

Marginalization of Researchers in the Global South in Global, Regional, and National Economic-Development Consulting.



Photo: Dean Calma / IAEA

Authors Ramos E. Mabugu | Vaqar Ahmed | Margaret R Chitiga-Mabugu
| Kehinde O. Omotoso

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Abstract

Using responses from a self-administered questionnaire, this study presents findings on the likelihood that consultants, academics, and policy researchers based in the global south will be hired by mainstream development partner organizations. We also present organizations' views regarding the future of economic-development consulting. A surprising consensus view is that researchers in the global south are frequently commissioned but that the budgets for this work are limited. Important concerns highlighted hindering the hiring of researchers in the global south include perceived lack of professionalism, inadequate experience and expertise as well as weak writing skills and articulating policy implications of research. Respondents envisage more commissioned research on the horizon in subjects such as welfare, distribution, and SDGs related subjects, especially since COVID-19 has now increased respect for local knowledge.

Authors

Ramos E. Mabugu

School of Economic & Management
Sciences, Sol Plaatje University
South Africa
emmanuel.mabugu@spu.ac.za

Vaqar Ahmed

Sustainable Development Policy Institute
Pakistan
vaqar@sdpi.org

Margaret R Chitiga-Mabugu

Director and Head of School
University of Pretoria
South Africa
margaret.chitiga@up.ac.za

Kehinde O. Omotoso

Obafemi Awolowo University Ile Ife
Nigeria
dgullivers@yahoo.com

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Table of Contents

I.	Introduction	1
II.	Literature Review	1
	2.1 Participation in Economic-Development Consulting by Researchers in the Global South	1
	2.2 Institutional and Legislative Hindrances	5
III.	Empirical Approach and Data	8
IV.	Results	10
	4.1. Commissioning of Southern Consultants in Economic-Development Projects	11
	4.2. Cost of Commissioning Southern Consultants in Economic-Development Projects	14
	4.3. Criteria for Commissioning Southern Consultants in Economic-Development Projects	15
	4.4. Challenges in Commissioning Southern Consultants in Economic-Development Projects	17
	4.5. Possible Future Commissioning or Engagement of Southern Consultants in Economic-Development Projects	20
	4.6. COVID-19 Pandemic and Use of Evidence from Southern Consulting Firms/Researchers	21
	4.7. Expectations of Organizations in the Medium to Long Term	23
V.	Concluding Remarks	25
	References	27
	Appendix - Questionnaire	30

List of Figures

Figure 1: Designation of Respondents (Numbers).....	9
Figure 2: Distribution of Respondents by Gender.....	9
Figure 3: Organizational Category of Respondents	10
Figure 4: Frequency of Commissioning Southern Resource Persons.....	11
Figure 5: Frequency of Commissioning Southern Consulting (For-Profit) Firms	12
Figure 6: Indications Regarding the Share of Overall Budget Dedicated to Commissioning Southern vs. Non-Southern Consultants	14
Figure 7: Major Variables in Overall Selection Criteria for Awarding Consulting Contracts	15
Figure 8: Some Best-Practice Metrics Used by Organizations in Procuring Consulting Services.....	16
Figure 9: Differences in Due Diligence Frameworks by Procurement Unit of Participating Organizations in Choosing between Southern and Non-Southern Consultants	17
Figure 10: Experience Regarding Outputs of Southern Consultants.....	18
Figure 11: Critical Consulting Skills and Elements of Consultant Orientation Identified as Lacking among Southern Resource Persons	19
Figure 12: Comprehension of Requirements for Commercial Bidding on the Part of Southern Resource Persons	20
Figure 13: Distribution of Economic-Development Sub-Sectors in Which a Greater Concentration of Researchers in the Global South Was Expected	21
Figure 14: How COVID-19 Has Changed Organizations' Views and Use of Evidence from Researchers and Consultants in the Global South	22
Figure 15: Changes in the Types of Evidence Demanded from Researchers in the Global South in a Post-Pandemic Era	23
Figure 16: Organizations' Expectations in the Medium to Long Term	24
Figure 17: Organizations' Desire to Use More Nationally Produced Evidence or Non-Southern Providers.....	24

List of Tables

Table 1: Frequency of Commissioning Academics Outside of Southern Countries	12
Table 2: Frequency of Commissioning Think Tanks Outside of Southern Countries.....	13
Table 3: Frequency of Commissioning Foreign Consulting (For-Profit) Firms Outside of Southern Countries.....	13

I. Introduction

Despite the important role played by economic-development consulting in developing countries, very little evidence exists regarding how researchers or consultants from developing countries are actually hired, deployed, or compensated in consulting projects, particularly with respect to their counterparts from the global north. We have responded to this issue by focusing specifically on the processes by which economic-development consultants are hired, the constraints and costs involved in such hiring, the reasons why researchers in the global south are poorly represented in economic-development consulting, the scale of participation of researchers in the global south, and the challenges that exist in engaging them.

We have adopted a broad definition of “economic consulting” that draws from the general characteristics of the consulting profession as described by the University of Virginia’s Economics Department (“Careers in Economic Consulting,” n.d.). By “economic consulting” or “economic-development consulting,” then, we intend any evidence-based advice provided to governmental, inter-governmental, or non-governmental organizations, including data collection, research reports, IT-based tool development, capacity-building interventions, evidence-based advocacy and outreach services, or policy engagement.

II. Literature Review

2.1 Participation in Economic-Development Consulting by Researchers in the Global South

Geographical inequity and exclusion are global phenomena that negatively affect societies at the national, regional, or international level (Jones, 2009). Ongoing debates regarding the globalization of economies, societies, and cultures, as well as increasing cross-national activities by businesses and international organizations have galvanized

reflections by researchers, policy makers, and stakeholders (Tejada, Guerrero & Bolay, 2010; Fulcher, 2000; Guttal, 2007).

The global dynamics of economic-development consulting were recognized as early as the 2000s (for instance, by Passaris, 2006). Awareness of geographical (north-south) inequalities and of regional- or country-level differences in participation and engagement in research, trade, investment, and economic-development consulting (see *Achieving Sustainable Development*, 2008)—despite the growing contributions of researchers and scholars in the global south—has increased. For instance, Obeng-Odoom (2019) has argued that the growing marginalization of intellectual contributions from Africa reflects global inequalities and not simply human-capital differentials or disdain for African knowledge systems. Another aspect of the marginalization is the lack of recognition of local knowledge in shaping the performance, outcomes, and policy recommendations of consultants. Economic-development business consulting can facilitate the transfer of locally contextualized skills and knowledge among researchers and stakeholders and is effective at fostering “enlightened” and “interactive” models of knowledge utilization (Jacobson, Butterill & Goering, 2005). Research has nonetheless highlighted a problematic imbalance in the global dynamics of business participation and social justice, which are primarily dominated by the perspectives of “powerful” individuals who work primarily in the global north or who have “deep” networks in the global south (Fletcher & Weinstein, 2018; Odeh, 2010).

With respect to the representation of academics from developing countries as authors and editorial-board members in scientific journals, Cummings and Hoebink (2017) examined patterns of publications in the field of development studies. They used 2012-2014 data from the Web of Science database and from the websites of individual journals to analyze the affiliations of authors and editorial board members of ten reputable academic journals. They found that editorial board members were largely situated in the United Kingdom and the United States of America (approximately 62% of editorial board members). Twelve top institutions in these countries accounted for about 32% of all editorial board members, and each of these institutions held two or more editorial board memberships.

Moreover, about 43% of the authors of the 2,112 sampled articles were located in the USA and the UK, and 43% were from other developed countries. Sumathipala, Siribaddana, and Patel (2004) found that authors based in developing countries were grossly underrepresented in high-impact general medical journals, with an average contribution of 6.5% to the research literature in the five top medical journals. Only 8% of the articles they reviewed from two British journals and 5% of the articles in three USA-based journals were authored by researchers located in developing countries.

Most writers have argued for further internationalization or globalization of the participation of researchers in the global south in economic-development consulting (see, e.g., Mzee, Chen & Li, 2010; Petricevic & Teece, 2019; Tănăsescu, Dumitru & Dincă, 2012). Indeed, as voices from the global south have become increasingly significant in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on economies around the world, national and international cooperation and partnerships seem to be inevitable (Dávalos, 2020). A critical examination and interpretation would find that bias against and underrepresentation of scholars and institutions from the global south cause serious disadvantages not only for authors and institutions but for entire nations (Wight, 2008). Among these is the potential obstruction of global business and economic development when contributions and innovations from the global south are restricted. Broadly speaking, inadequate participation of “southern” researchers has significant implications for the gathering and sharing of evidence that could boost global, national, or regional economic development.

Some explanations have emerged for the reduced participation of researchers in the global south in economic-development consulting, including the exclusion of issues and realities well-contextualized in the global south but marginalized by “northern” systems that determine and formalize “rules” and “principles” for participation and partnership (Fletcher & Weinstein, 2018; Sieber & Braunschweig, 2005; Kok et al., 2017). For instance, the mechanisms involved in selecting researchers, in forming partnerships, and in developing programs, activities, and projects are largely determined by themes and interests prioritized by the global north (Sieber & Braunschweig, 2005).

Obeng-Odoom (2019) opined that the persistence of the intellectual marginalization of the global south could be linked to the historical and continuing concentration of knowledge production in the hands of few powerful people, the peripheralization of African channels of knowledge production and diffusion, and the perceived inferiority of African knowledge, particularly when that knowledge comes from women. Relatedly, Medie and Kang (2018) argued that scholars in the global south were underrepresented in top women, gender, and politics journals, underscoring the need to “decolonize” gender and politics scholarship. In most instances, however, the research capacity and needs of the south are very different from those of the north, which are often the priorities of funders and researchers (Kok et al., 2017). A more inclusive participatory model, therefore, built on fair principles of partnership and cooperation, is required for scientifically sound, demand-driven, and locally-led solutions to development challenges among developed and developing countries, which would, at the same time, improve research capacity in the global south (Sieber & Braunschweig, 2005; Kok et al., 2017). Effective strategies are also needed to foster collaboration and strengthen local capacities among north-south researchers (Pike, Rodríguez-Pose & Tomaney, 2014; Horner, 2020).

Greater participation by researchers in the global south in the economic-development-consulting community around the world—and greater collaboration among researchers in the global south and their northern counterparts—is nonetheless hampered by a number of obstacles and constraints, including low levels of tertiary education of researchers in the global south, weak institutional support in the global south for researchers and for partnerships, the “brain-drain” that takes researchers from the global south away from their home countries, inadequate research spending, poor quality of research output, reluctance to submit to high-impact journals for fear of rejection, and lack of incentive and technology required for research (Kigotho, 2020; see also Khan et al., 2016).

Wight (2008), for instance, highlighted low levels of development and widespread socioeconomic inequalities as key reasons for insufficient capacities in social-science research and consulting and, by extension, economic-development consulting services,

among African scholars. More importantly, Wight stressed that individualized contract-based research or consulting projects played a significant role in hampering the capacity of academic institutions, restricting the communication of research findings, perpetuating donor regulation of research themes and programs, and fostering marginalization and underrepresentation. These are often attributed to a lack of collegial support or of resources that results in poor writing skills and failure to publish effective articles. Wight thus suggested that consulting and research capacity might be fostered by commissioning projects through institutions rather than individuals.

2.2 Institutional and Legislative Hindrances

Very little research has focused on the institutional and legislative context of business consulting within the economic-development space. Specifically, research regarding selection or performance-management instruments within the context of economic development could not be found. Thus it remains unknown what selection or performance-management instrumentation exists or, if it does exist, how effective it is in economic-development consulting. Research conducted for the global consulting industry is still relevant for our case, however, and we draw lessons from it for our area of interest. At the same time, distinguishing between policy research and traditional consulting businesses is essential. In our view, these may be two separate streams in the global north; in the global south, however, researchers and consultants skilled in one of these streams frequently transition to the other when changes in priorities occur or new incentives are offered. In fact, recent literature has promoted this transition and termed this as one of the strategies in overall economic development (Kirmani & Baum, 1992).

Role of trust in consulting: Evidence in the literature indicates that trust plays an important role in decision-making regarding whether to award consulting contracts to northern vs. southern resource persons (Turner, 1982; Candelon et al., 2020; Ahmed et al., 2021). The specific factors that shape aspects of trust and social capital in

development consulting are not clear, however. An analysis by the BCG Henderson Institute has suggested that the trust variable can be explained by (i) reliability and credibility, including expectations regarding timely delivery, and past track record; (ii) proximity and relationships at an informal level; (iii) transparency (e.g. ease of sharing knowledge); and (iv) security and privacy, particularly in the case of testing something new as a development intervention (see Candelon et al., 2020). Many of these indicators, however, pose measurement difficulties that would complicate any scientific analysis.

Linkages can be made between trust and the phenomenon of social networks. Many clients located in the north gain access to southern collaborators over time. Researchers, academics, and consultants in the global north who network with resource persons in the global south facilitate contacts with northern funders. The networks strengthen as long as both sides can ensure completion of their contractual obligations, including quality of output and adherence to timelines (“trust”).

Credibility is another fundamental consideration. Unless robust quality-assurance mechanisms are in place, establishing whose evidence is credible in a developing-country setting can be difficult (Sustainable Development Policy Institute, 2021). The issue of credibility is equally relevant to policy research and analysis and to traditional consulting businesses.

Procurement frameworks that favor northern consultants: Donors have often required large programs in developing countries to be led by contractors who are based outside of southern countries and often who are from the west (Gulrajani, 2016). This practice has prompted good southern resource persons to take jobs with northern consulting firms that then send the natives back to the global south to undertake assignments on behalf of northern-based firms. The capacities of southern consulting institutions and think tanks is affected both in terms of brain drain and of lack of a level playing field.

An interesting case in point is the World Trade Organization’s Agreement on Government Procurement (GPA) which governs consulting and research contracts, among others. While the regulations regarding procurement under the Development

Cooperation Instrument (DCI) of the GPA allow entities from developing countries to participate in DCI-funded tenders, tenderers must be based in countries that are signatories to the GPA. Because parties to the WTO's GPA are mostly Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) countries, such a requirement specifically excludes researchers and consulting businesses based in many southern countries—even when the issue under study is a southern country (no African country is a member of the OECD or a formal signatory to the GPA, for example). Even if northern firms can work with partners from the south, an imbalance in agenda-setting and approach is inherent in the relationship, potentially distorting findings and interpretations.

Positive spillover of southern consultants working for northern (consulting) firms: In general, our view is that spillover of southern consultant is not a hindrance and could, in fact, be part of the solution to the marginalization of researchers in the global south. Recent evidence suggests that southern resource persons active in northern policy-research firms may draw advantages from the capacities they gain and from the opportunities they have to diffuse that knowledge in their native countries. (The discussion in Pomerantz, 2004, is relevant here.)

This could take several forms including offshore services. For example, professors at Harvard and Stanford who were Pakistani in origin were selected for evidence-use programs in South Asia ("Building Capacity," 2022). Asian consultants who rise to the level of partner in international consulting firms are often recruited by donors to lead major programs back home or lured by governments to head ministries in their native countries. One negative consequence of this process is that southern civil servants or ministers who have worked abroad have occasionally "pulled strings" to bring future contracts to northern firms.

Role of in-country representatives of donor organizations: Local staff working for donor organizations have sometimes played a critical role in determining whether contracts should be awarded to local vs. foreign consultants, bringing their own experiences and

biases to bear in procurement and selection processes. At the same time, aid-receiving countries see these staff members as an important resource and require their services to communicate with or bridge expectations between grant makers and grantees. In complex and longer-term programs, grant-makers select a team of in-country consultants to assist in finalizing opportunities for investments in the development sector, including procurement of consultants. In “Working with Local Consultants in International Grantmaking” (2004), the author describes an important dimension of this phenomenon:

The head of a Bangladeshi foundation explained that confusion can set in because the funders fail to clarify the role and authority of their consultants: “What has happened in Bangladesh, and I think in lots of parts of South Asia, is that a culture of consultancy has developed. In various places, consultants have a kind of designated zone of influence. Small grant seekers are in some sense forced to depend on them. There is an impression that if you go to [a particular] consultant you have a chance of getting funds from [a particular] donor.”

III. Empirical Approach and Data

Because of logistics and time considerations, we used a non-probability sampling technique in which all members of the population did not have an equal chance of participating in the study. This entailed identifying potential respondents in organizations and businesses that were pertinent to this study. We were able to identify fifty-two potential respondents from bilateral, multilateral, national, government, and private consulting businesses, and we sent a self-administered online questionnaire to each of them.

The responses numbered sixteen, which constituted a response rate of about 25.4%. Respondents came from bilateral and multilateral organizations, consultancy groups/think-tanks, and own-country government sources. Figure 1 shows that respondents were mostly at the director and economic-advisor levels (each making up about 21%), followed by associate directors, managing directors, economic consultants, senior research fellows, adjunct professors, senior knowledge management, partners, and senior program specialists in their organizations.

Figure 1: Designation of Respondents (Numbers)

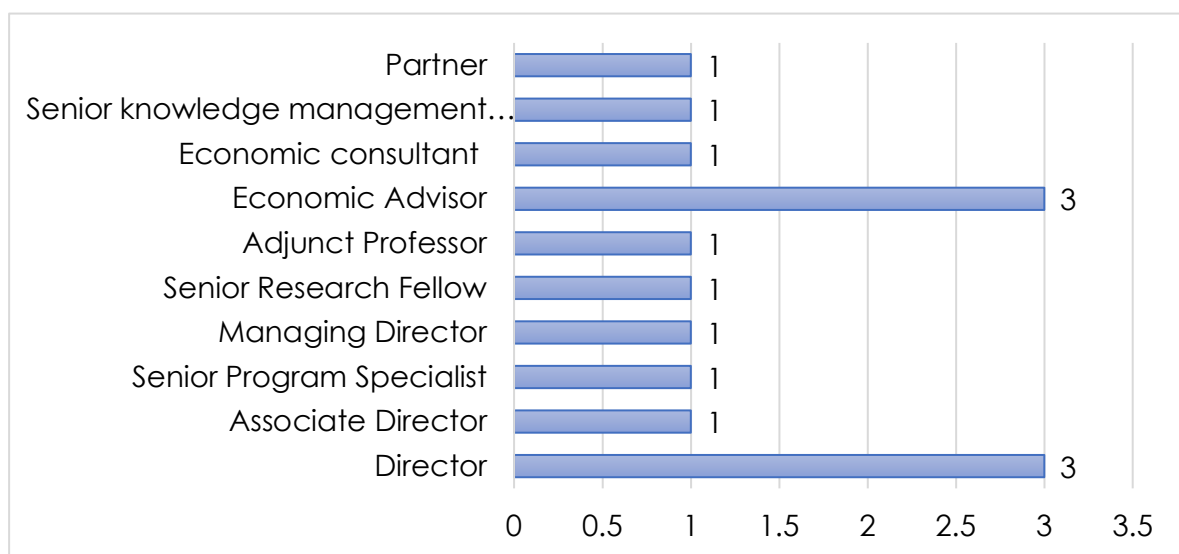


Figure 2: Distribution of Respondents by Gender.

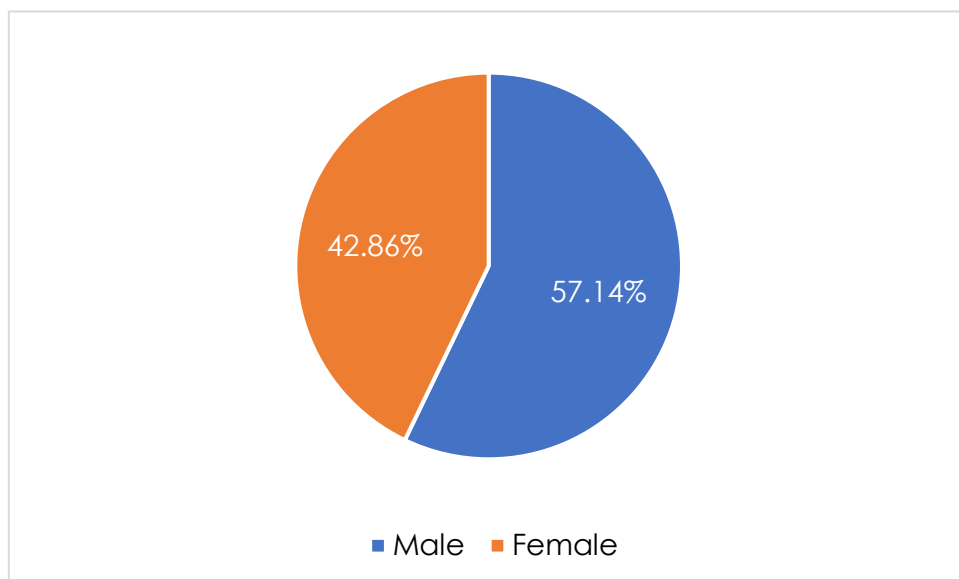
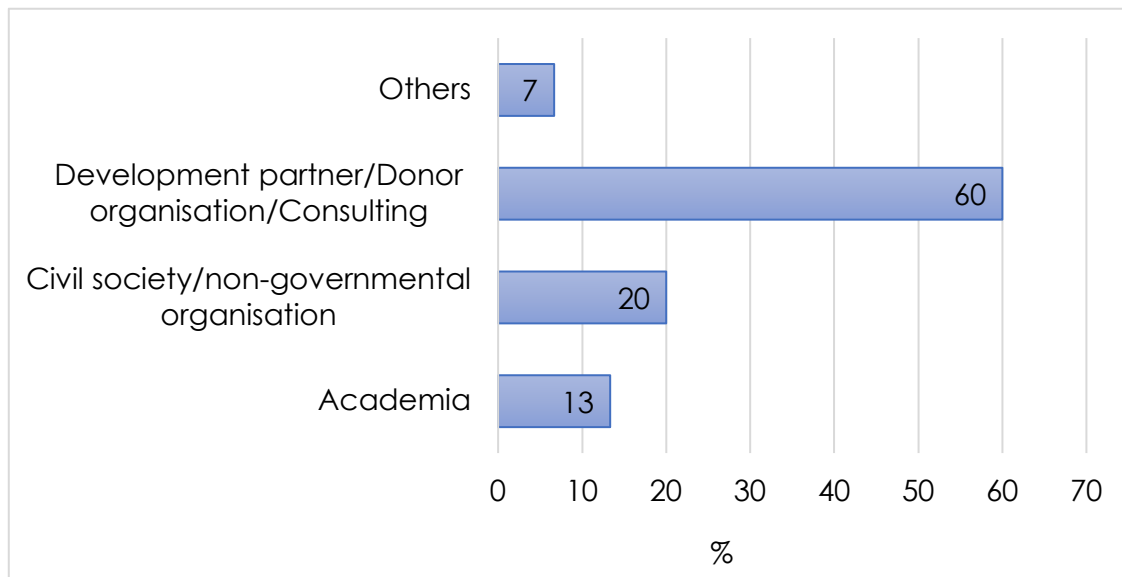


Figure 3 shows that approximately 60% of respondents worked for development partner/donor/consulting firms or organizations. The second-largest category consisted of respondents in civil society/non-governmental/think tanks organizations, followed by those working in academia (13%). The remaining 7% worked in the "Others" category.

Figure 3: Organizational Category of Respondents



For the analysis of the responses to the questions, we used statistical software to assess frequencies. We grouped the questions by theme and then analyzed the responses.

IV. Results

Our findings are grouped by theme. We first looked at the frequency with which researchers in the global south were commissioned in economic-development consulting, then at the cost of commissioning them. Subsequently, we focused on selection criteria followed by the challenges faced in procuring researchers in the global south. The remaining themes included prospects, opportunities (including COVID-19), and areas that held promise for growth.

4.1. Commissioning of Southern Consultants in Economic-Development Projects

Our analysis showed that southern resource persons were commissioned frequently in economic-development business consulting. Nearly 79% respondents reported that their organizations frequently commissioned southern consultants while about 13% of respondents indicated that they rarely or sometimes commissioned them (see Figure 4). What is less clear from these responses is whether these southern consultants were based in the northern countries or in their native countries while performing their assignments.

Figure 4: Frequency of Commissioning Southern Resource Persons

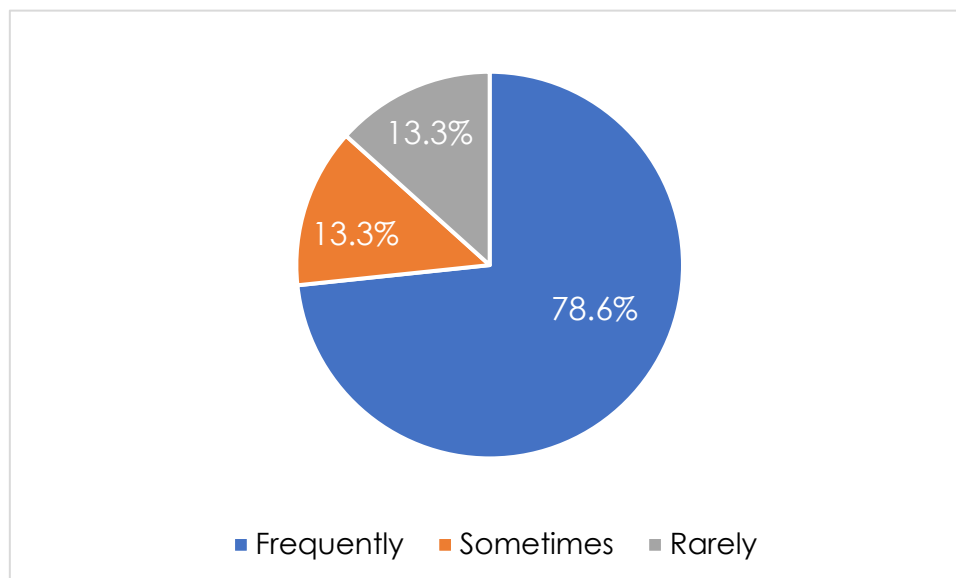


Figure 5 shows the rate at which for-profit southern firms were commissioned. About 40% of respondents said that their organizations rarely commissioned for-profit consulting firms in the global south. Another approximately 40% reported that they frequently commissioned them while 20% stated that they sometimes commission southern for-profit consulting firms. This may partially explain why the number of for-profit consulting business from the global south has not risen.¹

¹ Examples from the north include McKinsey, KPMG, EY, DAI, Palladium, etc.

Figure 5: Frequency of Commissioning Southern Consulting (For-Profit) Firms

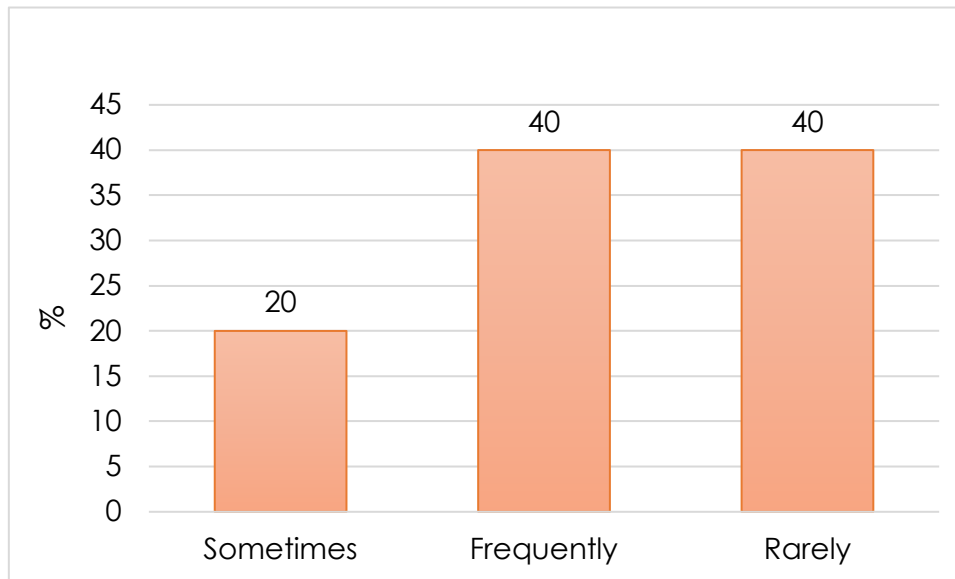


Table 1 indicates that almost half of respondents (47%) reported that their organizations frequently commissioned academics located outside of southern countries. About 40% sometimes commissioned them, whereas only 13% stated that they rarely commissioned them. The basis of a preference for non-southern academics is less clear from the responses, though one reason could be the lag in capacity development on some issues in the global south..

Table 1: Frequency of Commissioning Academics Outside of Southern Countries

	%
Sometimes	40
Frequently	47
Rarely	13
Total	100

Source: Authors' calculations.

About 47% respondents reported that their organizations frequently commissioned think tanks outside of southern countries (see Table 2). Organizations that sometimes commissioned them were about 13%, while those who rarely commission them made up 40%. This high percentage of respondents indicating that foreign think tanks were not often commissioned indicates that they may not have wished to undertake

the cumbersome contracting and detailed due-diligence processes that would be involved. Hiring of individuals was often preferred, especially those with a track record (and who had already cleared due diligence). All these elements in the procurement processes reflect biases that act as a barrier to entry and to scale-up for southern policy think tanks.

Table 2: Frequency of Commissioning Think Tanks Outside of Southern Countries

	%
Sometimes	13
Frequently	47
Rarely	40
Total	100

Source: Authors' computation

Table 3 shows that nearly 40% respondents reported that they more frequently commissioned foreign consulting for-profit firms than southern ones, while about 27% and 33% indicated they were rarely or sometimes more likely to commission foreign for-profit consulting firms over southern ones, respectively.

Table 3: Frequency of Commissioning Foreign Consulting (For-Profit) Firms Outside of Southern Countries

	%
Sometimes	33
Frequently	40
Rarely	27
Total	100

Source: Authors' computation

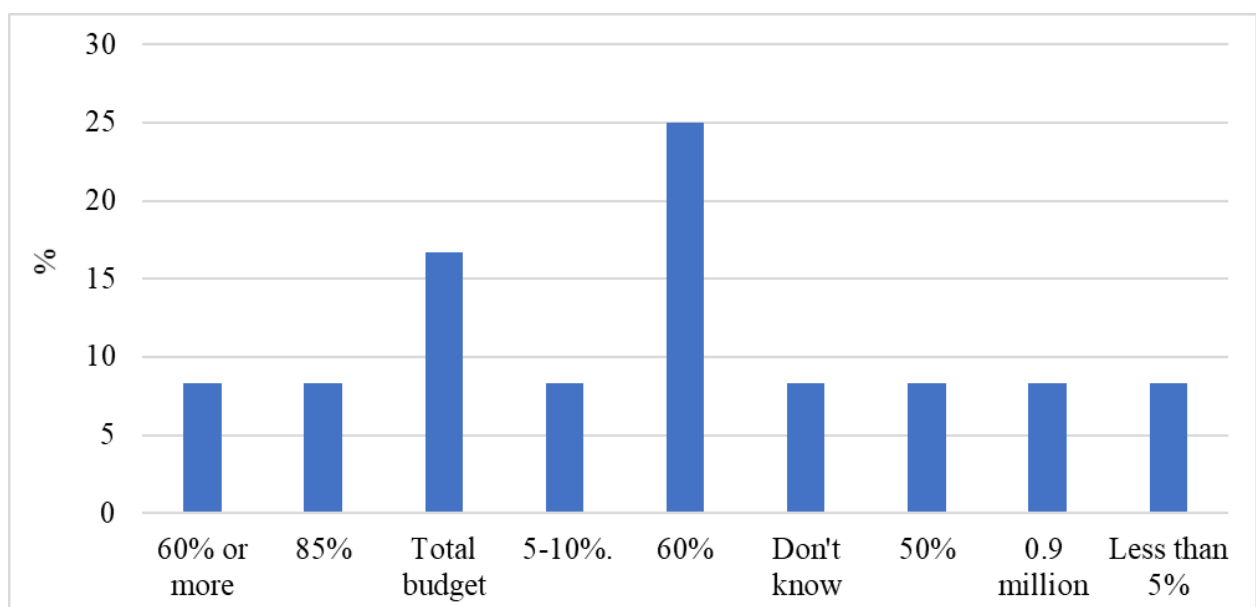
Responses showed that most organizations who commissioned non-southern consultants/academics during the previous three years often had sources from a pool of experts from around the world, predominantly the UK, USA, Canada, Sweden, Germany, Japan, South Asia, and some East and Southern African countries.

4.2. Cost of Commissioning Southern Consultants in Economic-Development Projects

With respect to the cost of commissioning consultants and researchers, estimated annual budgets ranged between USD \$200,000 and nearly USD \$2,000,000 annually. The share of the overall budget dedicated to commissioned research for southern vs. non-southern resource persons also varied across respondents' organizations.

Figure 6 illustrates that, while some respondents (about 17%) reported that their total budget was dedicated to procuring southern resource persons, others indicated that the amount was less than 5%. A number of respondents noted that their organizations allocated from 60%-85% of their overall budget to commission southern consultants or researchers. Many respondents indicated that inclusivity was the core value of their organizations, though this was less often reflected in procurement processes.

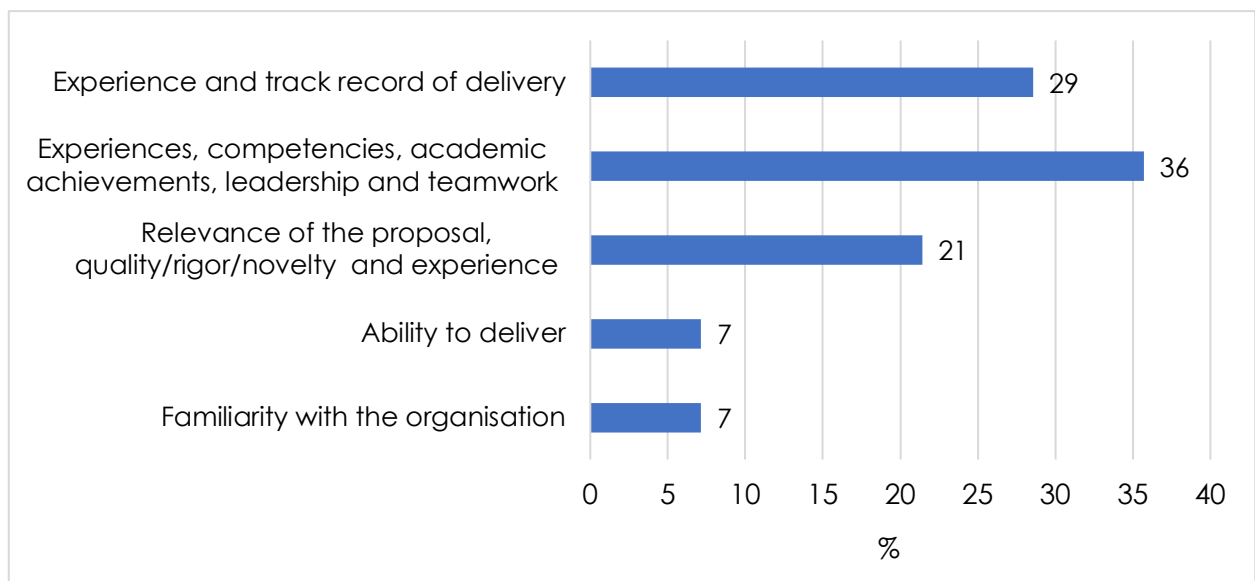
Figure 6: Indications Regarding the Share of Overall Budget Dedicated to Commissioning Southern vs. Non-Southern Consultants



4.3. Criteria for Commissioning Southern Consultants in Economic-Development Projects

The majority respondents (36%) from participating organizations indicated that experience, competencies, education, academic achievements, leadership, and teamwork were important factors usually considered in the selection of consultants and researchers. Other pertinent factors included the ability to deliver on assigned task(s), familiarity with the organization, track record of delivery, expertise, and quality of past work. Relevance of proposal and quality/rigor of the proposal also mattered in the selection or commissioning of researchers and consultants (Figure 7). Most multi-year calls for proposals employ commercial contracting formats that are easily understood by northern entities, though researchers in the global south may not have the skills to complete bid documents or their organizations may not have business-development units dedicated to this task.

Figure 7: Major Variables in Overall Selection Criteria for Awarding Consulting Contracts



As Figure 8 demonstrates, sensitivity to gender and disability status was considered a best-practice metric by most organizations in procuring consulting services. Local expertise, experience in supporting African countries in the area of interest, and

expertise known to produce cutting-edge work (each making up about 17%) also constituted important practice metrics for some organizations.

Figure 8: Some Best-Practice Metrics Used by Organizations in Procuring Consulting Services

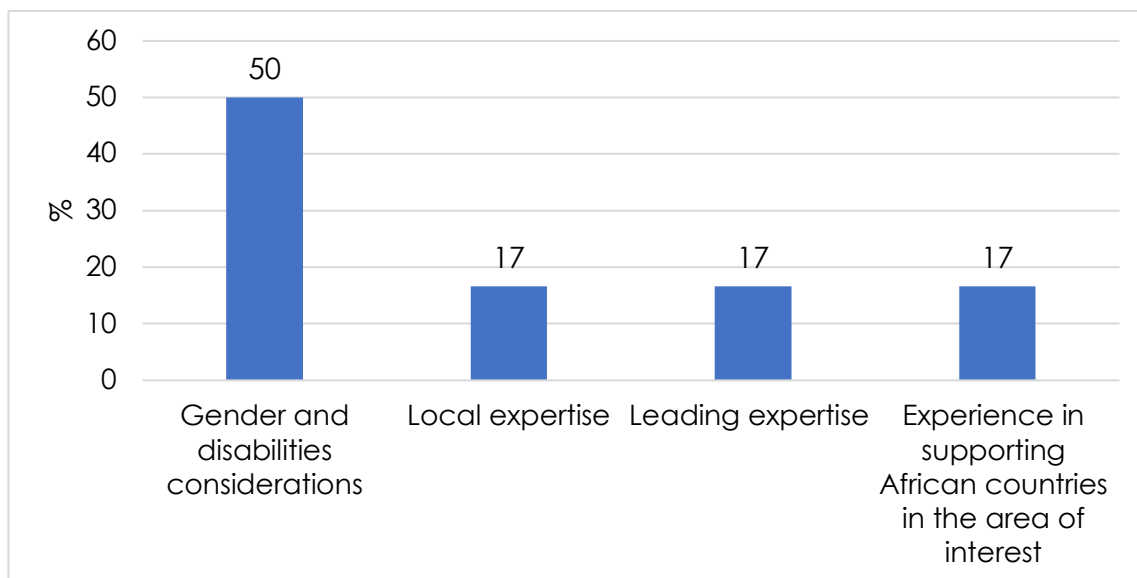


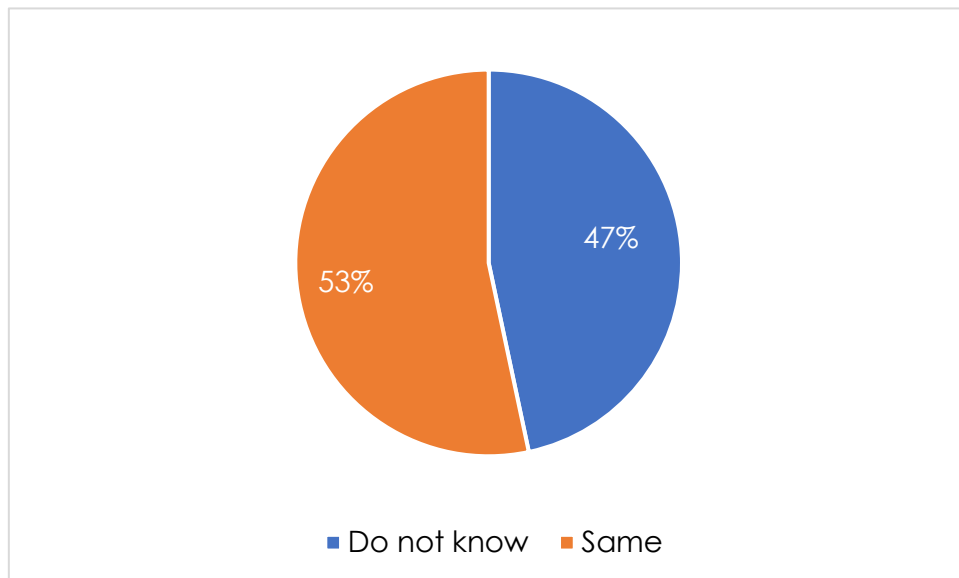
Figure 9 indicates that approximately 53% of the respondents were not aware of differences in their organizations' enforcement of due-diligence frameworks in choosing between southern and non-southern based consultants, while about 47% reported that due diligence frameworks were the same for southern and non-southern consultants. To some extent, this suggests that exercising due diligence in procurement might not really be a discriminating factor against southern based researchers' engagement in consultancy services.

One of respondent had this to say:

My experience is that opportunities are always provided to southern consultants in their organizations. Some consultancies are invariably suited for local consultants in the south while others are more for international consultants in non-southern countries. This is due mainly to experiences. However, even when more suitable for non-southern

consultants, the advertisement is always carried locally just in case some local consultants are responsive.

Figure 9: Differences in Due Diligence Frameworks by Procurement Unit of Participating Organizations in Choosing between Southern and Non-Southern Consultants



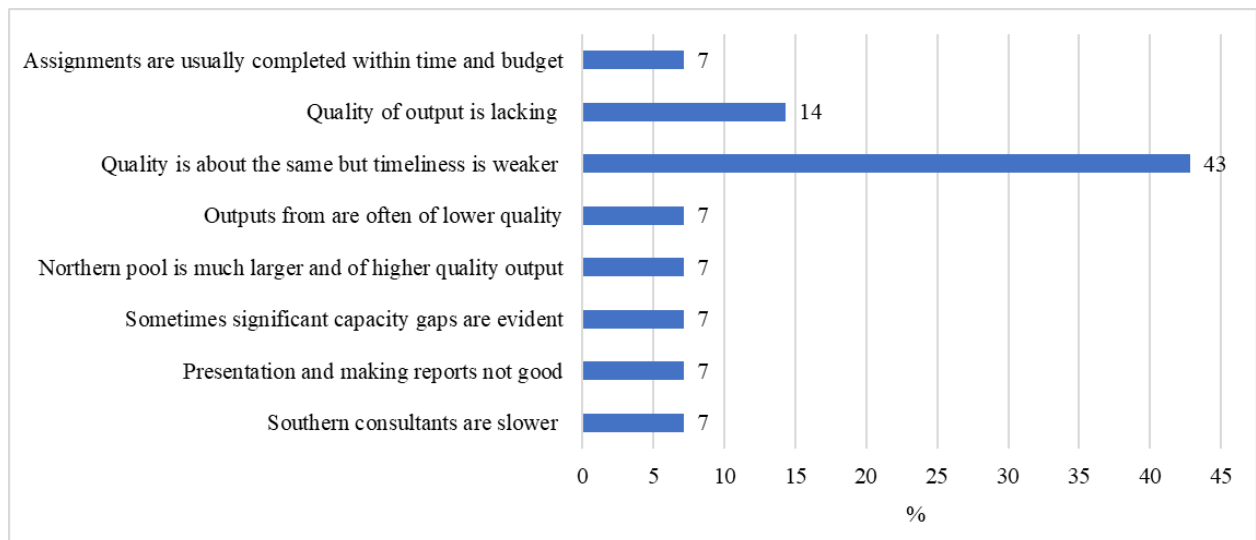
4.4. Challenges in Commissioning Southern Consultants in Economic-Development Projects

Figure 10 shows that most respondents (about 43%) highlighted timeliness in delivery of assigned tasks as the leading challenge facing southern consultants. A considerable number of respondents affirmed that timelines were weaker in the global south, which tended to be a problem. One respondent stated that southern consultants, on average, were slower and less familiar with the expectations of northern foundations or clients. Unpacking this argument could be part of future research in this area.

Another important issue raised was that outputs from southern consultants were often of lower quality than required and that projects were usually prolonged beyond the planned timeline. Other challenges included significant capacity gaps or the fact that the northern pool was much larger, thus increasing the probability of higher-quality

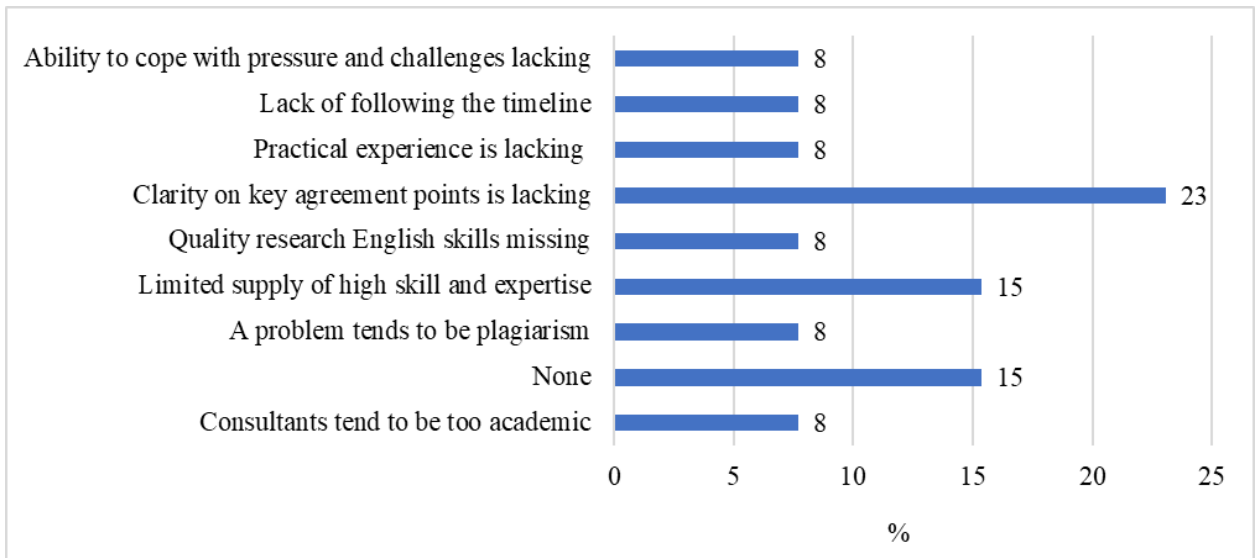
output. To a few respondents, quality of milestones and deliverables, including reports, assessments and advice was satisfactory and that assignments were usually completed on time and within budget.

Figure 10: Experience Regarding Outputs of Southern Consultants



In terms of critical consulting skills and elements of orientation that southern resource persons lacked, some respondents (about 23%) were of the opinion that southern consultants lacked clarity on key agreement points or on providing feedback and had a limited supply of high skills (15%). Others also reported that southern resource persons tended to be too academic or advocacy-driven (8%), particularly in the international development field when what organizations often needed was policy-oriented work that addressed real-life problems or challenges (Figure 11). A few respondents also identified the scope of projects and a failure to follow timelines as weak consulting elements among southern consultants. Others felt that conducting plagiarism checks was a major critical skill that southern consultants and researchers lacked. Language was also sometimes identified as a major problem, especially in the case of non-English speaking consultants.

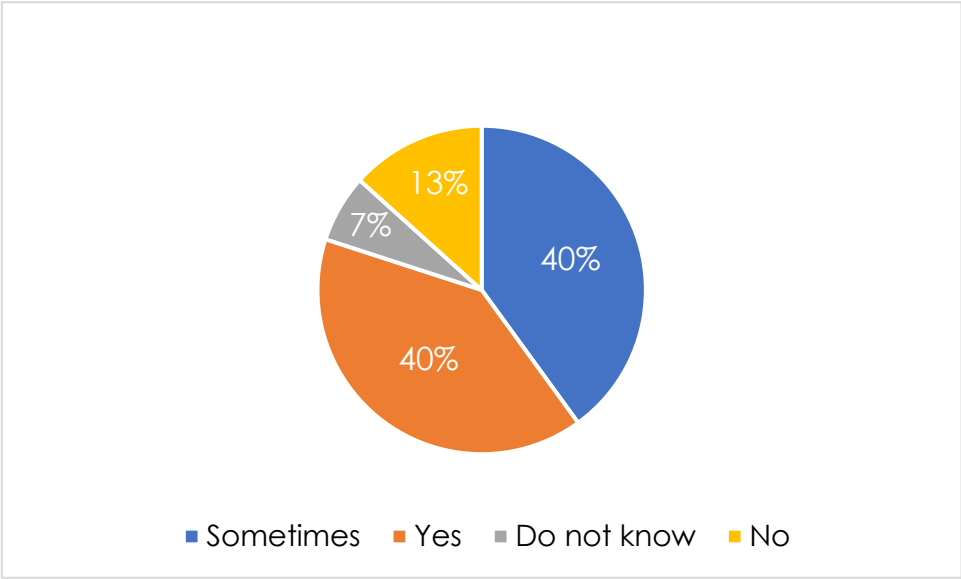
Figure 11: Critical Consulting Skills and Elements of Consultant Orientation Identified as Lacking among Southern Resource Persons



One respondent stated that “Quality research English skills are often missing [and] application of economic data in research work is often lacking. It is also difficult to get detailed and focused analysis. Concrete methodology part is also often missing or incomplete.” Another was of the view that “some southern consultants are good while some are not, just like the northern resources.”

Figure 12 shows that about 40% respondents believed that southern researchers and consultants were sometimes not able to fully comprehend requirements for commercial bidding, while another 40% indicated that researchers in the global south/consultants were able to fully comprehend the requirements. Approximately 13% of respondents categorically stated that southern researchers or consultants were not able to fully comprehend such requirements while 7% were unsure.

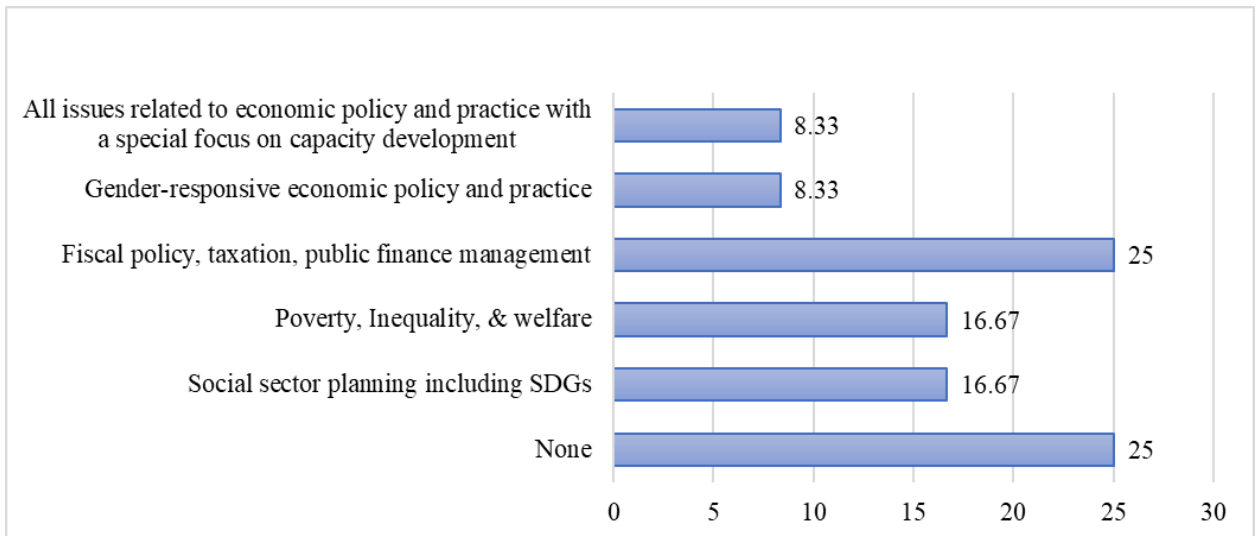
Figure 12: Comprehension of Requirements for Commercial Bidding on the Part of Southern Resource Persons



4.5. Possible Future Commissioning or Engagement of Southern Consultants in Economic-Development Projects

As shown in Figure 13, approximately 25% respondents stated that researchers in the global south tended to be concentrated in the areas of fiscal policy, taxation, and public-finance management in the economic development space. A similar percentage of respondents said they did not think any subsector in their organizations held any greater concentration of southern researchers. About 17% indicated a greater concentration of southern researchers in the poverty, inequality, welfare, and social-sector planning areas, including Sustainable Development Goals, while only 9% imagined a greater concentration and commissioning of southern researchers in gender-responsive economic policy and practice or in all issues related to economic policy and practice with a special focus on capacity development.

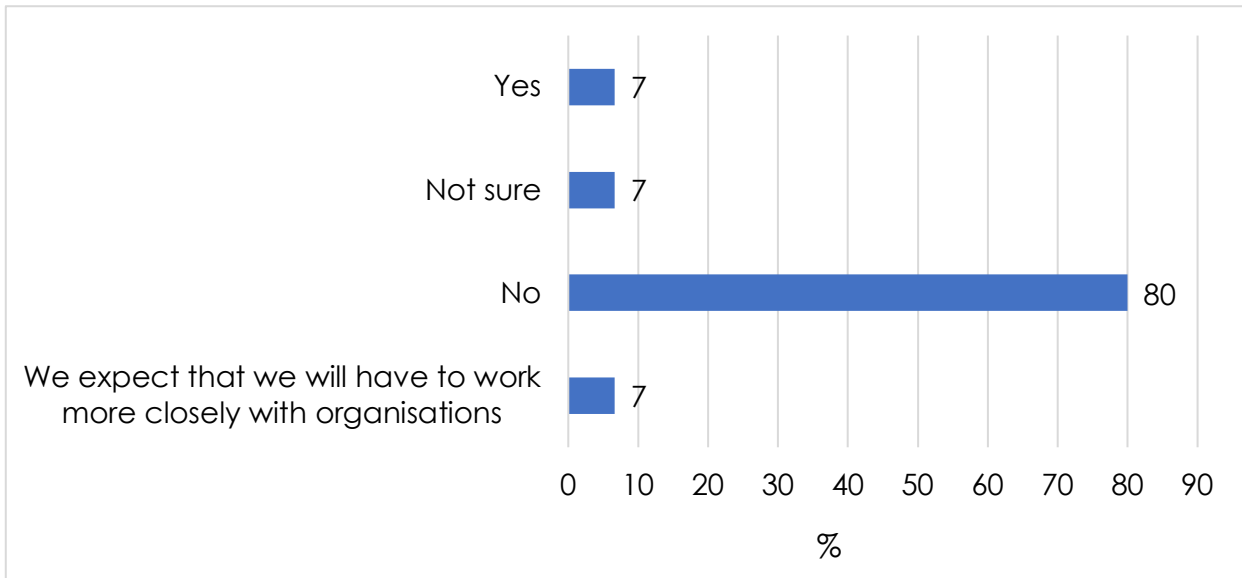
Figure 13: Distribution of Economic-Development Sub-Sectors in Which a Greater Concentration of Researchers in the Global South Was Expected



4.6. COVID-19 Pandemic and Use of Evidence from Southern Consulting Firms/Researchers

Given that COVID-19 has given rise to travel and work restrictions for foreign consultants and their firms, the pandemic might well change how organizations view and use evidence from researchers and consultants in the global south. A majority of respondents, however (80%), believed that COVID-19 would not affect their relationships with southern consultants, though they thought building new relationships and seeing new and exciting work might be more challenging. Some felt that more locally based southern consultants and researchers were being requested (Figure 14).

Figure 14: How COVID-19 Has Changed Organizations' Views and Use of Evidence from Researchers and Consultants in the Global South

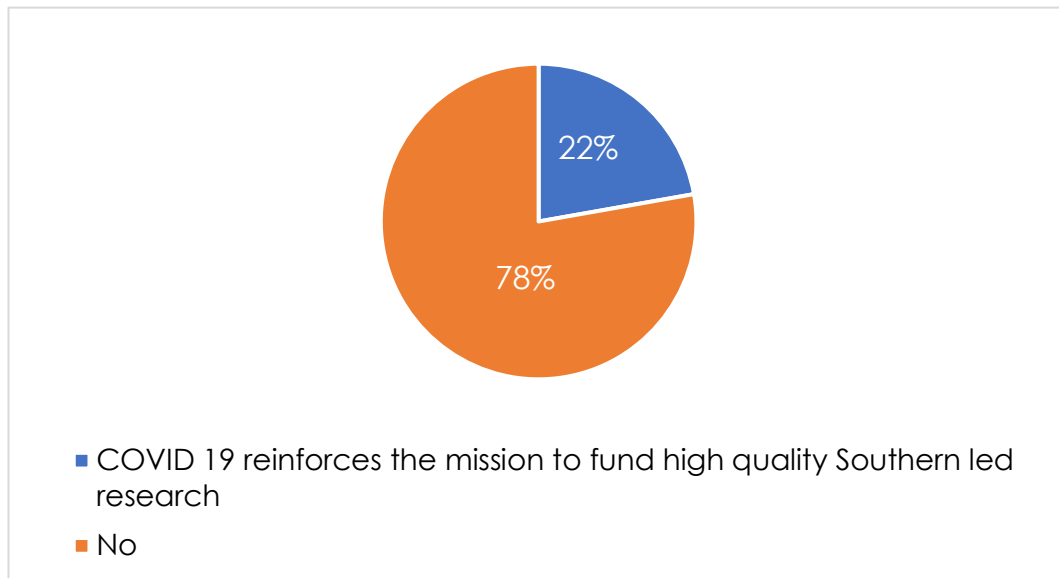


One respondent noted: “The pandemic has affected operations but has not changed the attitude toward researchers in the global south,” and others expressed the view that they would continue to work more closely with southern consultants and firms in their areas of specialization or interest, noting that operations might change as a result of limitations on field work, travel, and physical contact (meetings) and that new partnerships might be required. The greater focus on “desk studies,” in fact, led one respondent to remark that “it has become more apparent that it is unnecessary for people to travel, and [that provides] more opportunities to local consultants”

Moreover, most respondents (78%) did not foresee changes in the types of evidence demanded from researchers in the global south in a post-pandemic era because both southern and non-southern resource persons now work virtually (Figure 15). That fact might even lead organizations and partners to fund high quality southern-led research for development. However, some of the evidence demanded from researchers or consulting firms in the global south might be biased toward health and pandemic-related issues, especially thinking and evidence relevant to supporting post COVID-19 recovery. One respondent commented that “Indeed [the] COVID-19 pandemic seems to have increased nationalism, at least in the short term, such that local

evidence now has more credibility,” and another said that “It appears that COVID-19 pandemic may be the start of a significant shift.”

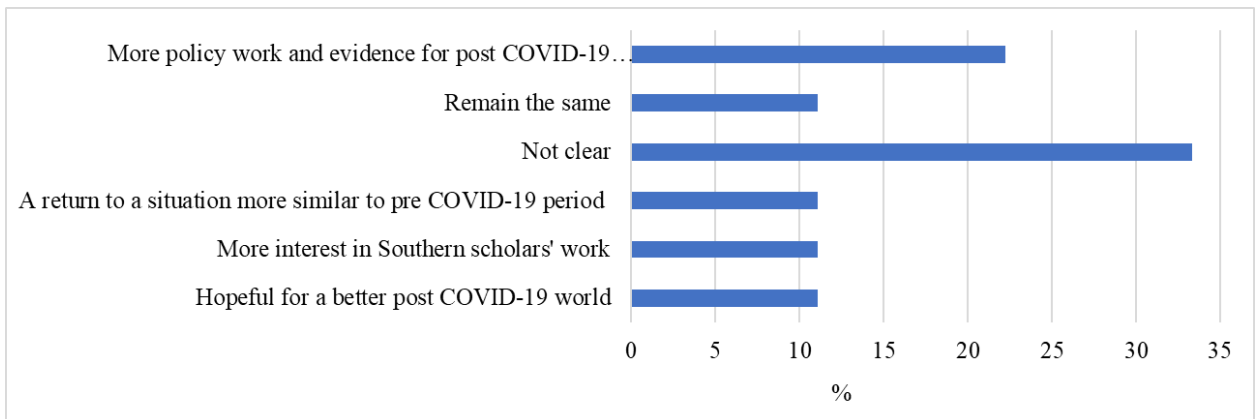
Figure 15: Changes in the Types of Evidence Demanded from Researchers in the Global South in a Post-Pandemic Era



4.7. Expectations of Organizations in the Medium to Long Term

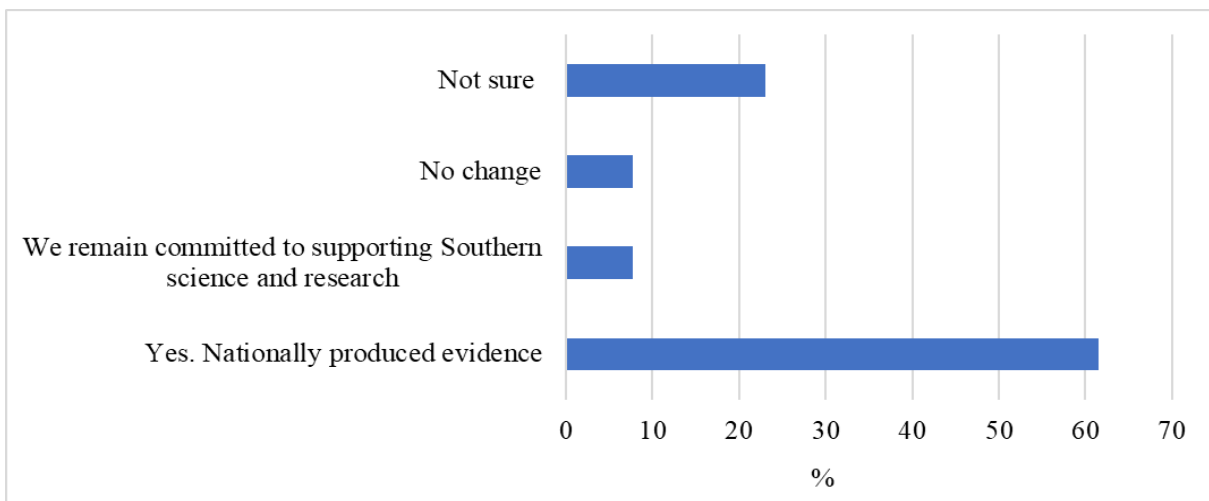
Respondents from various organizations seemed to have different post-pandemic expectations (Figure 16), though evidence relevant to supporting post COVID-19 recovery was expected to be the main focus in the medium to longer term. While some hoped that the global challenge of COVID-19 would help them learn global solutions as the best opportunity for a better world, others’ expectations remain unchanged and unclear (about 35%). Some also expressed optimism for a return to a situation more similar to pre COVID-19 and reduced use of digital communication techniques, which would increase mutual learning. A need for more policy work on post COVID-19 recovery was also foreseen from all experts globally.

Figure 16: Organizations' Expectations in the Medium to Long Term



Most respondents (about 70%) expressed the view that their organizations would use more nationally produced evidence as they remained committed to supporting southern science and research, though some expected no change in their organizations' use either of more nationally produced evidence or of foreign providers (Figure 17). One respondent stated that nationally produced evidence was mainly used in research outputs while another noted that nationals were used only to provide evidence through case studies while experts (from either the south or north) were used competitively to provide cutting-edge ideas. Yet another felt that using more nationally produced evidence or turning more toward foreign providers depended upon the credibility of the evidence and its relationship to global and national discussions.

Figure 17: Organizations' Desire to Use More Nationally Produced Evidence or Non-Southern Providers



A respondent expressed the view that:

As national consultants are getting more experienced and responsive and as all advertisements are carried locally, I believe more consultancies will be won by local consultants. Local consultants have the inherent advantage of knowing country context better. It would serve them well if they are more proactive by building strong networks with non-southern consultants. This can allow them to reach out to southern consultants and form a team, and win consultancies that could have been easily won by non-southern consultants.

V. Concluding Remarks

By focusing on the process by which organizations hired consultants as well as on the obstacles that hindered participation, we sought to explore the perception that southern consultants and researchers are underrepresented in economic-development projects. We also sought to understand organizations' views about the future of economic-development consulting including their ideas regarding the areas that held promise. A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect the data. Mindful that primary data from interviews, especially if limited to sixteen respondents as in this case, provide a thin empirical base for generalization, some important observations can still be extracted from the findings.

Our key observations include:

- Researchers in the global south are commissioned frequently; however, the charge-out rates and the financial resources allocated to their hiring are lower than are those of their northern counterparts;
- For-profit southern firms are commissioned comparatively less often in consulting relative to their northern counterparts; and

- The procurement systems of development-partner organizations often act as a barrier to entry and scale-up of southern policy think tanks, which are unable to dedicate time and resources to understanding and preparing bids for highly specialized commercial contracts.

Based on our findings, three types of biases appear to be acting against increased participation of researchers in the global south in mainstream consulting. First, while many researchers from southern backgrounds serve northern organizations as employees and have achieved success, their peers who remain in the southern countries are viewed with less professional respect. Second, researchers in the global south may have been successful in getting commissioned research (as shown in select cases above), but their role in agenda setting, which comes well before research is commissioned, clearly seems to be missing. This implies that researchers in the global south often miss out on the understanding of important aspects pertaining to the assignment such as: How did the demand for the specific research arise? How will research outputs be used? What are the term outcomes of this research? Most researchers in the global south are not part of such discourse. Finally, inequality of opportunity is coupled with inequality in remuneration which, in turn, leads to longer-term issues of morale and motivation for those in the south. Against a similar level of effort, researchers in the global south are paid rates much lower than are their northern counterparts on the premise that local country prices reflect cost-of-living. A key implication of this has been substantial “brain drain”: southern researchers and consultants have moved out of their home countries (predominantly toward northern countries) to earn higher consulting rates, ultimately leaving the policy ecosystem weaker in the global south. While partnership should be fostered between researchers in the north and south, the local contexts that researchers in the global south can contribute to global development issues should be appreciated and encouraged.

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Appendix - Questionnaire

Dear Participant:

Background: This study aims to find out if researchers in the global south are able to participate on an equal footing in the consulting activities across economic development space. Second, we are also trying to document the selection criteria of consultants as well as challenges or deficiencies faced by researchers in the global south to find out opportunities in this space.

The survey should be completed by individuals, rather than by a group on behalf of an organisation. We expect that it will take approximately 15 to 20 minutes to complete. It is expected you respond to the questions based on your current knowledge and understanding. Some questions will have quick answers and others ask for a narrative response. Finally, you will see that we are also asking for feedback and comments on anything that the survey may have missed that is relevant and we should ensure to keep in mind, or any other ideas and suggestions you may want to share.

Consent form

You confirm that you understand why this survey is being done and how it is being used, and that you have the right not to answer any question. You agree to participate in this survey. Your responses will be confidential. They will be stored without any other identifying information in a secure space/server. In the case of narrative responses where you might be identified, we will anonymize that information for any discussion or reporting. Only authorised persons will be allowed to perform basic analytics and provide a report on the data.

- A. Accept
- B. Decline

For queries, please contact: vaqar@sdpi.org or Emmanuel.Mabugu@spu.ac.za

1. Name of official:
2. Name of organisation:
3. Designation:
4. Sex (Male/Female/Other/Prefer not to answer):
5. Organisational category
 - a. Government
 - b. Civil society organisation/non-government organisation
 - c. Academia
 - d. Development partner/donor organisation
 - e. Other:

6. Who are the most frequently commissioned researchers/groups by your organisation?

	Frequently	Sometimes	Rarely
Southern academics			
Southern think tanks			
Southern consulting (for-profit) firms			
Academics (from outside of southern countries)			
Foreign think tanks (outside of southern countries)			
Foreign consulting (for-profit) firms (outside of southern countries)			
Other:			

7. If you often commission non-southern academics, think tanks, and consulting organisations or their representatives, please list the countries (from where most commissioned during past three years).

8. Would you have an indicative idea regarding the total annual budget line (in USD) allocated for commissioned research/consulting services?

9. Would you be able to give us an indicative idea regarding share of overall budget dedicated to commissioned research from southern vs. non-southern consultants?

10. What are the major variables in your overall selection criteria while awarding a consulting contract?

11. Any examples of best-practice metrics used by your organisation while procuring consulting services?

12. How different is the due diligence frameworks by the procurement unit at your organisation while deciding between southern vs. non-southern consultants?

- a. Same
- b. Different (explain in what manner: _____)
- c. Do not know

13. What has your experience been regarding output received from southern consultants? Kindly highlight factors such as timeliness and quality of output.

14. In your opinion, are there any critical consulting skills, as well as elements of consultant orientation, lacked by southern resource persons?

15. In your opinion, are there any critical consulting skills, as well as elements of consultant orientation, lacked by northern resource persons?

16. In your view or in your organisation's commissioned work, what sub-sectors in the economic development space see greater concentration of researchers in the global south?

- a. None
- b. Macroeconomic policy
- c. Poverty, inequality, and welfare
- d. Social sector planning including SDGs

- e. Gender-responsive economic policy and practice
- f. Fiscal policy, taxation, public-finance management
- g. Central bank operations including monetary policy
- h. Others:

17. Are researchers or consultants in the global south able to fully comprehend requirements for commercial bidding?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Sometimes
- d. Do not know

18. COVID-19 has given rise to travel and work restrictions for foreign consultants and their firms. Has COVID-19 changed how government views and uses evidence from researchers in the global south/consulting firms?

19. Are there changes in the types of evidence, demanded from researchers in the global south in a post-pandemic milieu?

20. Are there changes in whose evidence counts or whose evidence is seen as credible?

21. What is your expectation about the medium to longer term? Will your organisation be using more nationally produced evidence or turning more to foreign providers?