

IFS CONFERENCE REPORT

THE FUTURE OF CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT FOR YOUNG RESEARCHERS IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH: *PAST, FUTURE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES*

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Executive Summary

Scientific research remains a cornerstone of global progress, enabling societies to respond effectively to pressing challenges such as climate change, public health crises, technological disruption, and sustainable economic growth. In the Global South, spanning Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia, and the Pacific, young researchers continue to confront systemic barriers that hinder their contributions to science and innovation. These include chronic underfunding, limited mentorship, inadequate research infrastructure, and the persistent outflow of talent. Since its establishment in 1972, the International Foundation for Science (IFS) has played a catalytic role in addressing these constraints. Through research grants, capacity-strengthening initiatives, and mentorship programs, IFS has supported over 80,000 early-career scientists across low- and lower-middle-income countries (LLMICs), contributing to the national and regional research ecosystems.

Now, after five decades of impact, IFS is approaching institutional closure due to long-standing financial constraints to the changing funding landscape. In recognition of its legacy and with a commitment to shaping the future of research capacity development, a landmark “Young Researcher Opportunities Conference” (YROC) was held in Cotonou, Benin, from 24–26 February 2025. Under the theme, “The Future of Capacity Development for Young Researchers in the Global South: Opportunities and Challenges,” the conference convened a diverse group of stakeholders, researchers, policymakers, funders, and institutional leaders from across the Global South to reflect, strategize, and co-create a path forward. Participants from Sub-Saharan Africa (42%), Asia and the Pacific (27%), Latin America and the Caribbean (25%), and the Middle East and North Africa (6%) engaged in deep dialogue on the critical enablers of research capacity. Central to these discussions were the need for sustainable financing mechanisms, stronger mentorship structures, institutional collaboration, and deeper policy engagement. The roles of digital technologies, artificial intelligence, and big data have emerged as transformative tools for enhancing research productivity and competitiveness. At the same time, the conference highlighted the urgency of reversing brain drain through targeted incentives and fostering regional research hubs.

Key forward-looking resolutions from the conference included:

- > Advocating for national governments and academic institutions to allocate a minimum of 2% of national budgets to research and innovation.
- > Launching a Global IFS Alumni Portal to foster collaboration among researchers, mentors, funders, and industry actors.
- > Institutionalizing structured mentorship programs to support early-career scientists.
- > Enhancing university-industry linkages to stimulate innovation and private sector investment.
- > Strengthening mechanisms for policy engagement so research evidence can directly inform national and regional policymaking.
- > Introducing targeted policies, including returnee fellowships and funding incentives to attract and retain top research talent in the Global South.

As the IFS chapter draws to a close, the outcomes of the YROC offer a clear roadmap for sustaining and scaling research capacity in the Global South. The momentum generated by the conference must now be translated into action through strategic partnerships, domestic resource mobilization, and institutional reforms. The continued success of young scientists in these regions depends on the global community’s commitment to inclusive, resilient, and future-ready research ecosystems. With intentional investment and coordinated leadership, the Global South can remain a dynamic force in driving scientific innovation and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

1. Background

After more than five decades of championing early-career researchers in Low- and Lower-Middle-Income Countries (LLMICs), the International Foundation for Science (IFS) is coming to a close due to persistent funding challenges. Founded in 1972 in Sweden in the wake of the 1965 Pugwash Conference, IFS emerged as a vital force in global scientific development, supporting thousands of emerging scientists in the Global South. Despite its significant contributions, the inability to secure long-term sustainable financing led to the difficult decision to wind down operations. This marks the end of an institution that, over its lifespan, awarded research grants and provided mentorship and capacity development to over 80,000 early-career scientists across Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

In February 2025, the legacy and future of research capacity development in the Global South were brought into sharp focus at the Young Researchers Opportunities Conference (YROC) in Cotonou, Benin. Convened as a culminating moment in IFS's history, the conference brought together global stakeholders to celebrate achievements, draw lessons, and reflect on the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for supporting young scientists and strengthening research ecosystems in LLMICs. This report builds on that moment of transition, offering documentation on IFS's impact and a forward-looking agenda for sustaining research capacity beyond IFS.

The conference brought together a stakeholder base from the Global South; the Middle East and North Africa (6%), Sub-Saharan Africa (42%), Latin America and the Caribbean (25%), Asia and the Pacific (27%) (Fig. 1). Participation from Europe was largely from the IFS office in Stockholm. The estimated number of participants from the Global South was 64. The diverse group of stakeholders included early-career researchers, academic leaders, policymakers, funding organizations, and representatives from research institutions across the Global South, IFS, and beyond. The three-day conference was designed to facilitate deep engagement and knowledge exchange through various formats, including Plenary sessions featuring keynote speeches by distinguished experts; World Cafe focused on specific research capacity development questions; Panel discussions with researchers, policymakers, and funding agencies; Networking opportunities for cross-disciplinary and cross-regional collaboration, and excursions.

The objectives of the conference included;

- > To reflect on past experiences in research capacity development and identify lessons learned from initiatives by IFS and other regional programs.
- > To assess the current trends and challenges in research funding, mentorship, and policy engagement for young researchers' capacity development.
- > To explore opportunities for strengthening research ecosystems, including new funding models, South-South collaborations, and digital transformations.
- > To document the legacy of IFS and key outcomes to inform actionable strategies and policy recommendations to sustain and expand early career research capacity development in the Global South as IFS winds up its operation.
- > To encourage cross-sector collaboration between academia, governments, private sector actors, and non-profit organizations.

2. Key Outcomes and Proposed Actions

Based on the discussions, the following key actions were recommended. The recommendations presented in this section provide a framework for strengthening research capacity in the Global South. Implementing these strategies will require a coordinated effort among governments, research institutions, funding bodies, and the private sector.

- a. **Governments in the Global South should allocate 2% of their national budgets to research and development**, ensuring sustained investment in scientific innovation.
- b. **Establish an African-led Research Support Fund** to reduce dependency on foreign donors and provide researchers with stable funding.
- c. **Develop structured mentorship programs** to support early-career researchers and expand opportunities for S-S academic mobility.
- d. **Create incentives for retaining skilled researchers**, including competitive salaries, fellowships, and career development pathways.
- e. **Increase investment in digital and physical research infrastructure**, enabling access to state-of-the-art laboratories and online/digital research tools.
- f. **Strengthening South-South research collaborations** and reducing reliance on partnerships with developed nations.
- g. **Encourage open-access publishing** to improve the global visibility of research from the Global South.
- h. **Enhance science communication training**, equipping researchers with the skills to engage policymakers and the public effectively. E.g. development of policy briefs for decision-makers, ensuring that research findings are integrated into national and regional development plans.

2.1. Recognition of the Need for Sustainable Research Funding

- a. Governments are urged to allocate at least 2% of their national budgets to research and innovation.
- b. The establishment of regional funding mechanisms, such as an African-led Research Support Fund, was emphasized to reduce dependency on external donors.
- c. Universities were encouraged to develop endowment funds to provide long-term financial stability for research activities.

2.2. Strengthening Institutional and Human Capacity

- a. A structured mentorship framework for young researchers was recommended to enhance career development.
- b. Increased investment in research infrastructure, including laboratories, digital tools, and high-speed internet, was identified as a critical need.
- c. South-South collaboration was emphasized as an effective way to build local expertise and reduce reliance on partnerships with developed nations.

2.3. Enhancing Policy Integration and Research Impact

- a. The need to bridge the gap between research and policy was widely acknowledged. Participants recommended developing concise policy briefs to ensure research findings inform decision-making.
- b. Science communication training was identified as a key area for development to improve engagement with policymakers, industry leaders, and the public.

2.4. Addressing the Brain Drain Challenge

- a. Incentives for retaining and reintegrating skilled researchers were highlighted, including competitive salaries, fellowships, and career advancement opportunities.
- b. Digital transformation was identified to enable researchers in the diaspora to remain engaged with institutions in their home countries.

3. Declarations for Action

At the YROC, stakeholders committed to advancing key recommendations within their institutions and national frameworks. Agreed follow-up actions include establishing a Global Alumni Portal, promoting open-access publishing, increasing engagement with policymakers and funders, fostering university–private sector partnerships, and strengthening South-South research networks. The conference emphasized the urgency of coordinated efforts to sustain research capacity in the Global South through mentorship, collaboration, infrastructure, and sustainable funding. Stakeholders resolved to turn the conference momentum into concrete actions that empower young researchers, shape future research agendas, and ensure science continues to drive innovation, policy, and inclusive development in the region.

Stakeholders committed to implementing key recommendations within their respective institutions, organizations, and national frameworks. follow-up actions were agreed upon, including:

- a. **Developing a Global Alumni Portal** to facilitate collaboration and resource-sharing among researchers.
- b. **Promoting open-access publishing** to enhance the visibility of research from the Global South.
- c. **Engaging with policymakers and funding agencies** to advocate for increased national to regional research funding.
- d. **Strengthening partnerships between universities, private sector stakeholders, and development organizations** to create new funding opportunities.
- e. **Advancing long-term South-South research networks** to support sustainable capacity-building efforts.

The conference underscored the **urgent need for coordinated action** among governments, academic institutions, funding bodies, and the private sector to support young researchers in the Global South. By **implementing sustainable funding models, promoting mentorship and collaboration, and strengthening research infrastructure**, countries in the region can build a more resilient and globally competitive research ecosystem. The insights and recommendations from this conference will **serve as a legacy and a foundation for future initiatives**, ensuring that research continues to drive innovation, policy development, and economic growth in the Global South. Stakeholders are encouraged to **continue engaging, collaborating, and advocating** for a strong, well-funded, and inclusive research environment.

The stakeholders agreed that the momentum generated by the YROC must now translate into **tangible actions** that empower young researchers, shape future research agendas, and contribute to the long-term development of science and technology in the Global South.

4. Overview of some keynote addresses



Prof. Dr. Patrick Van Damme
IFS Board Chair and IFS Director

Patrick reflected on the remarkable journey of the International Foundation for Science (IFS) and its contributions to research development in the Global South. He indicated that for over five decades, IFS has been at the forefront of strengthening scientific ecosystems, providing essential research grants, mentorship, and capacity-building programs that have empowered thousands of early-career researchers. He expressed that the impact of this work is undeniable, although now the reality of IFS is ending, and the knowledge and progress built must not be lost.

The financial constraints due to the withdrawal of major sponsors and diminishing external support have significantly challenged IFS operations. However, rather than quietly fading away, IFS chose to mark this transition through a meaningful gathering, the YROC. This conference is an opportunity to reflect on past achievements and engage in critical discussions on how research capacity development can continue in the years ahead. He applauded the presence of the stakeholders as it spoke about the impact IFS has had and the collective responsibility, we must share in shaping the future. Patrick stressed that if we are to address the persistent challenges facing research funding constraints, mentorship gaps, and institutional weaknesses, we must strengthen collaboration across regions and disciplines. Patrick likened the conference to the Big Bang Theory, which led to the formation of the universe that we know; therefore, the ending of IFS declared at the YROC was not an end but a new beginning. Let this gathering not be a farewell, but a launchpad for the next phase of research support in Global South.



Prof. Eléonore Yayi Ladeka
Minister of Education, Science and Research, Benin

Prof. Yayi highlighted the inspiration she drew from the International Foundation for Science (IFS), which provided her with funding for research as a young scholar. This support propelled her career forward, giving her strength and confidence in her academic journey. She encouraged early-career researchers to start their research endeavors, emphasizing that IFS gave her a voice in research by trusting and supporting her through a research grant. She shared how research has been instrumental in her professional growth, helping her advance to higher levels. IFS grants supported her research and enabled her to travel, broadening her exposure. She urged young researchers to begin their research early and to publish their findings, ensuring that their work reaches and benefits diverse communities. She advised young researchers to remain open to feedback on their work, as constructive criticism strengthens their contributions and allows them to refine their research further. She emphasized that research is key to developing other essential professional skills, including effective communication and public speaking. She encouraged young women to pursue their research interests without being limited by gender-based barriers.



Prof. Brice Sin Sin
Université d'Abomey-Calavi, Benin

Prof. Sin Sin reflected on his first IFS in 1987. He indicated that most senior people in academics and professors got the support from IFS. He spoke about mentorship while indicating that most of the PhDs they have graduated needed mentorship. Mentorship has enabled Benin to produce many PhDs. Education economies indicate that the more a government invests per student, the lower the unemployment rate. He highlighted that the more Higher Education is adequately funded, the better employees feel satisfied with their jobs. He stressed the need for training of highly qualified professionals in Africa, especially at the PhD level, to advance research, innovation, economic, and scientific progress. He emphasized that the more research capacity in a country, the more likely it is to be able to address gaps in healthcare, economic barriers, and food insecurity. Therefore, African countries need to produce more PhDs by fostering an environment where creative and practical solutions to local challenges can thrive. Africa needs an additional million doctoral degree holders.

5. Conference methodology

The conference was structured around key themes, each dedicated to a specific aspect of research capacity development in the Global South. Through keynote speeches, panel discussions, interactive sessions, and networking opportunities, the conference provided a platform for diverse perspectives to be shared. Participants engaged in in-depth discussions on the sustainability of research funding, the need for stronger mentorship programs, policy integration, emerging opportunities, challenges, the importance of research infrastructure, and the role of technology in advancing research.

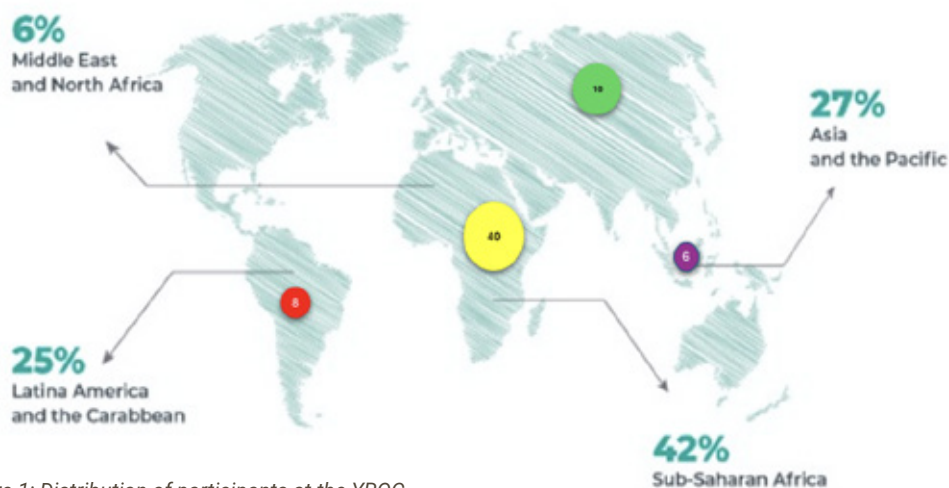


Figure 1: Distribution of participants at the YROC



A Panel session moderated by Prof. Patrick Van Dame.

The first day focused on reflecting on historical and ongoing challenges faced by young researchers. Discussions examined the 50-year impact of the International Foundation for Science (IFS) and how research funding has evolved. The impact of IFS was discussed, and the legacy was described in key words, capacity building, knowledge transfer, networking, and mentoring (Fig 1).



5.2. Day 2: Current Trends in Young Researchers' Environments

Dr. Bishnu Upreti (NCCR, Nepal) delivered the keynote address, emphasizing the role of North-South and South-South collaborations in research development. A major focus was on emerging funding models, including both traditional and alternative financing mechanisms, and their role in ensuring the sustainability of research initiatives. Participants explored strategies for strengthening policy engagement to make research more impactful and relevant to national and regional development goals. International collaborations were also discussed, with attention given to the benefits and challenges of both North-South and South-South partnerships. The discussions further highlighted the growing role of digital tools, artificial intelligence, and data science in enhancing research quality and efficiency.

reduced international donor support for researchers in the Global South. It was noted that governments and regional institutions must take a more active role in supporting scientific endeavors.

The final day looked ahead to strategies that could contribute to a sustainable research environment. A key focus was on the development of policy frameworks that support long-term investment in research. The opening keynote address highlighted the critical role that young researchers play in advancing knowledge and addressing societal challenges. The speaker emphasized the importance of early-career funding, mentorship, and policy engagement in advancing research excellence. Participants also examined ways to mitigate brain drain while promoting “brain gain” through incentives and targeted initiatives that encourage researchers to contribute to their home countries. Another major discussion point was the proposed creation of a Global Alumni Portal to strengthen research networks and facilitate knowledge exchange. Additionally, the role of regional and national research funding bodies in sustaining research efforts was emphasized, with recommendations on how these institutions can play a more significant role in shaping the future of research in the Global South.



6. Discussion

This section presents a structured analysis of the key themes, challenges, and opportunities discussed during the three-day conference. Each day focused on a specific aspect of research capacity development in the Global South, with insights drawn from keynote addresses, panel discussions, and interactive sessions. Discussions at the conference underscored several structural and systemic challenges that continue to shape the research environment in the Global South. These challenges, which span funding, policy engagement, and industry collaboration, require strategic interventions to create a more sustainable and effective research ecosystem.



Figure 3: Key highlights on opportunities and challenges.

6.1. Challenges facing young researchers

These challenges span funding limitations, mentorship gaps, inadequate research infrastructure, and the loss of skilled researchers to more developed regions. Panelists shared personal experiences related to securing research funding, publishing in high-impact journals, accessing mentorship, and dealing with limited research infrastructure. The discussion highlighted common barriers across different regions and identified strategies for overcoming these obstacles. One of the most pressing concerns is research funding constraints. Many countries in the Global South allocate limited domestic resources to research, making institutions highly dependent on international donors. This reliance often limits research autonomy, as funding priorities are shaped by external entities

rather than national or regional needs. Furthermore, the absence of sustainable long-term funding mechanisms makes it difficult for researchers to complete projects or undertake impactful studies.

6.1.1. Mentorship and supervision also emerged as a significant challenge. The shortage of qualified mentors means that young researchers often lack adequate guidance, leading to prolonged research timelines and difficulties in developing high-quality work. Additionally, low PhD-to-mentor ratios contribute to inefficiencies in training and supervision, while the absence of structured mentorship programs leaves early-career researchers without the necessary support systems.

6.1.2. Research infrastructure and technological capacity are other major concerns. Many institutions struggle with inadequate facilities, such as poorly equipped laboratories and unreliable internet access. Researchers often face difficulties in accessing modern tools and digital resources, further limiting their ability to conduct high-quality studies. Outdated technological infrastructure also poses challenges in data management and analysis, restricting the scope and impact of research outcomes.

6.1.3. Brain drain and talent retention were recurring themes throughout the discussions. Many researchers from the Global South seek opportunities abroad due to better funding, career prospects, and research environments. This migration results in a significant loss of talent, reducing the return on investment in PhD training and weakening national research ecosystems. The lack of strong incentives to encourage researchers to remain in or return to their home countries further exacerbates the challenge, making it difficult to build sustainable research communities. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive and coordinated efforts to enhance funding mechanisms, improve mentorship structures, strengthen research infrastructure, and create better incentives for researcher retention within the region. Participants examined strategies to prevent the migration of skilled researchers, including policies to support returning researchers through funding opportunities and fellowship programs. The need for incentives that encourage researchers to contribute to local and regional research initiatives, ensuring that their expertise benefits their home countries.

6.1.4. A significant concern is the changing research funding landscape. Traditional funding sources from the Global North have declined, leaving many research institutions struggling to secure financial support. Additionally, the distribution of research funds remains highly unequal, with well-established institutions receiving most of the available resources while emerging and less-resourced institutions face significant barriers. This imbalance underscores the urgent need for alternative financing models that can ensure long-term sustainability and greater inclusivity in research funding. Collaboration between governments, universities, and funding agencies was identified as a crucial component in ensuring long-term financial support for research endeavors. The discussion explored national and regional research funding strategies, particularly the feasibility of taxation-based funding models. Participants emphasized the importance of establishing self-sustaining research funds at both national and regional levels to reduce reliance on external donors.

6.1.5. The gap between policy and science. Research findings are often not effectively translated into actionable policy recommendations, limiting their influence on decision-

making processes. Furthermore, there is a persistent misalignment between national policy priorities and the focus of research outputs, which reduces the practical impact of academic work. The lack of training in science communication exacerbates this disconnect, as many researchers struggle to convey their findings in a manner that is accessible and relevant to policymakers.

6.1.6. The weak linkages between universities and industry also pose a challenge to research development. Private sector investment in research remains limited, leading to missed opportunities for innovation and commercialization of research findings. The lack of strong collaboration between academia and industry reduces the practical application of research, preventing its integration into economic and technological advancements. Additionally, the absence of clear incentives for industry-driven research discourages meaningful partnerships, further weakening the potential for knowledge transfer and real-world impact.

6.2. Emerging Opportunities and Best Practices

Despite these challenges, several promising opportunities and best practices are emerging to strengthen research ecosystems in the Global South.

6.2.1. One key strategy is the diversification of funding sources, including the establishment of public-private partnerships that can provide more stable and long-term financial support for research initiatives.

6.2.2. Technological advancements, particularly in artificial intelligence (AI) and digital tools, are also creating new possibilities for enhancing research capacity. The integration of AI in data analysis, literature review, and predictive modeling can significantly improve the efficiency and quality of research outputs. The role of digital transformation in research through the integration of artificial intelligence and data science was highlighted to be weak but could enhance research quality and efficiency.

6.2.3. Additionally, the development of joint degree programs presents a valuable avenue for improving mentorship and supervision. Collaborative programs between universities across different regions can help bridge mentorship gaps, provide diverse learning experiences, and enhance research training for early-career scholars. There is growing recognition of the need for increased policy engagement training for researchers (Fig. 4). Equipping researchers with the skills to effectively communicate their findings to policymakers can help bridge the gap between research and decision-making. By aligning research outputs with national development priorities, such training initiatives can contribute to more impactful and evidence-based policymaking in the Global South.

1-Research Funding and Sustainability

- Effective strategies to face the shrinking of funding from the Global North
- Efficient research hubs and institutional research management offices
- Local governments support
- Fund raising through IFS Alumni and IFS like-minded organizations
- Cost-effective research implementation strategies.



2-Capacity Building and Institutional Strengthening

- Institutional research infrastructures
- South-south collaboration for research and capacity building
- Mobility of students and researchers
- Multi-actors research development for effective policy integration
- Skilling ECRs in big data, data analysis, science communication, and networking
- Mental health awareness

3-Policy Engagement and Sustainable Partnerships

- High policy-makers and private sector engagement for long-term impact.
- Clear and Accessible research findings for policy implementation.
- Formalising partnerships
- Leveraging brain drain as brain gain
- Mentorship programs for ECRs

Figure 4: Summary of insights on funding, capacity building, and policy engagement.

6.3. World Café feedback on research capacity development

This was followed by World Café discussions, where participants deliberated on key challenges and formulated strategic responses to address them. During the World Café discussions, participants developed strategic recommendations to improve research capacity in the Global South e.g.

expanding South-South research networks to enhance regional collaboration, encouraging governments to increase research funding to at least 2% of GDP, developing digital platforms to connect researchers and facilitate knowledge-sharing, and creating national and regional research endowment funds to ensure sustainable funding.

Summary from the World Café

Challenges discussed

Discussions emphasized the importance of researchers developing well-structured, high-quality proposals that demonstrate a clear impact on the challenges in the Global South. Researchers must present solutions that address current challenges while making a compelling case for support. National funding is often tied to government priorities, focusing on specific thematic areas and disciplines relevant to local needs. Some countries, such as Chile and Benin, integrate research and training into their programs. Private sector contributions from industries and civil society also play a role, though bureaucratic hurdles and eligibility requirements can limit access. International funding is driven by the priorities of NGOs, agencies, and global research networks. These funds support interdisciplinary and collaborative projects, providing broader exposure but requiring proposals that align with funder expectations and address global challenges.

Suggested solutions

To improve access to national funding, researchers should build strong task forces and research groups, enhancing visibility and credibility. Capacity-building efforts, mentorship, and skills de-

velopment are essential in securing grants. Institutional support, particularly from universities and research centers, is critical in facilitating applications. Structured national programs such as annual research calls, partnerships with industries, and funding tied to strategic enterprises can create sustainable pathways. Some countries, including Argentina and Bolivia, link research funding to national development goals, ensuring alignment with economic priorities.

Best practices

A key takeaway was the integration of research and training. Funding programs should support both research projects and scholarships for students, technicians, and early-career researchers. Examples from Madagascar, the Philippines, and Thailand show that investments in education and research strengthen long-term innovation. Sustained efforts in advocacy, institutional support, and knowledge-sharing are necessary to expand funding accessibility. National policies should be more transparent and inclusive, while researchers should leverage international collaborations to secure additional resources. The discussions reinforced the need for coordinated action to ensure continued support for researchers at the start of their careers.

6.5. Key Takeaways and Recommendations

The discussions held throughout the three-day conference generated valuable insights into the state of research capacity development in the Global South. The key takeaways highlight the most pressing challenges faced by researchers and

institutions, while the recommendations provide actionable strategies for overcoming these barriers. The proposed interventions focus on primary areas: **policy and governance, research funding and infrastructure, capacity development and collaboration, science communication, and impact.**

Table 2: Key highlights on each day of the conference, day 1–3

Day 1 Key Highlights	Day 2 Key highlights	Day 3 Key highlights
i. Achievement of IFS for 50+ years ii. Challenges in Research Funding and the Changing Financial Landscape iii. Building Research Capacity and Addressing the Skills Gap at PhD level iv. Strengthening Policy Engagement and Science Communication v. Enabling environment for open-access publishing and access vi. Harnessing Technology and Innovation for Research Advancement (AI, big data, and digital platforms)	i. Strengthening North-South and South-South Research Collaborations ii. Emphasizing trust, collaboration, and formalizing partnerships through MOUs for research funding. iii. Research Funding and Capacity Development iv. Resource mobilization through IFS Alumni networks globally and collaboration with like-minded organizations (built IFS alumni network platform - Quick win for IFS) v. Enhancing Policy Engagement and Research Impact (effectively translated into policy and action) vi. Leveraging AI and Digital Tools for Research and Capacity Building vii. Transforming Brain Drain into Brain Gain viii. Encouraging mentorship programs and creating an alumni database	i. Africa Research Alliance for Science (ARAS) as a New Research Funding Body to perpetuate the legacy of IFS and strengthen research funding. ii. Key Challenges to Research Innovation: climate change risks, weak policies, poor government prioritization, limited communication and advocacy, and restricted access to finance and insurance. iii. 3. Effective policy reforms to support the domestication of research in the Global South iv. Country-Specific Strategies for Research Funding v. Strengthening Alumni Networks and Resource Mobilization vi. Global IFS Alumni Portal

6.6. Policy and Governance

This discussion emphasized the disconnect between scientific research and policy-making in many countries.

6.6.1. The speakers advocated for a better science communication strategy to enhance the collaboration with policy-makers e.g. the development of policy briefs tailored to decision-makers.

6.6.2. One of the major concerns raised during the conference was the **limited governmental support for research funding** in many countries in the Global South. Participants noted that in several cases, research is not seen as a national priority, and **public investment in research and development remains low, often below 1% of GDP**. This lack of investment leads to fragmented funding opportunities, inconsistent policy frameworks, and an overall inability to sustain long-term research initiatives.

6.6.3. Another critical challenge is the **weak integration of research findings into national policy-making processes**. Many researchers struggle to engage with policymakers due to the complex bureaucratic nature of government institutions. This results in a disconnect between scientific knowledge and its application in policy development, ultimately limiting the impact of research on societal progress.

6.6.4. To address these challenges, the conference participants proposed some **policy recommendations**. Governments should **allocate at least 2% of their national budgets** to research and development, ensuring sustained financial support for scientific initiatives. Additionally, national and regional research policies should be **structured to facilitate collaboration between governments, universities, and research institutions**, creating an environment where scientific advancements contribute directly to national development.

6.6.5. Furthermore, the importance of **public-private partnerships** was emphasized to mobilize additional resources. By working with industries, technology firms, and development organizations, governments can **leverage external investments** and create long-term funding mechanisms that ensure research is both innovative and sustainable.

6.7. Research Funding Infrastructure

Across multiple panel discussions and keynote addresses, the issue of **inadequate research funding** emerged as one of the most pressing barriers to research capacity development. Many young researchers find themselves unable to secure funding, limiting their ability to conduct meaningful studies.

6.7.1. **Dependence on foreign donors** was identified as a major weakness, as it often leads to restrictions on research autonomy and a misalignment between local research priorities and global funding interests.

6.7.2. Participants underscored the need for **alternative funding models** that are **regionally owned and managed**. A proposed solution was the establishment of an **African-led Research Support Fund**, which would provide grants and financial aid to researchers without the constraints of foreign funding conditions. Similarly, it was recommended that **universities develop research endowment funds** to create long-term financial stability for research projects.

6.7.2. Beyond financial constraints, the **lack of adequate research infrastructure** continues to hinder scientific advancement in the Global South. Many institutions struggle with **outdated laboratories, limited access to modern equipment, and unreliable internet connectivity**. Without the necessary infrastructure, even the most promising research cannot be executed effectively.

6.7.3. To resolve these issues, the conference recommended **increased investment in both digital and physical research infrastructure**. Governments and universities must prioritize the development of **well-equipped research facilities** and expand access to **high-speed internet and digital research tools**. Participants also called for the **formation of regional research funding pools**, where multiple countries could contribute financial resources to support cross-border research collaborations.

6.8. Capacity Development and Collaboration

The sustainability of research in the Global South depends on the availability of well-trained, well-supported, and well-connected researchers. However,

6.8.1. A key concern raised was that **many PhD students and young researchers lack access to experienced mentors**, which affects the quality of research output and slows career progression. Many early-career scientists face **limited mentorship opportunities**, leading to challenges in navigating the academic and professional aspects of research.

6.8.2. To address this, it was strongly recommended that universities and research institutions **establish structured mentorship programs**. These programs should be designed to **provide long-term guidance, professional development opportunities, and networking platforms for young researchers**. Institutions should also actively promote **mobility programs**, enabling researchers to participate in exchange programs, postdoctoral fellowships, and international training workshops to expand their skills and perspectives.

6.8.3. Another persistent issue is **brain drain**, where highly skilled researchers migrate to developed countries in search

of better opportunities. Many African, Asian, and Latin American countries invest significant resources in training researchers but often do not see returns on this investment due to **limited employment opportunities, low salaries, and weak research ecosystems**.

6.8.4. To mitigate this challenge, the participants proposed **strategies for retaining and reintegrating researchers**. These include **establishing competitive funding schemes, improving career development pathways, and providing incentives such as tax breaks or housing support for returning researchers**.

6.8.5. Furthermore, **South-South collaboration** was identified as a crucial tool for knowledge-sharing, where research institutions across the Global South could form stronger partnerships, reducing overdependence on collaborations with developed countries.

6.9. Science Communication and Impact

A difficulty in **translating research into real-world impact** was identified among researchers. Many researchers produce valuable studies, yet their findings often fail to reach policy-makers, industry leaders, or the public. One of the major reasons for this gap is that **scientific communication remains highly technical**, making it difficult for non-academic audiences to engage with research findings. Another concern is the **limited accessibility of research publications**. Many young researchers in the Global South struggle to publish their work due to **high publication fees in top-tier journals and restricted access to global research databases**. This lack of visibility reduces their chances of gaining recognition and attracting funding. To enhance the impact of research, the conference participants proposed some actions;

6.9.1. Researchers should be trained in **science communication techniques**, enabling them to present their findings in a way that is accessible to policymakers and the public.

6.9.2. Institutions should **encourage open-access publishing** by providing financial support for publication fees and promoting the use of open research platforms.

6.9.3. The integration of **digital tools and AI** into research communication was also highlighted as a major opportunity. By leveraging social media, AI-assisted writing tools, and digital storytelling techniques, researchers can increase the visibility of their work and ensure that their findings reach broader audiences.

6.9.4. Researchers to **develop policy briefs summarizing key findings in a format that is easily digestible for policymakers**. These briefs should be **concise, solution-oriented, and tailored to specific policy needs**, ensuring that research contributes directly to national and regional development strategies.

Appendix I: List of Speakers and Panelists

The conference featured a diverse range of speakers, including policymakers, senior researchers, representatives from funding agencies, and early-career scientists. The following individuals contributed to keynote addresses, panel discussions, and interactive sessions:

Keynote Speakers

Prof. Brice Sinsin – Université d'Abomey-Calavi, Benin
Dr. Abid Suleri – Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Pakistan
Prof. Anders Malmer – Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Sweden
Elisabeth Schenker – Swiss National Science Foundation
Prof. R. Ramakumar – Tata Institute of Social Sciences, India

Panelists and Contributors

Edward Yeboah – Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, Ghana
Dr Andrea Premoli – INIBIOMA-CONICET, Argentina
Prof. Dr. Nishara Fernando – University of Colombo, Sri Lanka
Prof. Thammarat Koottatep – Asian Institute of Technology, Thailand
Prof. Achille Assogbadjo – Université d'Abomey-Calavi, Benin
Prof. Alejandro H. Buschmann – Universidad Los Lagos, Chile
Dr Bishnu Upreti – National Centre for Competence in Research, Nepal
Dr Sushant Acharya – South Asian Institute of Advanced Studies
Prof. Ali Mahamane – Université Abdou Moumouni, Niger
Prof. Komi Agboka – Université de Lomé, Togo
Dr Alberto Giménez – Universidad Mayor de San Andrés, Bolivia
Prof. Stella Ifeanyi Smith – Nigerian Institute of Medical Research
Prof. Enrique Galindo – National Autonomous University of Mexico
Dr Christophe Kouamé – CIFOR ICRAF, Côte d'Ivoire
Prof. Kokou Kouami – Université de Lomé, Togo

YROC Conference Facilitator and Reporter

Dr David Chiawo-Lead Scientist, Centre for Biodiversity Information Development, Strathmore University, Kenya. IFS Alumni Chair for Kenya| Email: dchiawo@strathmore.edu

Rapporteurs

Dr Hospice Gracias-Climate Change and Biodiversity, Natural Resources Management Laboratory of Applied Ecology, University of Abomey-Calavi.

Dr Fréjus Ariel -Plant Breeding & Genetics. Researcher at NTFPs-Orphan Crop Species Unit Laboratory of Applied Ecology (LEA), University of Abomey-Calavi (UAC) Benin

Appendix II: Conference Agenda

Day 1: Past and Present Challenges in Research Capacity Development

08:00–09:00 | Registration and Networking
09:00–09:30 | Welcome and Opening Remarks (IFS Board and Secretariat)
09:30–10:00 | Keynote Address: Researcher's View on Scientific Challenges
10:00–10:30 | Panel Discussion: Individual Experiences of Young Researchers
10:30–11:00 | Networking Coffee Break
11:00–12:30 | Keynote Addresses: Perspectives from Policy, Higher Education, and Research Institutions
12:30–13:30 | Lunch Break
13:30–15:00 | Keynote Address: The Role of Donors in Research Capacity Building
15:00–16:30 | Panel Discussion: Challenges in Research Funding and Institutional Support
16:30–17:00 | Summary and Wrap-Up of Day 1
18:00 | Gala Dinner and Networking Reception

Day 2: Current Trends in Young Researchers' Environments

08:30–09:00 | Registration and Welcome
09:00–09:35 | Keynote Address: Learnings from North-South Research Collaboration
09:35–10:55 | Panel Discussion: Emerging Trends in Research Capacity Development
10:55–11:25 | Networking Coffee Break
11:25–12:10 | Panel Discussion: New Challenges in Research Capacity Development
12:10–13:10 | Lunch Break
13:10–17:30 | Research and Cultural Excursion: Ouidah
17:30 | Closing of Day 2

Day 3: Future Possibilities for Research Capacity Development

08:30–09:00 | Registration and Welcome
09:00–09:35 | Keynote Address: Policies for Future Capacity Building
09:35–10:50 | Panel Discussion: Research Funding and Institutional Support
10:50–12:10 | World Café Session: Solutions for Sustainable Research Development
12:10–13:30 | Lunch Break
13:30–15:45 | World Café: Collaborative Action Plans and Roundtable Discussions
15:45–16:15 | Final Wrap-Up and Presentation of Recommendations
16:15–16:45 | Closing Remarks and Next Steps

Acknowledgments

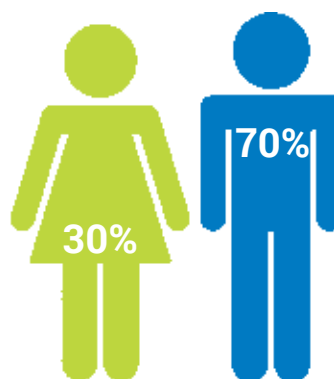
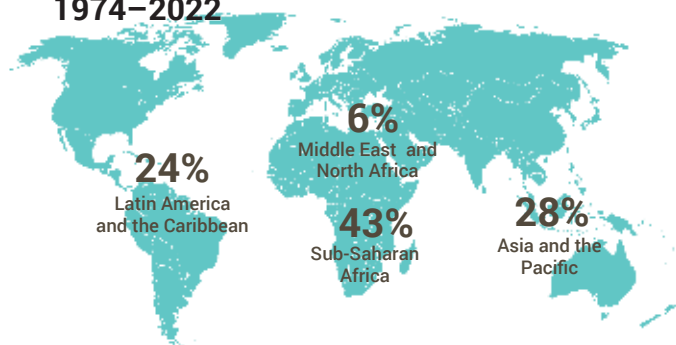
The International Foundation for Science (IFS) extends its appreciation to all individuals and institutions whose efforts made the final conference, “The Future of Capacity Development for Young Researchers in the Global South” (24–26 February 2025, Cotonou, Benin), a resounding success. IFS acknowledges the strategic leadership of the IFS Board of Trustees for planning the conference and the BOT members Prof. Dr. Patrick Van Damme (Chair and Interim Director), along with Prof. Monica Moraes, Prof. Edith Taleisnik, Dr. Bishnu Upreti, and Ms. Elisabeth Schenker, who moderated key sessions at the conference. The IFS Secretariat, comprising Annika Eriksson, Ingrid Lindhé, Bahati Orlendo, Jill Wallin, Ulf Edin, and Nathalie A. Persson, provided exceptional coordination and logistical support throughout the event. The Benin Organizing Committee, including Prof. Brice Sinsin, Prof. Achille Assogbadjo and Prof. Joseph Hounhouigan for their warm hospitality and effective local coordination. We further thank our keynote speakers, including Prof. Brice Sinsin, Prof. Eléonore Yayi Ladeka, Prof. R. Ramakumar, Prof. Anders Malmer, Dr. Bishnu Upreti, Ms. Elisabeth Schenker, and Prof. Olusola Oyewole, for their powerful contributions to shaping the conference dialogue. IFS recognizes Ms. Elisabeth Schenker for designing and facilitating the World Café session and extend appreciation to all group convenors, note takers, moderators, and participants who made the collaborative sessions vibrant and impactful. Special recognition goes to Dr. David Chiawo for his outstanding work as the overall conference facilitator, and to Dr. Hospice Gracias and Dr. Fréjus Ariel for their meticulous documentation as rapporteurs. The conference brought together a diverse and dynamic group of more than 60 participants, including early-career researchers, senior academics, institutional leaders, policymakers, and funders from across the Global South including Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Middle East and North Africa. The collective engagement of the regional representatives not only celebrated the legacy of IFS but also helped chart a meaningful path forward for inclusive, sustainable research capacity development in the Global South.

About IFS

The International Foundation for Science (IFS), founded in 1972 in Sweden, has supported early-career researchers in Low- and Lower-Middle-Income Countries (LLMICs) for over five decades. Inspired by the 1965 Nobel Prize-winning Pugwash Conference, IFS sought to democratize global science by empowering young researchers in the Global South through research grants, mentorship, and capacity development. Headquartered in Stockholm, IFS was governed by an international Board of Trustees with regional representation and supported by 92 scientific academies, most of them based in LLMICs. Upholding the values of trust, transparency, equity, empowerment, and mutual respect, IFS championed gender equality and inclusion in science. The mission of IFS was to enable promising early-career scientists to: Conduct high-quality, relevant research, communicate their findings to diverse audiences, influence science and development policy, and collaborate within a global scientific community for lasting impact. Funded by governments, private foundations, and development partners, IFS maintained an annual budget of approximately USD 3.6 million. As IFS approached closure due to long-standing funding constraints, its legacy and impact were honored at the **Young Researchers Opportunities Conference (YROC)** held in Cotonou, Benin, from 24–26 February 2025. **The event symbolically marked the end of an era while igniting new conversations on sustaining science for development beyond IFS.**

Impact of IFS summarized

Geographical distribution of IFS grants 1974–2022



IFS awards small, competitive grants to early-career scientists. On average 30% of grants are awarded to women grantees.

80 000+

PEOPLE HAVE BENEFITED FROM SCIENTIFIC EQUIPMENT THANKS TO IFS GRANTS

IFS is unique in the world to provide qualified scientific feedback to both successful and unsuccessful grant applicants

IFS has a proven 45-year track record of successful identification of and investment in future science leaders in low and lower-middle income countries who deliver impact-oriented and problem-solving solutions to local issues in three main areas.



IFS in short:

8 000+
GRANTS

1 400+

PRO-BONO SCIENTIFIC ADVISERS

130+

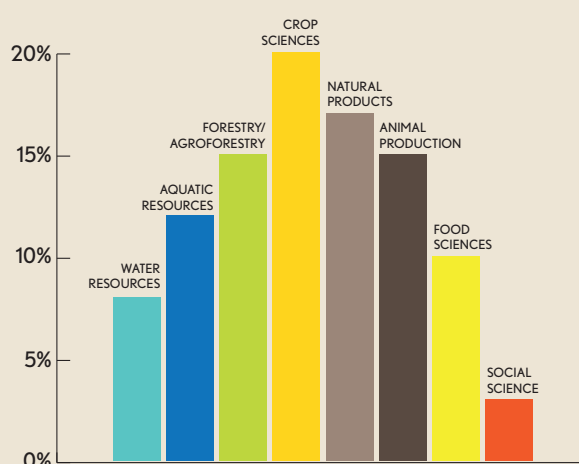
AFFILIATED ORGANISATIONS

105+

COUNTRIES

40+

PRO-BONO SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS



A total of 8800+ grants of value of USD 98 million in 105+ countries.

Group photo of stakeholders at the IFS YROC
24–26 February 2025, Golden Tulip in Benin





SUPPORTING YOUNG RESEARCHERS

The International Foundation for Science (IFS) supports early career scientists in Low- and Lower-Middle-Income Countries through grants and capacity-enhancing activities.

IFS was established as a non-governmental organisation in 1972, is funded by the academic, development and private sectors and has provided more than 10 000 grants to researchers in 105 countries for a half-century.



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