easy access to linked resources.
- 3. Develop enhanced guidance on options for using EquiPar within projects.** The Tool currently includes a limited set of ideas on how it could be used. This should be further developed to provide a clear menu of options for projects. This would range from a light-touch approach that might be appropriate for small or short-term projects (e.g. circulating EquiPar and holding a team discussion to identify issues), to medium-intensity options (e.g. partners complete the Traffic Light tool, and key issues identified for action are regularly monitored), to the most in-depth approach (e.g. repeated EquiPar surveys, funding for EquiPar Champion, specific work-package on equitable partnerships). Guidance could also be included on managing and discussing sensitive issues.
- 4. Review and expand the links to resources, examples and case studies.** To provide inspiration and help prevent duplication of efforts across teams, update and expand the links to useful resources under each EquiPar Theme. This would include templates for EquiPar-related surveys and publication agreements.
- 5. Encourage use of EquiPar within LSHTM research partnerships.** To raise awareness about EquiPar and encourage its use we suggest:
 - **Awareness raising** – Updating the EquiPar material on the intranet, and featuring it in the Chariot and other newsletters. Holding regular events during the LSHTM Festival, Centre

Retreats and other fora. Developing a short EquiPar animation that could be promoted internally and externally.

- **Orientation and training sessions** - Develop a short recorded presentation to introduce EquiPar that can be watched online, and a longer interactive synchronous training session on Equitable Partnerships more generally
- **Consider adding partnership issues to Leo Ethics form and mentioning EquiPar** - This could nudge project teams to consider equity issues. While we do not suggest that EquiPar use is compulsory it would help raise awareness at an early stage in the project cycle.
- **Establish an LSHTM Community of Practice on Equitable Partnerships** – The Equitable Partnerships Coordinating Group should establish a Community of Practice within LSHTM to share ideas and experience, provide a forum for discussions, and support project teams. This could help link projects new to EquiPar with Mentors who have used it before, and could support an annual reflection meeting on experiences using EquiPar across LSHTM.

6. **Disseminate information on EquiPar to the broader Global Health community.** To raise awareness about EquiPar beyond LSHTM, we propose publishing an article on the pilot in a peer reviewed journal and creating a well-formatted 2 page summary of the pilot evaluation, featuring EquiPar on the LSHTM website, making online training and promotional materials available to external users, and promoting EquiPar through our external newsletters and social media.

7. **Address outstanding concerns with LSHTM structures and systems that inhibit equitable partnerships.** While EquiPar has the potential to encourage greater equity at the level of the individual research partnership, it is essential that work also continue in parallel to address barriers to equity within LSHTM's contractual, financial, and ethical approval processes, and to consider synergies with other activities such as EDI and environmental sustainability. This should build on the work of the Task and Finish groups that studied these areas, and the ongoing activities of the Equitable Partnerships Coordinating Group.

8. **Continue to advocate for change in the wider sectoral environment.** Finally, we recognize that, in an ecosystem with numerous inequities, changes within our own institution are only one part of the solution. LSHTM should continue to advocate with stakeholders such as funders and journals to further the equitable partnerships agenda. Specific issues highlighted in this evaluation include funders allowing project leadership by non-UK PIs, providing sufficient budgets for equity-supporting activities such as training and workshops, and appropriate recognition of all researchers and field workers on project outputs.

In sum, EquiPar has the potential to be a positive and necessary step for forward in helping projects address equity issues, but achieving truly equitable partnerships will require sustained advocacy, commitment and structural change across the global health community. We leave the last word to one study participant who summed this up well:

'I think in a way we're aiming to be equitable in a world that isn't equitable and I think acknowledging that ...should be like a disclaimer in the tool.. that we're doing our best. We live in a world that is systematically just not equitable...but within that, I think the tool does a good job.... there is a lot to be done but yeah, I think to start...the same as with many other social changes, it requires people being aware about it.' (LSHTM PI, P02)

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APPENDICES

The EquiPar Tool

Supporting Equitable Partnerships for Research Projects

Introduction

Partnerships are the foundation of the research that we do at LSHTM. Building healthy and mutually beneficial partnerships intrinsically concerns equity. At the heart of equity lie the principles of fairness and the distribution of resources according to needs. Historical legacies of colonisation, power relations, imbalances in opportunity and resources, perceived hierarchies of knowledge, and cultural norms can all lead to inequitable partnerships. We want to consider how we can build research partnerships from the outset to facilitate understanding, fairness, awareness of each other's contexts, trust and mutual exchange of expertise and knowledge.

Several sets of guidelines have been developed to use within global health research partnerships. Three that are highly relevant to our context include: the [Canadian Coalition for Global Health Research \(CCGHR\) Partnership Assessment Toolkit](#); the [Research Fairness Initiative Reporting Guide \(RFI\)](#); and the [Swiss Commission for Research Partnership with Developing Countries' \(KFPE\) Guide for Transboundary Research Partnerships](#). For crisis affected countries, please see LSHTM's health in Humanitarian Crises Centre's [Charter](#) and [implementation guidance](#) for decolonising research, teaching and partnerships.

Principles of Research Partnerships

- Decide on the objectives together
- Build up mutual trust
- Share information; develop networks
- Share responsibility
- Create transparency
- Monitor & evaluate the collaboration
- Disseminate the results
- Apply the results
- Share profits equitably
- Increase research capacity
- Build on the achievements

[KFPE Guidelines for Research in Partnership with Developing Countries, 1998](#)

Drawing mainly on these three guidelines, as well as our collective experience, the EquiPar tool was developed to help us establish strong foundations and processes for our research partnerships. We encourage research teams and their partners to try using this tool in their current and developing research projects. The tool is just one step in the longer-term process of developing and maintaining partnerships, which also involves a range of "softer" considerations such as personal relationships, mutual trust and humility. However, we hope that research teams will find this tool helpful in thinking through their partnerships systematically, prompting action and change where necessary to promote effective and equitable collaboration.

How to use this tool

What? The EquiPar Tool is designed to provide practical and pragmatic guidance for establishing and strengthening equitable partnerships. This tool doesn't tell you what to do, rather it poses a series of questions for you to reflect on with your team and develop your own strategies. The tool poses questions for research teams to consider on three key themes: people management and relationships, research activities and outputs, and contracting and resource management.

When? The tool can be used by researchers at multiple stages during the research cycle. It will be particularly useful at the start of partnerships to set expectations, and establish procedures. However, researchers are encouraged to revisit the tool at multiple stages during their collaboration, including at the end. The tool may also provide helpful guidance for responding to unforeseen opportunities or challenges that arise. See figure 1 for suggestions about when different sections of the tool might be more relevant, although of course, all issues can be important at all stages.

How? The expectation is that this range of questions can be considered in an open and consultative way with partners. Throughout the document, there are links to resources which can guide you through the process – and please feel free to suggest more! Researchers should assign time for the discussions, and plan follow-up meetings and activities where required, and budget for them if necessary. You may want to document the discussion, or record joint agreements, and share these with partners and other relevant stakeholders. You can return to this documentation multiple times within the project, to update it or to remind yourself of the agreements made. There is currently no expectation for you to submit your answers. **On page 10 we have added a few suggestions for using the tool drawing on some working examples.**

Who? We hope the guidelines will be relevant to all staff involved in research project partnerships. Some elements will be particularly important for PIs, but it is recommended that all staff are aware of the guidelines and feel confident to apply them in their work. You may want to share the guidelines with your research partners, and other relevant stakeholders.

If you have any suggestions for improvements to this tool, or additional resources to recommend, please contact Catherine Goodman (catherine.goodman@lshtm.ac.uk) or Ginny Bond (virginia.bond@lshtm.ac.uk)

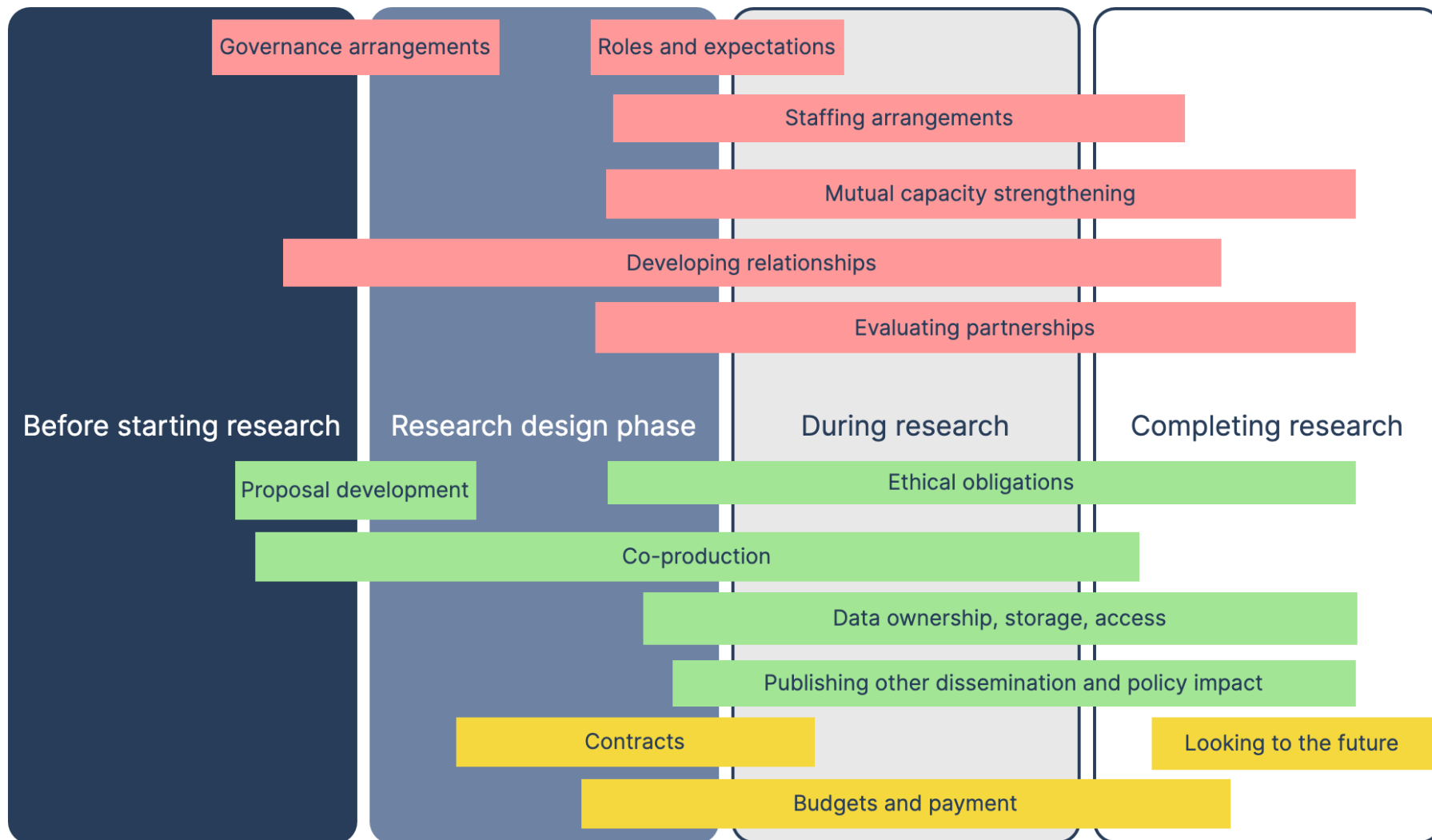


Figure 1: Moments when equitable partnerships issues will arise in the research cycle (red: people management and professional relationships, green: research activities and outputs, yellow: contracts and resource management).

Theme one: People management and professional relationships

What are our governance arrangements?

- Do they support equitable partnership?
- Have we considered opportunities for distributed leadership?
- How will we communicate? (e.g. regular check-in calls / emails / platforms such as MS teams)
- Are methods of communicating accessible and inclusive (e.g. for people with disabilities)?
- What principles or approaches will we follow to foster transparency in our partnership?
- How will we deal with any conflicts / concerns that may arise?
- Do partners know who to contact at LSHTM if they feel their concerns are not addressed properly within the project? (e.g. Head of Department, Dean of Faculty, Research Governance Lead)
- Are all partners given the opportunity to read and comment on these guidelines?

Have we jointly agreed on the roles and expectations of each partner?

- What expectations does each partner have?
- What roles would each partner like to take?
- Are these reflected in contract docs e.g. TOR or other collaborative agreements?

What is our plan for mutual capacity strengthening?

- What strengths do the partners already bring? What are their learning needs?
- Have we considered the opportunities for knowledge sharing and mutual learning within the project for research and administrative staff? How will we assess this?
- Can partners advise each other on suggested readings, networks, people to follow on twitter etc to help develop a deeper understanding of (i) the research context in study countries, and (ii) the broad topic under investigation?
- What opportunities are there for Early Career Researchers to participate in all stages of the project?
- Can we source funding for formal training – within the main grant or from other sources?
- Should we develop a formal capacity development plan?
- How will we monitor capacity development throughout the project?

What considerations have we made for equitable staffing arrangements?

- Does our project draw sufficiently on local expertise? Are local researchers hired where possible?
- Have LSHTM staff been appropriately trained and briefed on the local context / culture / political situation etc before visiting / engaging with partners?
- Have we considered equity in terms of gender, disability and other sources of diversity in staffing and project activities?
- Do all partners understand issues that might arise around local partner safety?

- Do all partners understand the demands arising on staff in different contexts, at the personal, institutional and national levels, particularly in times of crisis?

What activities will we use to develop our relationships?

- How will we help our team get to know each other, understand each other's institutions, and build relationships?
- What approaches could be planned to help the team develop relationships (e.g. social activities, exchanges, workshops etc)?

How will we evaluate how well our partnership is working?

- What opportunities will be built in for periodic reflection on our partnership? What form will this take e.g. survey tool, focus groups, informal discussions?
- How should people raise concerns?
- What if we can't resolve a conflict internally?

Resources: People management and professional relationships

Equitable roles

[The Funding Web \(We All Count\)](#) – a tool to help you unpack the interplay between money, data and decision making between partners.

Mutual Capacity Strengthening

[RECAP Capacity Strengthening Workplan](#)

[RESYST Consortium Capacity Development Strategy](#)

[RESYST Consortium Capacity Needs Assessment](#)

[CHEPSAA - How to do Capacity Assessments for Health Policy and Systems Research in University Settings: A Handbook](#)

[LSTM Centre for Capacity Research](#) – see useful publications and guidelines

[Vitae Professional Development for researchers](#) – useful resources for ECRs

Developing the relationships

[Rethinking Research Partnerships: Discussion Guide and Toolkit](#) – contains 21 Tools which are interactive visual workshop activities around specific themes, Christian Aid and OU 2017

Monitoring and evaluating a partnership

[CCGHR Partnership Assessment Toolkit questions to monitor a partnership \(Phase II page 19\)](#)

[The Equity Tool \(EQT\) for Valuing Global Health Partnerships, Larson et al 2022](#)

[GSDRC guide on monitoring and evaluating civil society partnerships](#)

[Intrac brief on M&E of partnerships](#)

[RESYST Consortium Satisfaction Survey](#)

Partnerships in humanitarian crisis contexts

[Elrha: Partnerships review – Research for health in humanitarian crises](#)

Theme two: Research activities and outputs

How can we maximise opportunities for all partners to contribute to proposal development?

- How will partners be involved in proposal design and writing? Are any resources available to support this (e.g. funds for visits)?
- How can we provide opportunities for all partners to be involved in key stages such as protocol and tool development?

What opportunities exist to introduce elements of co-production into the project?

- In addition to partners, who should we include to co-design the project? The study population, potential beneficiaries, policy makers, other stakeholders?

Moments for co-production might include:

- Before funding award: deciding on what to study / where to apply for funding / developing the proposal and budget
- After funding award: co-designing research tools, piloting tools with study populations, data validation / research feedback meetings with research participants.

How will we manage ethical obligations during this partnership?

- Which ethical principles / processes will be followed (particularly if we are collaborating across disciplines or with non-research partners)?
- Which ethical and other approvals should be obtained in all partner countries and in which order? Who is responsible for these?

Do we have an equitable plan for publishing, other dissemination and policy impact?

- What are the principles of dissemination? Will the study population receive the findings first? National bodies next? International bodies last?
- How will we decide which outputs to produce and who does what?
- Have we agreed on a set of authorship principles?
- Have we agreed on a set of principles for other dissemination e.g. internet, press, social media, conferences?
- What are the institutional structures in place to disseminate findings to different audiences?
- Are outputs accessible to people with different types of disabilities?

How can we ensure equitable ownership, storage, access and use of data and samples?

- Who will own data and any samples, and what arrangements will be made for other partners to use this? Are Data Transfer Agreements required? (standard practice should be data owned by the institution in the country in which the data are collected, with a licence for use / right of use granted to other partners as appropriate)

- Similarly for samples. Are Material Transfer Agreements required?
- Are there other ownership issues e.g. IPR?

Resources: Research activities and outputs

Publication and other outputs

[E-pharmacy template for Publication Guidelines and Plan](#)

[AMFm Dissemination Principles](#)

Co-production Resources

[NIHR Guidance on co-producing a research project \(Feb 2019\) change to:](#)

[NIHR Guidance on co-producing a research project \(learningforinvolvement.org.uk\)](https://learningforinvolvement.org.uk)

[NIHR Reflective questions to support co-produced research \(May 2020\)](#)

[Lokot & Wake, The co-production of research between academics, NGOs and communities in humanitarian response: a practice guide. LSHTM 2021](#)

[BMJ Special Issue on co-production, 2021](#)

Theme three: Contracting and resource management

Budget and payment

- Is the budget allocation fair?
- Does any partner feel they have inadequate resources for what they've been asked to do, both financially, and in terms of other resources they need to draw on?
- Does the budget cover key aspects of equitable partnership such as co-production, capacity strengthening, writing up time and publication costs? Are accessibility requirements accounted for?
- Have overheads or indirect costs been included fairly for each institution, to cover institutional resources (e.g. buildings, equipment, utilities or staff) that the project may draw upon?
- Has an appropriate payment schedule been drawn up? Will partners receive advances where this is necessary?

Contractual arrangements

- What type of agreement will you use to formalise the partnership (e.g. MoU, MoA, research contract)
- Do all parties have reasonable expectations of how long the contractual process will take and what challenges may arise if there are delays? If contracts are delayed, is there a shared understanding of what preparatory work could be done in advance of a signed contract, and what funds will support that?
- Is there mutual understanding of processes for due diligence, and monitoring of contract performance? Is there any need for additional support with these processes?
- Does each partner know who they need to communicate with about contracting and finance in each institution, and who is responsible for regulatory issues e.g. ethics?
- Which country's law will govern the contract, and are all parties comfortable with this plan?

Looking to the future

- Have we agreed on a research completion plan that articulates how resources are to be allocated, staff redeployed or transitioned, and ownership of biological and intellectual property managed at the end of the project?
- Have we planned for project meetings and consultations to explore future directions, new relationship opportunities, transition possibilities etc?
- What can we do to improve the sustainability of this project, and equitable partnerships fostered?

Resources: Contracting and resource management

[Where there is no lawyer: Guidance for fairer contract negotiation in collaborative research partnerships](#), and associated [Guidance notes](#) COHRED 2013

Ideas about how to implement the tool

Using the tool during proposal development

- You can apply the tool during the proposal development process by reflecting on the three main areas in the tool at that early stage. For example, thinking about governance issues together, thinking about people management and professional relationships and considering opportunities for distributed leadership.
- During the proposal development, you could include EquiPar as part of the project design, detailing for the funder how you intend to use it.

Using the tool during the research process

- This could be through ongoing self-reflections about equitable partnership principles and practices, within the project team, supported by facilitated discussions.
- It could be a regular exercise that you incorporate into project workshops and meetings, or if time permits, schedule a focused event or activity to discuss equity issues using the tool.
- Identify an EquiPar champion within the project team who would raise awareness, and facilitate and track use of the tool within the research team.
- Every research project and partnership may have different needs and priorities that need addressing. Different strategies could be used to identify project/partnership specific needs such as a staff survey, or an action points template used in project leadership meetings. Another approach could be to use the Traffic Light Tool below to identify, prioritise and respond to project needs. This tool could be used in discussions or a survey.

Traffic Light Tool to assess equitable partnership needs in projects

	A	B	C	D
	Theme	Criterion	Time of review (mm of project)	How are we faring (score out of 3, with 3 being best performance)
1				
2	People management & professional relationships	Governance arrangements		3
3	People management & professional relationships	Roles and expectations		3
4	People management & professional relationships	Staffing arrangements		2
5	People management & professional relationships	Mutual capacity strengthening		1
6	People management & professional relationships	Developing relationships		1
7	People management & professional relationships	Evaluating partnerships		2
8	Research activities and outputs	Proposal development		2
9	Research activities and outputs	Ethical obligations		1
10	Research activities and outputs	Co-production		3
11	Research activities and outputs	Data ownership, storage and access		3
12	Research activities and outputs	Publishing, dissemination and policy impact		3
13	Contracting and resource management	Budget and payment		3
14	Contracting and resource management	Contractual arrangements		3

EquiPar Evaluation Survey / December 2023

About this Survey

Introduction

We would like to invite you to take part in a survey about the [EquiPar Tool](#) to Support Equitable Partnerships for Research Projects. The EquiPar tool was designed to help research teams think through their partnerships systematically, prompting action and change where necessary to promote effective and equitable collaboration. Over the past six months, EquiPar has been [piloted](#) by a number of research partnership teams involving the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM), and various research institutions based in low and middle income countries. Through this evaluation we will assess the perceptions and experiences of LSHTM staff and our partners in using EquiPar, and identify options for improvement. The evaluation is a collaboration between staff from LSHTM and staff from a number of LSHTM's existing research partners. Funding has been provided by LSHTM.

Why have I been asked to take part?

You have been asked to take part in this evaluation because you are a member of a research project team selected to pilot EquiPar, with the consent of the PI/s, or because you provide support to such a team.

Do I have to take part?

No. Participation is voluntary. There is no obligation for you to take part. You can withdraw from the study at any time.

What will happen if I decide to take part?

If you decide to take part in this survey, we will ask you to complete an anonymous online survey about any experience you have using EquiPar within your study. The survey will take around 15-20 minutes to complete. You will not be asked to give your name, contact details or precise role, though you will be asked to provide your institutional affiliation. The institutions included in the evaluation, other than LSHTM, will not be named in

reports or publications arising from this evaluation, but will be referred to as Institution A, B, C etc. The research projects will also not be named. All information collected about you will be kept private and confidential. During data collection, data will be stored through LSHTM laptops that are encrypted and all data will only be accessible with a password and only accessed by the core research team involved in the study. Only our evaluation team and authorities who check that the study is being carried out properly will be allowed to look at information about you. The survey data will be stored on LSHTM's secure Sharepoint server for seven years, after which it will be deleted. The data will not be deposited in a publicly accessible data repository. The survey data will be stored on LSHTM's secure Sharepoint server for seven years, after which it will be deleted. The data will not be deposited in a publicly accessible data repository.

What are the possible risks and disadvantages?

The evaluation is not expected to place you at any risk or disadvantage. The evaluation is not an audit or evaluation of you, your institution or your research project.

What are the possible benefits to me?

A possible benefit to you is that sharing your experiences with EquiPar will lead to improvements in the Tool's design and future use.

What will happen to the results of this study?

Preliminary findings will be presented at a Closing Workshop to which 3-5 members of your research project team (including the PI(s)) will be invited. Subsequently we will prepare a revised version of the EquiPar Tool (assuming it is found to be useful), a report of the findings, potentially a paper for publication, and communications resources to promote the tool.

Who has checked this study?

This study has been reviewed and given favourable opinion by The London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine Research Ethics Committee (study number 28150-1).

Further information and contact details:

If you have any questions or concerns feel free to contact us using the details below. Contact details:

Catherine.Goodman@lshtm.ac.uk and Virginia.Bond@lshtm.ac.uk

If your concern is not resolved and you wish to raise a formal complaint, you can do this by contacting the Head of Research Governance, at rgjo@lshtm.ac.uk or +44 (0) 20 7927 2626.

Informed Consent:

If you are willing to take part in the study, please read through these statements and check the box below to provide your consent:

I confirm that I have read and understood the information provided above about the above-named study. I

understand that my consent is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw this consent at any time.

I understand that data that I provide will be used in presentations, reports and potentially a journal article, and

that I will not be identifiable from this information.

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the above study related information and I agree to take part in the study *

Yes, I agree to participate

No, I decline to participate

2. If you have declined to participate in this survey, please could you provide a reason for declining. *

Your research affiliation

3. Which research project do you belong to? If you do not belong to any of the EquiPar pilot projects, select 'other' and provide the name or title of your research project.*

- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]

4. Which organisation (s) are you a member of?

5. In which country is your organisation located?

Your experience with the EquiPar tool

6. How did you use the EquiPar tool? Select all that apply *

- Read it through
- During regular project meetings with colleagues
- In an EquiPar focused meeting or workshop with colleagues

Conducted a survey

- Used the traffic light tool
- Attended a workshop or webinar to learn more about it

In grant applications

- I did not use it

In other ways

7. If you selected 'In other ways' in Q. 7, please briefly describe how you used the tool.

8. When in the project cycle did you use the tool? Select all that apply *

- While developing the proposal
- At the beginning of the research project

After research activities had started

- Towards the end of the project
- After the project had ended

I did not use the tool

9. Which section(s) did you use? Select all that apply *

- Theme one: People management and professional relationships
- Theme two: Research activities and outputs
- Theme three: Contracting and resource management
- None of the above

10. In each of the three sections of the tool, there are some linked resources (e.g. the RESYST consortium resources in the pink box on pages 5 6). Did you use any of suggested resources?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

11. If you answered 'Yes' in Q.11, please name the resources that you used.

12. In each of the three sections of the tool, there are some linked resources (e.g. the RESYST consortium resources in the pink box on pages 5 6). Did you use any of suggested resources?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

13. If you answered 'Yes' in Q.11, please name the resources that you used.

Your perceptions of the tool

14. How useful did you find the tool in planning, managing & monitoring your partnership? *

Overall

- Not useful
- Somewhat useful
- Quite useful
- Very useful
- Did not use the tool or a particular theme

Theme one: People management and professional relationships

- Not useful
- Somewhat useful
- Quite useful
- Very useful
- Did not use the tool or a particular theme

Theme two: Research activities and outputs

- Not useful
- Somewhat useful
- Quite useful
- Very useful
- Did not use the tool or a particular theme

Theme three: Contracting and resource management

- Not useful
- Somewhat useful
- Quite useful

- Very useful
- Did not use the tool or a particular theme

15. How strongly do you agree or disagree with these statements? *

I will use the EquiPar tool again

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree

- Neither agree or disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

The EquiPar tool improved the overall functioning of the research partnership

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree or disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

The EquiPar tool led to positive changes within the research partnership

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree or disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

The EquiPar tool led to negative changes within the research partnership

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree or disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

The EquiPar tool took too much time

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree or disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

I will recommend the EquiPar tool to colleagues

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree or disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

The resources provided in the tool were relevant

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree or disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Your recommendations

What other topics should be added to the tool?

Do you have recommendations for how researchers can use this tool in the future?

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experience of using the tool?

Thank you for your time.

Please press the Submit button to record your response and exit the survey.

APPENDIX 3: IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW GUIDE

IDI topic guide

To be administered by researchers either face to face or on-line, once the informed consent process has been completed.

Organisation(s)	
Role(s) e.g. research fellow, PhD student, administrator	
Highest qualification	
Gender	
Nationality(ies)	

Instructions for interviewer: Start by reminding people about the tool and its main themes (share in chat or show a visual), and briefly walk people through it.

Say to the interviewees: Just to remind you, the EquiPar tool covers three broad themes within research partnerships. Under these three themes the tool raises some key questions that could be relevant to a research project involving the LSHTM and partner research institutions. The tool also provides additional resources linked to the three themes. As you may recall, the tool is targeted at individual projects – partnerships between research projects- and not at the institutional level, though we recognise that actions may also be needed at the institutional/ funder level. We'd like to ask you some questions today about how you might have used the tool..

We have already shared the Participant Information sheet with you in advance and you have signed the consent form. As stated in the Participant Information sheet, our focus is on evaluating the EquiPar tool and not on assessing the equity of your partnerships. In other words, the aim of this evaluation is to assess your perceptions and experiences with the tool, and to identify options to improve the tool and its potential implementation.

Different groups may have used the EquiPar tool in different ways and we want to hear from you whether and how you have used it in your project.

Your participation is voluntary. There is no obligation for you to take part. You can withdraw from the study at any time. The interview will last for approximately 30 minutes to an hour.

We'd also like to reassure you again that all information collected about you will be kept private and confidential. The institutions included in the evaluation, other than LSHTM, will not be named in reports or publications arising from this evaluation, but will be referred to as Institution A, B, C etc. Likewise, the research projects will not be named. Quotes will not contain any information that could lead to the identification of any participant.

Do you have any questions? Do you confirm your consent to participate in the interview and are you comfortable if we record the interview?

Organisational and project context

1. Where in the project cycle is your project (*interviewer to name the project*) at the moment?
 - a. Where was it 6 months ago, when the pilot began? In terms of project activities?
2. How many research partners are engaged in your project? (*some staff may not know this, so ask them to speak about whatever they know*)
3. Could you describe how your project is structured (in terms of work packages? Different institutions? Core vs peripheral partners?)

Awareness of the tool

4. Thinking back, how and from whom did you hear about the EquiPar tool?
 - a. what was your original reaction?
5. What do you see as the key elements of the EquiPar tool?

Use of this tool

6. Who took ownership and initiated the use of this tool in your organisation?
 - a. Did you, or anyone else, have any hesitation or resistance - and if so why?
7. Did you use the tool in your project, and if so for what aim/purpose?
 - a. Who else used the tool in your organisation, in your partner organisation?
 - b. If you didn't end up using it, why not?
8. When and how did you use the tool?
 - a. When in the project cycle?
 - b. How did you draw on the tool, what strategies did you use (e.g. specific / regular meetings/surveys/FGDs/traffic light tool)?
 - c. Which specific themes and topics did you draw on? (which you decided not to use?)
 - d. Did you use any of suggested resources? (as in the boxes/ or any others?)
 - e. Did you use it remotely or in person? Please tell us about the experience.
9. Have you used the tool in any grant application processes ? Could you tell us how?

Effects / usefulness of the tool

10. How useful did you find the tool in planning, managing & monitoring your partnerships?
 - a. Was the scope and content appropriate and relevant to your partnerships? Is there anything else it should cover?
 - b. Were there any problems with the tool?
 - c. How onerous was it to use / how much time & resources did it take?
 - d. What do you think about the way the tool is presented and formatted? What about the wording, the design and the length? Could you suggest any improvement?
 - e. Did the tool raise anything surprising or unexpected? Please tell us about these.
11. Did anything change (positively or negatively) as a result of using the tool?
 - a. Can you provide specific example(s) and explain how did this come about?
 - b. Were there any negative consequences of using the Tool?
 - c. Has the tool led to any actions to enhance the equity of your partnership?
12. How does the tool relate with your understanding of equitable partnerships?
 - a. Has your understanding of equitable partnerships been informed or influenced by using the EquiPar tool?
13. Other than EquiPar, have you used any other tools or guidelines for enhancing equity in partnerships – please tell us about these and how they compare with EquiPar?
14. What did you think about the introductory workshops and follow on workshops that we had? Were they useful or not? How could we improve on those?

Recommendations and next steps

15. Will you continue using the EquiPar tool in your partnerships? Why? Or why not? Is a tool an effective way to grapple with equity issues in partnerships? Would you recommend it to others? Why or why not?
16. What else is needed to meaningfully support equitable partnerships?
17. Finally, thinking back to your original reaction to the Tool, how do you feel about it now?
 - a. How could the Tool and ideas about implementing the tool be improved?
18. Thank you for your time. Any questions?