



SHARING THE FRUITS OF RESEARCH THROUGH EDUCATION: LESSONS FROM THE COSYST-MNCH PROJECT IN MALAWI AND IRELAND

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Issue



- The fruits of development research designed by international / local academia-led consortia and conducted or facilitated by staff from non-governmental organisations may not always be shared and enjoyed by those carrying out the research activities.

Description & Opportunities



- The Community Systems Strengthening for Equitable Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (COSYST-MNCH) project has two interrelated elements: novel research on community systems and a technology-enhanced educational programme on community systems health research.
 - The learners on the MSc programme are local staff of NGO partners within the COSYST-MNCH project.
 - The MSc programme, planned with all partners, is delivered primarily on-line by academic partners in Ireland and Malawi.
- The NGO-academic partnership explicitly seeks to bridge the practice-research gap and to build the research capacity of local NGO development staff who are well connected within the local communities in which the research is taking place.
- Flexibility of Irish Aid facilitating change of focus as contexts changed
- High level of trust and respect between partners

Challenges



- The MSc programme itself has so far been positively evaluated by the students on the programme,
 - some online activities favoured over others
- Transnational/institutional study
 - Cross-institutional support
 - Efforts for sustainability
- Technical challenges
 - Dedicated project learning technologist in Ireland
 - Technical support in Malawi in Malawi
- High demands on the students.
 - The support of the NGO managers and senior staff has been instrumental in supporting their staff undertaking the MSc and also in facilitating the implementation of the research strand of the project.

Lessons learned



- The research and educational elements of this project have presented opportunities for mutual learning and enhanced capacities for all partners, in different ways, while overcoming technical and organisational challenges.
- The MSc programme, by seeking to directly build the research capacity of NGO staff – rather than just using them to collect data – aims to achieve a more equitable partnership between academics and NGOs, by enabling NGO staff to work towards academic awards, while also facilitating the completion of the larger project.

Next steps



- The evaluation of the whole COSYST-MNCH project is ongoing, offering opportunities for trans-boundary learning for all involved,
 - Using Swiss Commission for Research Partnerships with Developing Countries (KFPE) guidelines
- Researchers in future development research projects should examine and balance the rewards of research participation for all concerned



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