Deqa Aden[1]

Busara Groundwork
■ *THOUGHT PIECE*

August 2023

What is a Global South organization? Exploring the meaning of terminology and identity for Busara's knowledge production

THOUGHT PIECE

Busara

About Busara

Busara is a research and advisory organization, working with researchers and organizations to advance and apply behavioral science in pursuit of poverty alleviation. Busara pursues a future where global human development activities respond to people's lived experience; value knowledge generated in the context it is applied; and promote culturally appropriate and inclusive practices. To accomplish this, we practice and promote behavioral science in ways that center and value the perspectives of respondents; expand the practice of research where it is applied; and build networks, processes, and tools that increase the competence of practitioners and researchers.

38 Applecross Road, Lavington, Nairobi, Kenya
www.busara.global

About Busara Groundwork

Busara Groundwork lays the groundwork for future research and program design. As think pieces, they examine the current state of knowledge and what is needed to advance it, frame important issues with a behavioral perspective, or put forward background information on a specific context.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

GN	Global North
GNGN	Global-North born and raised, educated in a Global North institution
GS	Global South
GSGN	Global-South born and raised, educated in a Global North institution
GSGS	Global-South born and raised, educated in a Global South institution
HDI	Human Development Index
SPS	Staff Pulse Survey
WEIRD	Western, educated, industrialized, rich, democratic (a term established by Henrich et al. to describe systematic differences in human behaviour based on cultural and institutional backgrounds)

Introduction:
Where, exactly, is the Global South?

Using the term Global South is a trendy way to describe parts of the world.

'Global South' appears in many publications from diverse disciplines, such as development studies, anthropology, and economics, as Dados and Connell found.[1] What it means, exactly, is less clear: most of the research papers that note 'Global South' as a keyword use the term without providing an in-depth definition or extensive engagement with its nuances, argue Haug et al.[2] Thus, alongside the term's popularity, concerns are growing about this meta-category that homogenizes, expresses power dynamics, and carries historical colonial baggage.[3]

In the social sciences and in global development programs, Global South is often used to define the physical hemispheric south (with the exception of the Antipodes), as well as former colonial states that today share similar geopolitical dynamics (thus, Haiti is usually included in the Global South description even though it lies in the northern

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1 Dados and Connell (2012)
2 Haug, Braveboy-Wagner and Maihold (2021)
3 Ibid

hemisphere).[4] The meta-category further often depicts current economic disparities in low-income regions worldwide. However, what makes the description Global South limited is that it stems from the same family as previous designations such as Third World or Developing Countries. All of these descriptors emphasize economic categorization, and lack meaningful expression of the socio-political realities of the world.[5]

With or without explicit definitions, the term Global South centers around socio-economic marginality and multilateral alliances where countries with a similar Human Development Index (HDI) are grouped together, with the categorization mainly offering vagueness and lack of nuance.[6] Although the term has been associated with development discourses, scholars have used it to frame interdisciplinary global studies that draw on different frameworks. This approach is an attempt to examine social challenges in an intersectional manner by using a seemingly unifying term to uncover differences.[7]

But what does the contested and unclear term mean for an organization that actively uses it to describe itself?

Global South: A meaningful identity for Busara?

Busara is a research and advisory organization, which emerged from being a behavioral science lab in Kenya to becoming an independent research and advisory organization in 2015. Today, Busara has close to 150 staff spread across its offices in Kenya, India, Nigeria, Uganda and Costa Rica. Organizationally, Busara champions multidisciplinary approaches to applied behavioral science to inform policies and programs to support

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4 Ibid
5 Mignolo (2011)
6 Armillas-Tiseyra and Mahler (2022)
7 Windsong (2018)

global human development. It also describes itself as a Global South organization, with context-based research at the core of its operations and research designs.[8] Busara states that 'those delivering behavioral approaches to global human development need knowledge that is created in the context in which it is applied' and that 'Busara pursues a future where global human development activities respond to people's lived experience; value knowledge generated in the context in which it is applied; and promote culturally-appropriate and inclusive practices.'[9]

Context-based research takes into account the social, political, and historical context in which research is conducted, ensures that research methodologies are culturally sensitive, and that the research findings are relevant to the people whom the research is about. Today, Busara seeks to intentionally recruit a diverse team that uses local insights to produce context-based and relevant Global South knowledge that meets international standards. Busara is headquartered in Kenya (while also registered in the United States), which demonstrates an organizational set up that is committed to being rooted in a context and its people, and to finding context-specific solutions for Global South problems.[10]

Even though hiring policies at Busara are in alignment with the overall mission of the organization of being diverse, committed to its context, and adhering to rigorous research standards, the organization is grappling with the phenomenon of being a Global South organization that is at the same time influenced by what could be

8 Haushofer, Collins, de Giusti, Njoroge, Odero, Onyago, Vancel, Jang, Kuruvilla and Hughes (2014)
9 Busara materials
10 Busara is registered and headquartered in Kenya with its full legal name Busara Center of Behavioral Economics. It has country offices in East and West Africa, and India. It is also registered in the United States as a non-profit corporation, although the intention is conduct research for the Global South from the Global South.

called the WEIRD phenomenon: being rooted in societies that are Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (WEIRD). The catchy acronym WEIRD was coined by Henrich et al. to highlight that people from different societies are systematically different from each other through their legacies of institutions and the culture they produced.[11] In subsequent research, Henrich has been adamant to highlight that the term should not be used to disguise the many differences that exist within WEIRD and non-WEIRD societies and that the world cannot be divided into two halves—[12]an argument that is reminiscent of the critique of the terms Global North and Global South that also champion such a binary division. Henrich et al.'s scholarship also highlights the limitations of making sense of humanity overall when research is primarily done with a narrow sample of participants from aforementioned WEIRD societies, highlighting the dramatic data gap that exists.

The rationale behind this report

While Busara exists to fill this data gap, it also straddles the many tensions its mission creates: the organization's ethos is to be deeply rooted in the Global South, yet the leadership composition is mixed, both from the Global North and Global South. This report was commissioned to bring some of these tensions in the open to transparently and constructively discuss them. It seeks to offer insights into how staff members experience this tension and how the organization might manage it constructively—or the extent to which the organization is committed to delivering on its ambitions to deliver context-based research, which is only truly possible if an organization is clear on its own logic, assumptions, power dynamics and imperfections that can contribute to producing flawed research outputs.

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11 Henrich (2020);Henrich, Heine and Norenzayan (2010)
12 Henrich (2020)

This report might hopefully also serve as an example to other institutions to be transparent about the challenges that come with working internationally with the ethos of seeking to represent the Global South, to be committed to producing knowledge that is true to and owned by the people in the research contexts, and to set an organizational culture in which open dialogue about these challenges and constructive feedback on how to address them are the ingredients that help to accomplish the overall mission: Global South knowledge production.

What Busara wanted to know: how does the makeup of our team influence the research we produce?

The initial ambition of this report was to investigate the meaning of the term Global South to staff members from different backgrounds in an international organization (in both its global presence and staff make up) that uses the term to describe itself. Yet, the question soon proved too broad and thus the author intentionally engaged Busara staff in setting their own priorities by asking them to vote on what question they found most important in understanding how Busara's Global South identity influences the way people experience and work in the organization.

Staff were asked to vote on seven possible research questions, based on their own interest and what they found to be most relevant to the overall objective of critically evaluating the meaning and practice of Busara's GS identity.[13] The question that was

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13 The list of all possible questions can be found in Appendix 1

deemed most important by the share of votes was 'how does the make-up of the team at Busara support or hinder contextualizing research?'. This question guided this report's qualitative research. In order to fully capture how Busara staff from diverse backgrounds view the extent to which the team make up enables or hinders contextualized research, the report categorizes the staff members who agreed to be interviewed by their geographic identities coupled with their educational background.

Key argument

This report argues that the term 'Global South' does not offer a unified identity: it holds different meanings to different people, depending on the background of the staff member. This background has an effect on the work that Busara does, as researchers are influenced in how they do their research by their context, which is made up by their personal identities as well as their academic background. This personal context also means that individual staff members operate with a unique logical framework that they apply on their research analysis; this framework is not normative across the team.

Research methods

In order to understand how the term Global South is currently used and debated in the literature and which part of that debate are relevant for Busara, the research began with a thorough literature review on the current knowledge gaps of how the meaning of the term Global South influences research production. The author then put together a list of 20 possible broader research questions that offered different angles to examine Busara's Global South identity (Appendix 1). Since these questions address different aspects, the list was condensed into seven questions, on which staff were asked to vote through an online survey tool (Appendix 2). The survey was distributed in July 2022 to all Busara team members across different departments and country locations; 48 staff voted, rating each question from 'highly interested' to 'not interested'.

Figure 1 shows that 87% found the question "how does the make-up of the team support or hinder contextualizing research?" highly or moderately interesting.

Figure 1: Percentage of the survey respondents that voted from 'highly interested' to 'not interested' on the question: 'how does the make-up of the team support or hinder contextualizing research?'
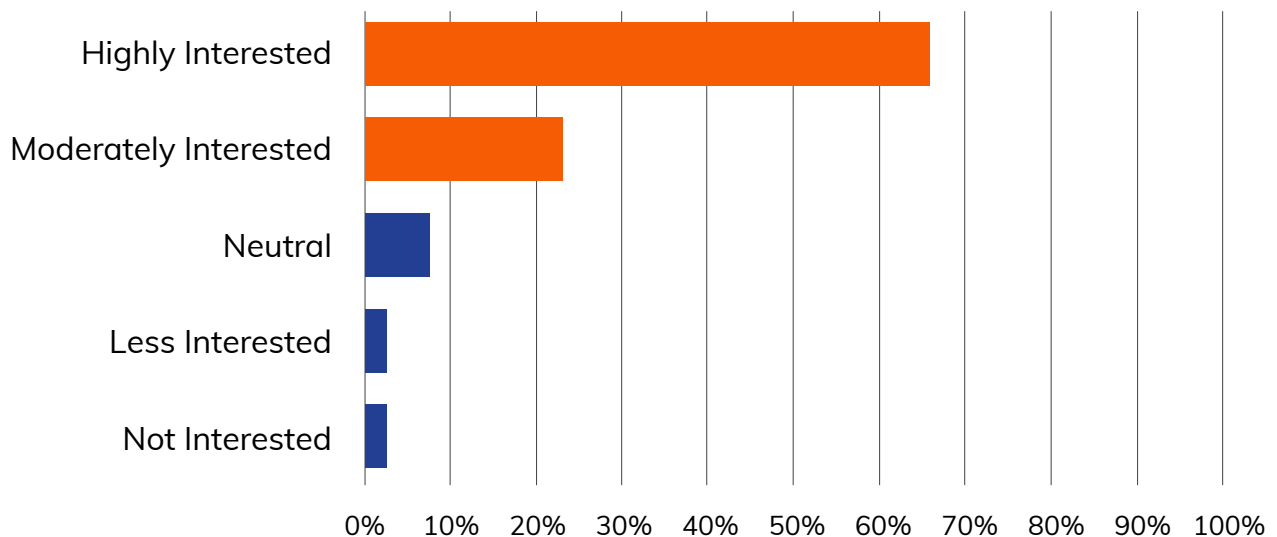
This shows that staff have an interest in exploring how they individually fill the term Global South with meaning through their career roles and makeup of the team. The question that had the least number of votes was: 'From the perspective of Busara staff, to what extent does the Global South term solve the problems of its predecessor labels, such as the Third World or Developing Countries?' (Figure 2). This shows that

the staff are less interested in labels, but rather their role in shaping the research process and the team dynamics that are inherent to international organizations.

Figure 2: Voting results on the question: 'to what extent does the Global South term solve the problems of its predecessor labels, such as the Third World or Developing Countries?'
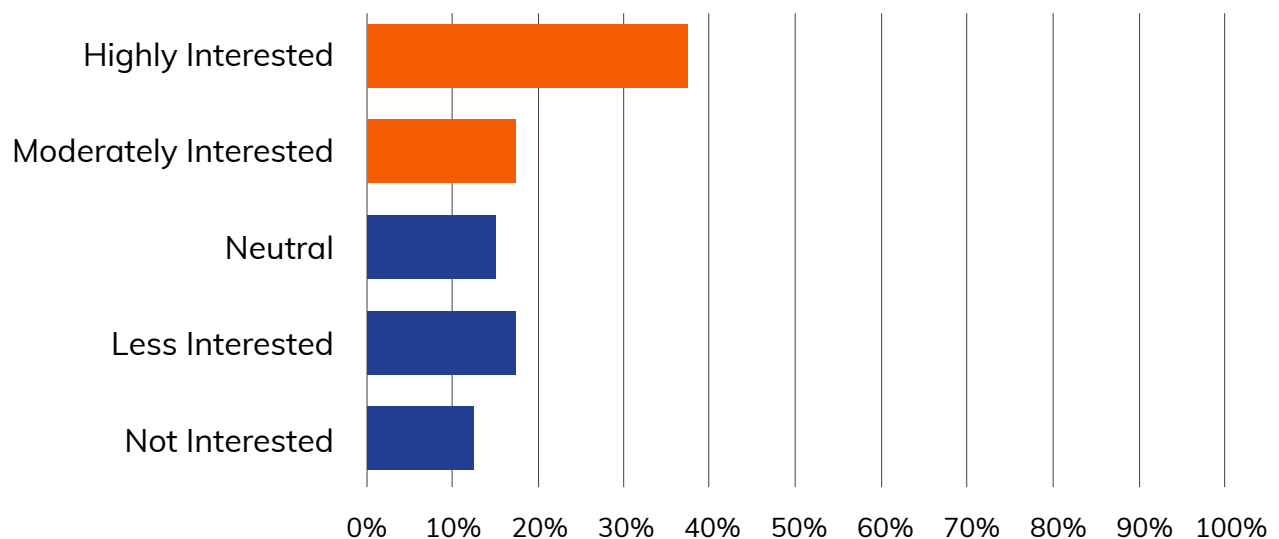
To answer the prioritized research question, the author used a qualitative case study approach, which allows in-depth exploration of a complex issue within a specific context. In this case, the context is Busara as an organization and the focus is on staff's own understanding of their engagement with the term Global South. Having asked for volunteers to come forward to be interviewed, the author conducted five qualitative interviews with staff members of different geographical and educational backgrounds (and different seniority within the organization), using a catalog of 16 questions (Appendix 3).

The first set of questions aimed to capture the respondent's demographic data, such as gender, geographic identity, number of years working at Busara, and their level of comfort in answering all of the questions. The substantive questions were open-ended, which allowed everyone to bring their own elaborations to the topic. Each interview took on average 25 minutes. Every participant was presented with a consent form that highlighted potential risks and the structure of the interview. One possible risk was the fear of sharing unfavorable experiences about the work dynamic at Busara. The research assured the participants that their data will be codified in an anonymous manner (and the identity of the respondents remains unknown to Busara staff). At the end of the interview, each participant answered the last question where they all reported that they felt 'extremely comfortable' answering all the questions. After all the interviews were transcribed, the responses were codified into themes in order to understand how the staff members approach their work at Busara.

Challenges and limitations

It is possible that despite the confidentiality of the responses and the fact that the author is not a Busara staff member, the interviewees might not feel comfortable critiquing their workplace. The participants were mostly based in the Kenya office, and it is possible that the power dynamic might be different in India or Nigeria, where almost everyone is from the Global South and the office is less diverse than the HQ office.

Three identities: roots of diversity and perspectives

Even with a small number of qualitative interviews, it became clear that Busara staff hold three distinctive possible identities and that these influence how they are experiencing working in a Global South organization. Differences in these identities emerged from both geographical and educational background. The key findings of this report rest on the understanding that these identities matter for Busara's knowledge production.

The three identities that emerged were:

1. *Global-South born and raised, educated in a Global South institution. This identity is abbreviated as GSGS.*

2. *Global-South born and raised, educated in a Global North institution. This identity is abbreviated as GSGN.*

3. *Global-North born and raised, educated in a Global North institution. This identity is abbreviated as GNGN.[14]*

These identities emerged because of notable consistencies in the responses that staff members provided when they talked about their research approach, the design of their studies, and the dynamics of work culture at Busara. Taking into consideration

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14 At the time of this research, no Busara staff member with the identity of GNGS (Global North born and raised and educated in a Global South institution) came forward.

the power dynamics inherent in the field of human development, this report contends that staff members who are closer to GN in terms of perceived national identities or educational background possess greater privilege and influence in shaping research outcomes compared to their colleagues who align more closely with GS identities.

The analysis presented here compares how GSGS, GSGN, or GNGN, speak of their identity, education, and the culture at Busara. Even though only five staff members participated in this qualitative research, they all provided detailed answers that demonstrate the complexity of the term Global South and how it influences the way they perceive themselves. The depth of their answers also supports future research questions and the role of the makeup of the team in producing context-based research.

To support the above argument, the report focuses on three aspects. Firstly, it examines how staff members representing the three identities describe themselves and how their values, education, gender, or ethnicity might influence their research work. Secondly, it delves into the organizational culture of Busara, how it engages with the three identities outlined above and how this might enable or hinder producing contextualized research. Thirdly, the report evaluates how respondents perceive the GS terminology and its impact on context-based research differently.

GNGN as experts, GSGN as translators, and GSGS as subalterns

Researchers who are seeking to produce knowledge that is deeply rooted in its context nonetheless have their own points of reference when contextualizing research. When designing research to be undertaken in the context in which Busara works—in countries in the Global South—personal identities play a role in how a research study is designed. This personal angle might be underestimated, as there is an unspoken assumption within Busara that all staff share the same values and seek to serve the same mission and commitment to context-based research. However, GS-born and raised staff members defined their identity very differently from their GN-born, raised and educated coworkers. The GS participants used their country of citizenship, and gender to describe themselves while the GN participants used their values and educational accomplishments, for example like in this self-description of a GN researcher: 'I am a researcher and have been for about ten years. Might slightly be even more depending on how you count. A lot of my career focuses on [what I studied] for my PhD."[15]

Another GNGN staff described their identity in a similar way: 'I am a scientist who is trying to lead an organization that is trying to do behavioral science work in the Global South.'[16]

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15 Author interview with GNGN staff member
16 Author interview with GNGN staff member

GS-born and raised staff offered a different point of reference to unpack how their identity plays a role in shaping Busara's research decisions and knowledge production. They mentioned their national identity as a vital tool that can help them solve problems that are unique to the Global South, meaning they rooted their research work in their lived experience One the GS staff said:

> *I identify as a citizen of a Global South country and that is it. I think coming from a country that is categorized as a Global South identity, I think a lot of the challenges these countries are facing and how similar the issues might be. Yet the details are different. So [my identity] helps me anticipate these challenges that we are going to face in specific areas of research. It helps me form hypotheses of certain behaviors in experiments. It helps me overcome the elephant in the room when it comes to research.*[17]

GNGN staff refer to their values (such as justice or equality) as their reason for wanting to work at Busara. Their personal values of caring about global inequity and wanting to make a difference is their connection to the GS research work they do. It is not their personal experience they are seeking to rectify (otherwise they would likely choose to work in the Global North), but these values are what makes them feel connected to Busara, to Kenya, and to the GS at large. Those who hold the identity of GSGS or GSGN feel attached to their work through their national identities. The fact that GNGN staff choose their place of work based on their value is a privilege that GSGS staff do not have.[18]

GN and GS staff foregrounded different factors to describe their identity description:

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17 Autor interview with GSGS staff member
18 Aden, Ngugi and Schomerus (2023)

one was values and the other ethnicity. This might mean that there are also two different frameworks that staff members apply in their research work. In particular, the value-based framework of GNGN staff seems rooted in an abstract level of understanding of the issues on which Busara conducts research. Ethnicity-based identities as described by GSGS mean that the understanding is drawn from lived experience of what it means to be GS. This results in a different engagement with what it means to be Global South: for the GN staff it means to have become an expert on something that is not them; for GS staff it means that they feel that they become translators of the lived experience. Another important identity component for staff that also influences how they conduct their research work is educational background. GSGS staff view their GS academic background as a contribution to Busara's attempt at contextualization, while GNGN members view their academic accomplishments as a contribution to Busara's research rigor. Though both contextualization and rigor are needed and provide valuable insights, it becomes problematic when in a Global South organization with diverse staff, the differentiation of the contribution becomes between experience and expertise, meaning one group is perceived as the expert while the other is not.

GSGS staff expressed that they felt that their input into research design might not be received as well as the contribution of a trained expert with a GN education. This uncertainty stemmed from the systemic challenge that universities located in the GS are ranked lower, or that English is the official language in the field but not always the main language of instruction for GSGS staff. Systemically, GNGN staff thus have the upper hand with perceived dominance in setting standards for quality research. Despite the fact that GSGS members value the education they received, they believe that it puts them at disadvantage, as one of them noted:

> *My education influences my work at Busara in two aspects: it informs my approach at work. We do a lot of research and collaboration with East African academics, and I find my colleagues who are not from East Africa to struggle what I consider some elements of being educated in the Global South...My Global South education puts me at a disadvantage at Busara. Busara tends to*

be quicker to recognize researchers from the Global North. You have to...put in a lot more effort to bridge that gap.[19]

GS education is thus implicitly valued less as a measurement of someone's technical expertise. Even GSGS who hold postgraduate degrees feel that these do not hold the same weight or value as their GNGN coworker's educational accomplishment. This perception is a reflection of the reality that most of the top universities in the world are located in the GN.[20] When hiring talent and experts in the field of behavioral research, GSGS staff have to put in a lot of effort sharing their knowledge and opinions with their teams, as these are often of a different shape than what GNGN staff recognizes. Even though GNGN staff joined Busara explicitly because of the organization's reputation of being cognizant of and committed to diversity and context-based research, the organization also continues to struggle to put that diversity into work, meaning that the contributions of each staff member, regardless of educational or ethnic background count equally. This insight also highlights diversity and valuing different types of knowledge is not achieved through numbers alone: most staff is hired in-country, but this does not create dominance of their knowledge, as one GSGS staff member explained:

There are people from the WEIRD places, and you can tell they are making an effort to be non-WEIRD. But most of the issues arise from the fact that they are not even aware of their WEIRDness, and it's deeply rooted in their upbringing. How can an organization be run, and it's almost unconscious of their WEIRDNESS? Say, for example, for Christmas we will host a dinner at

19 Author interview with GSGS staff member
20 Nejati, Shafaei, Salamzadeh and Daraei (2011)

*the office. But if you ask the Global South office, they will probably ask for a
gift card where they can shop for their families and take some money back
home. So that shows the decision-making process is made by an educated
individual from the Global North who is also wealthier than their Global South
colleagues. And these Global North staff wouldn't be aware of that context of
just that gift card alone.*[21]

Between the two identities are staff members who are GS born and raised, but were
educated in the GN: GSGN. They hold a unique role as translators, which can be a
particularly challenging role to play as they are part of their communities, while having
been elevated and exposed to different expectations due to having gone to university
in the Global North.[22] They are often viewed as perfect representatives by GNGN, who
can speak to the audience in the GN, but at the same time themselves might have lost
touch with the daily lived experience of their GS communities, meaning their connection
is not as rich as that of GSGS.

Despite commitment, Busara struggles to effectively utilize the diverse backgrounds
of its staff members to deeply shape the way the organization works. Unconscious
biases stemming from the GNGN perspectives are evident, leading to decisions and
actions that may not align with the realities and needs of the GSGS communities.
Addressing these challenges requires a deeper understanding and acknowledgment
of the staff members' backgrounds, experiences, and the influence of power dynamics
within the organization.

When examining the role of identities in producing context-based research at Busara,
education and ethnic identities emerged as significant factors shaping the organization's
work culture. While all research participants acknowledged Busara's commitment to

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21 Author interview with GSGS staff member
22 Aden, Ngugi and Schomerus (2023)

diversity and inclusion, the challenge lies in effectively assessing the contributions of diverse, GS-hired staff members to context-based research and quantifying the impact of Busara's commitment to diversity as a whole. One participant remarked that Busara's commitment to diversity is strong, but undefined. Since the organization was founded by, categorically speaking, GNGN people, it established a dynamic where little attention was paid to the GSGS hires' cultural norms (respondents mentioned, for example, different personality and different levels of accepting authority even at the cost of much-needed feedback). Unintentionally, diversity was initially seen to have been achieved once GS staff was hired. Once the team looked representative of its context, however, additional effort is required to put that diversity to work by clarifying how each staff member's experience is contributing to the knowledge production work Busara does.

Hindrances and enablers:
Busara's work culture

Busara's current work culture continues to be deeply rooted in its origins of having been founded by GNGN staff. Respondents expressed that they felt that the culture continues to be more geared towards accommodating the GN group. For example, there is an assumption that GNGN people are more outspoken, straightforward, and perceived as confrontational by their GS colleagues, as a GS staff explained:

> *Our founders and leadership are primarily from the United States. They bring a culture where being outspoken and giving/receiving feedback in an open way, sometimes clashes with African cultures where there is respect for elders and hierarchy. For example, you don't speak back to your environment just like you don't push back against your bosses. But if the leaders at Busara aren't conscious of these, it can negatively impact some of the employees. Perhaps even in our research. This is why we find a lot of the people on the ground doing the research are not the primary investigators [meaning that the principal investigator can remain removed from the empirical research work].[23]*

The power dynamic potentially puts research design on an unhelpful path. If GNGN staff are viewed as the experts and their cultural background determines work culture within the organization, it creates little space for GSGS staff to meaningfully shape research. This dynamic is also visible in the fact that Busara's project research leaders are mostly GNGN or GSGN, which might pose a challenge to the commitment of

conducting context-based research and might counter the purpose of hiring GSGS in the first place.

Yet, despite the experienced cultural differences, Busara's leadership encourages context-based research by empowering researchers to have ownership of their work. All of the respondents confirmed that the work environment is one that celebrates multiculturalism. Furthermore, they also affirmed that the work environment is highly collaborative and highly transparent. However, there seem to be organizational constraints that challenge these positive work dynamics. First, Busara's funding is dependent on external contracts, which limits the organization's control of scope and focus of the research, as one of the GN staff explained:

> *There is for sure a culture of withholding criticism because we might be spending too much time on budget and getting contracts and not enough time on whether the research design was effective in achieving context-based analysis.*[24]

Secondly, it is important to note that a significant portion of funding for Busara's research projects originates from the Global North, where individuals shaped by GNGN backgrounds often dictate the research agenda. This external constraint further contributes to the work culture at Busara that cannot consistently value different types of expertise, which in turn may hinder the pursuit of deeply context-based research that necessitates engagement and feedback from staff members, as one GN staff member explained:

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24 Author interview with GNGN staff member

I mean the biggest thing, which is a little bit outside of our control, but there are places where it's under our control is to make contextualization a standard part of our operation. The reason why I said that it's not entirely under our control is that we don't control the RFP (Request for Proposals) that we respond to. We don't write them; we just respond to them.[25]

While these factors lie outside of Busara's control and express systemic global imbalances, they nevertheless exert an influence on the organization's ability to fully embrace context-based research approaches.

Navigating diverse perceptions of the Global South identity: where is the common ground?

The term Global South has a different meaning to GSGS staff members in comparison to their GNGN colleagues. If the concept being studied has a different interpretation to GSGS staff, then what does context-based research in the Global South truly mean? The notion of deeply contextualized research is prevalent and recognized as needed, yet there is no consensus of what that means among Busara staff. This begs the question: how should Busara produce Global South knowledge when the terminology used has different meanings to GSGS, GSGN and GNGN staff? As a GSGS member said:

I think Global South means to me having a deep understanding of what the Global South experience looks like—whether its culture, financial, etc. And you don't have to necessarily be from the Global South yourself, but you must

have a deep commitment to understanding the Global South experiences and respect these experiences as well, because you can have an understanding without respect. We have Global North staff members who would live in a bubble in Nairobi by living in a wealthier area of the town and interact with people who do look like them. These people are physically here in Nairobi, but can never comprehend what it means to have no electricity, to even go without food, or deal with conflict. They would never have such contexts. When I tell some of my colleagues that my grandmother grew up in an extreme poverty, I can tell you that they will never understand what that experience is like. This is what I mean by deep understanding. I think that we need to make sure that those non-WEIRD issues are highlighted and incorporated into our work culture, and it's my responsibility to fill those gaps.[26]

In comparison, a GSGN member explained what the term Global South means to them:

For me, Global South means developing countries. Honestly, both terms are the same, though I prefer the term Global South. I think I have no strong opinions of the labels. And I know there is lots of research about these labels and their issues, but I personally remain neutral to them.[27]

A GNGN staff member unpacked the meaning of the term "Global South" to them in a different way again:

Global South is like one of my most hated words. It's just slightly better than Third World countries. We battle this internally, and maybe this research can help us to come up with a better terminology... Global South to me is really loaded. That when you say it, it's clear enough for people to know what you
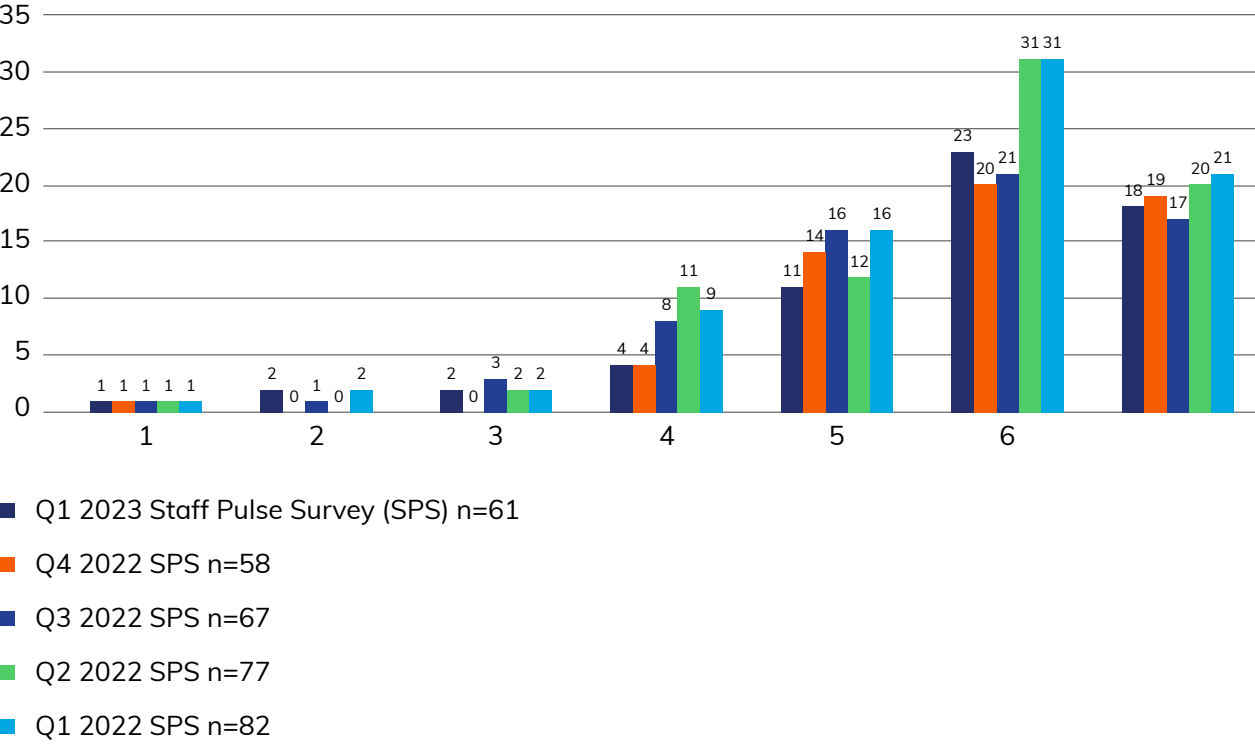
are talking about, but it's not enough. It is tricky, but you are stuck with it.[28]

Since GNGN staff members are not ever directly the subject of research, they might not be acutely aware that GSGS staff can experience research on Global South problems as extremely personal. The research is about their identities, their families, and their countries. This means that the relationship with the descriptive terminology such as GS is very different from someone who is educated in the GN. It is not clear whether a different terminology could clarify for Busara what it means to have researchers of different GS and GN identities who jointly seek to produce contextually-rooted research. But it is apparent that there is a difference in perceptions of what the term itself expresses. Addressing this perception difference might possibly be the answer to how to produce knowledge for the Global South and how to put diversity into work.

The beauty of this ambition is that it is both stark as well as nuanced. Because having one's identity represented is not a simple question that can be answered with a straightforward yes or no. In Busara's quarterly Staff Pulse Survey (SPS), which all staff at Busara are requested to fill out, one of the questions asked is about the extent to which someone feels this statement to be true: 'I believe my identity as a whole is represented and respected at Busara', with answer options ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The SPS results from 2022 and 2023 show that the responses are skewed towards the range that indicates agreement, the extent to which people agree with the statement varies (Figure 3).

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28 Author interview with GNGN staff

Figure 3: Staff Pulse Survey: "I believe my identity as a whole is represented and respected at Busara" (number of staff members that reported with the range of 1= strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree, per quarter)

- ■ Q1 2023 Staff Pulse Survey (SPS) n=61
- ■ Q4 2022 SPS n=58
- ■ Q3 2022 SPS n=67
- ■ Q2 2022 SPS n=77
- ■ Q1 2022 SPS n=82

This variety of responses, coupled with the findings of this report, indicate that while most Busara staff who responded feel largely represented, there is room for nuanced improvement.

Conclusion

This report delivers a couple of key insights on how the label of being a Global South organization influences how staff in Busara feel about the work they do.

The research uncovered distinct staff identities of GSGS, GSGN, and GNGN. These identities play a significant role in how people view themselves, their contribution and reason for being at Busara and, by extension, in shaping research approaches, study designs, and the overall work culture. The findings highlighted a power dynamic within the organization, with staff members closer to the GN perceived to have greater privilege and influence in shaping research outcomes compared to their GS counterparts. This power imbalance was influenced by factors such as educational backgrounds, with GS education being undervalued and underappreciated. It also stemmed from the dominance of GN perspectives and values in setting research standards and determining expertise, sometimes by proxy through donor preferences and agendas.

The organizational culture at Busara emerged as both an enabler and a hindrance to context-based research. While the organization celebrates multiculturalism and encourages researchers to have ownership of their work, there are also challenges in effectively utilizing the diverse backgrounds of staff members. Funding dependencies and external research parameters established by Global North funders further contribute to dynamics that might impede context-based research. However, commissioning this report demonstrates Busara's willingness to assess and critically evaluate its GS identity, indicating a commitment to international knowledge production

that is grounded in the GS. This commitment is evident in the organization's readiness to address areas where it faces challenges, highlighting a genuine dedication to continuous improvement.

Additionally, the findings revealed diverse interpretations of what the term Global South means to staff members, highlighting a lack of common ground and shared understanding. The differing perceptions of the term and its implications for research underscored the need for greater clarity and alignment in terminology to foster work that can meaningfully engage in its context through its research and the way it works as an organization.

In light of these findings, addressing valuing diverse educational backgrounds, fostering a work culture that truly embraces context-based research and identifying power dynamics are essential for Busara's success in continuing to carry out its mission to 'produce operationally-relevant knowledge on complex issues in food security, climate & environment, livelihoods, governance, education, peace, and health.'[29]

Recognizing and appreciating the experiences and perspectives of staff members from the Global South, while actively engaging with their interpretations of the research concepts, will contribute to producing more relevant and impactful knowledge. Efforts directed towards establishing a common understanding of terminology and promoting diversity in research design and decision-making processes will speak to the organization's ethos. By taking these steps, Busara can cultivate an inclusive and empowering work environment, bridging the gaps between diverse staff identities and facilitating the production of context-based research that truly reflects the needs and realities of the Global South.

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Appendix 1: list of possible research questions put to staff for prioritization

1. How do staff at all levels at Busara engage with the terms 'Global South' and 'non-Weird', and fill them with meaning through their work?
2. How does the make-up of the team support or hinder contextualizing research?
3. As a research organization seeking to address historical inequalities and imbalances, how does Busara situate itself in the history of knowledge production on the Global South?
4. How does Busara's engagement with Global North institutions, decision makers or researchers influence Busara's own decisions, strategies, research, and the way the organization presents itself?
5. What are some ways in which Busara's research has contributed to knowledge production on the Global South or stood in the way of it?
6. From the perspective of Busara staff, to what extent does the Global South term solve the problems of its predecessor labels, such as the Third World or Developing Countries?
7. Option: Enter your own question.

Appendix 2: comprehensive list of research questions

1. What does the term "Global South" mean to the Busara team? A question that must be asked first, as this term has served many purposes to different institutions depending on a set of implicit and explicit assumptions. In other words, how is the Busara lab filling the term "Global South" with meaning? A deliberate engagement with the term itself is the first step in producing meaningful work on the Global South.

2. Are there specific frameworks that the Busara Lab is using to make sense of Global South social space?

3. How has the Busara team engaged with the term "Global South?" Is this term taken for granted, such as a mere geographic location, or are the staff members engaging with it critically?

4. Are there any research publications by the Busara lab with the title "Global South" or papers that reference "Global South" as a key term? If yes, what are these papers highlighting in their findings? Geographic location or nuances that reflect this meta-category or country-based perspectives? What are these findings trying to accomplish?

5. How does the Busara leadership engage with the term "Global South", and do they have specific goals in mind as a research institute located in the "Global South"? And how does their use of language reflect their understanding of this meta category? Is this understanding reflecting any shortcomings that the institute could improve upon?

6. Is having a diverse research team enough to bridge the gap of contextualizing research on the Global South?

7. From the leadership's perspective, what does it even mean to have a diverse team? How are they utilizing these individuals to meet their agenda/goals for a research institute based in the "Global South"?

8. Is there a reference to the term "Global North" when doing research on the global south? Is there any duality in Busara's research publications? Duality serves a key component on making sense of the Global South as the other, where there is an implicit reference to institutions in the Global North, and whether the Global South is a "site for

marginalization, an agent of emancipation, or both, or something different altogether depending on the issue under investigation" (Haug, et al., 2021, pg. 1934).

9. Is Busara's research on contemporary marginalization of the Global South from colonial/post-colonial era? Is there any engagement with pre-colonial history? Is there ever a reference to specific timelines when researching issues that pertain to Global South? "The place of history in Global South scholarship is rather uneven. The focus is on contemporary marginalization, not discovery, if not recovery of their alternative pasts. This creates an ethnocentrism within the Global South, or a kind of self-marginalization… the shared task is not to build an International Relations for the Global South but a Global International Relations" (Acharya, 2015, pg. 176).

10. Is Busara producing knowledge for local purposes only or is it interested in exporting it to a global knowledge economy? If it is interested in the former, is it responding to problems that hardly exist in the Global North such as the social issues in post-colonial communities? "Recognizing local agendas for knowledge formation is important even in the mainstream knowledge economy" (Morrell, 2019).

11. What is the educational background of the staff members? Are they experts on "Global South" knowledge creation? This question examines that having a diverse team member in terms of ethnicity is not enough, but rather a team that is equipped in developing knowledge for the "Global South" while critically engaging with the "Global North" normative frameworks.

12. "Southern knowledge workers still have to work within a global knowledge labour system which endorses, for example, the power of publishing houses, top-ranked universities and highly cited researchers" (Morrell, 2019). How is Busara's external engagement with Global North institutions or researchers influenced their decision-making process and contextualized based analysis? Does Busara have a full control over their knowledge production? Do their partnerships with other researchers intervene with their research goals of challenging the Global North normative framework that universalizes theories?

13. Where does Busara get their funding from? Do their donor relations have any influence on achieving their Global South research goals?

14. The term "Global South" is academically contested due to its geographic and economic inaccuracies (Australia and New Zealand are in the South and some "developing" countries are located in the North). How is the Busara team addressing these inaccuracies?

15. According to many skeptic intellects, "the heuristic, intellectual, and political value of the Global South requires a more thorough discussion. Merely welcoming it as a refreshing playground for unsettling old and unfair ordering systems seems insufficient"

(Schneider, 2018, pg. 18). What are some radical ways that Busara's research team have contributed to the knowledge creation of the Global South beyond highlighting the already obvious WEIRD problem?

16. How is the Busara team defining the term "Global South" to catalyze real change rather than a "utopian ideal" that is never realized?

17. Who are the subjects of study? To what degree is the Busara lab inclusive or exclusive in their geographic definition of the Global South?

18. By utilizing the term "Global South," what "problem" is the Busara lab trying to accomplish or solve through this binary distinction?

19. From the researcher's perspective, to what extent does the Global South term solve the problems of its predecessor category such as the third world, developing countries?

20. If the main goal of the Busara lab is to conduct contextualized analysis, what is the main purpose of using the term "Global South", a meta-category with many assumptions?

Appendix 3: qualitative research interview questions

- Gender:
- Organizational Role/Title:
- Number of years working at Busara:
- Geographic Identity (Global South, Global North, and Other):
- Level of Comfort (1-5, 1=uncomfortable, 5=very comfortable):

1. How would you describe your identity to me? And how do the identity/identities you described influence your work at Busara?
2. How would you describe your educational background? And how does the educational background that you described influence your work at Busara?
3. How would you describe the work culture at Busara? And how does the "work culture" you described enable or hinder achieving contextualized research at Busara?
4. What are some of the challenges you faced as an employee when it comes to sharing your perspective on Busara's research decisions?
5. How would you describe Bushra's commitment to diversity? In what ways does Busara's commitment to diversity support contextualizing research
6. How does the WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich and Democratic) problem take place in Busara's research work?
7. In what ways could Busara improve contextualizing research for the Global South?
8. In what ways does Busara succeed at providing contextualized research?
9. How does your work role/position at Busara contribute to delivering contextualized research?
10. What does the term "Global South" mean to you and how do you fill it with meaning through your work at Bushra through your work role, education background, and identities?
11. Any additional comments to add:

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38 Applecross Road,
Lavington, Nairobi, Kenya
www.busara.global

Busara