Equity in research collaboration and scientific authorship remains an important topic, especially among researchers in higher-income countries (HICs) and low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). Elsewhere in *JAMA Network Open*, using a cross-sectional bibliometric assessment, Eldridge and colleagues elucidate the representation of authors from LMICs on publications supported by National Cancer Institute (NCI)-funded grants in LMIC settings. Their findings highlight some progress in LMIC authorship representation and emphasize the need to promote equitable collaborations in global cancer research. Eldridge and colleagues discuss the role of funding disparities and publication bias as factors partly contributing to disparities in authorship. While the findings provide a landscape of the disparities in scientific authorship representation for NCI-funded projects in LMICs in the past decade, bibliographic assessments, in general, offer only a snapshot and not the entirety of the story related to knowledge production and scholarship involving researchers in the LMICs.

To democratize the process of knowledge generation, meaningful engagement of all global health partners in the production and dissemination of knowledge is crucial. Using this lens as a global health expert and journal editor, Abimbola notes that advancing equity in global health is not only based on the lack of authorship representativeness per se but on the missed opportunity to showcase local knowledge, which inherently leads to what he termed “an intellectual deficit in academic global health.” In essence, the inequity in the inclusion of researchers from LMICs as authors is more about the deficit in the knowledge produced and disseminated rather than mere representation as coauthors. Discussions about equity in authorship must not only hinge on the obvious missingness of LMIC authorship representation noted through bibliometric assessments—a point noted by Eldridge et al. While this is important to note, there is a need to shift the focus to address the fact that knowledge growth in global health is limited by not including LMIC researchers in the knowledge production process. Authorship representation or credit based on knowledge generation is important for scholarship—especially in LMIC settings—because, as Kharasch et al state, "authorship must be intellectual, not transactional." And it is here that another relevant discussion point regarding authorship equity in global health research comes into focus, ie, the importance of capacity building.

In particular, poor research capacity building and strengthening by HIC collaborators are missed opportunities for LMIC researchers to contribute to scholarship discussions. This deficit deprives the scientific community of epistemic diversity that can be achieved through equitable inclusion of learnings from researchers in LMICs. Ensuring that capacity building is an essential part of research grants and projects will also positively affect the career advancements of LMIC researchers, including early career investigators and women. The continued narrative on gaps in manuscript development skills among researchers in LMICs has to be changed through intentional capacity strengthening and building. This cannot happen except with concerted and continuous efforts toward discovering the right researchers and building capacity in them. In the case of global cancer research in LMICs, Eldridge et al noted that recent efforts to strengthen the research environment and build the capacity of LMIC institutions and early career investigators, respectively, are based on successful models from the Fogarty International Center at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Importantly, they note that these successful training models embody principles of global health equity, eg, mutual respect and benefit, as well as clear partner roles and expectations.
Along with intentionally including capacity-building efforts, the role of funders and journal editors must be emphasized. Funders and journal editors can play a significant role in instituting equitable authorship practices in global health research partnerships. To this point, multiple global health researchers and editors have offered guidance on revisiting the application of the scientific authorship criteria from the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors’ to promote equitable inclusion practices in global health research. We agree with their suggestion on pragmatic guidance for assessing involvement through reporting reflexivity statements to describe the ways in which equity was promoted in the partnership that produced the research. Reflexivity statements are responses to a checklist of questions that authors involved in global health partnerships involving researchers from both LMICs and HICs that are submitted by authors and published alongside manuscripts. Reflexivity statements will allow for more intentional reflection on positionality, the limitations of one-sided research dissemination, and the importance of equitable inclusion of partners in knowledge production. Journal editors and funding agencies should consider making a reflexivity statement a publication requirement and part of grant submission (similar to the NIH Foreign Justification document) for global health partnerships. Although not a panacea for the problem of inequity in authorship representation, they provide actional approaches that could ensure that researchers are more deliberate in promoting true partnership in generation of scientific knowledge.

In summary, the discourse on equity in scholarship through publications is part of a broader conversation on democratizing knowledge generation and production. While the North-South global collaboration has enormous potential for cross-learning, the scientific community must continually probe equity in such collaborations in order to address the imbalance in power that is often perpetuated with most of the funding being driven by HIC partners and funders, which may influence the false sense of superiority in knowledge production. While this idea does not address all the nuances of promoting equity in publication, we believe it promotes more intentional and equitable research partnerships.

ARTICLE INFORMATION
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REFERENCES

