Knowledge networks in fragile states

Collaboration between international NGOs and national knowledge institutes:
The state of affairs, the state of the art, and an outlook beyond 2015

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10 December 2014
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DCR Strategy for collaboration with national knowledge institutes (Final report 10 December 2014)
Executive Summary

This DCR research into national knowledge networks in six fragile states in Africa has four principal sections with experiences and perspectives of, respectively, DCR country coordinators, academic journals, national knowledge institutes in the six countries selected by country coordinators, and staff at the Dutch headquarters of CARE, HealthNet TPO, SCI, and ZOA. Key findings in each are:

DCR country coordinators

National knowledge institutes
- Interviewees mention universities most when thinking of national knowledge institutes; only one-third of the named knowledge institutes are NGOs, government bodies, or private firms.
- Four reasons for limited collaboration with knowledge institutes emerged: poor management, limited resources, being de-linked from rural realities, and poor quality of research.

Sharing DCR knowledge with national knowledge institutes
- Not much of DCR knowledge and research is shared with national knowledge institutes.
- DCR members believe they possess knowledge of potential value to knowledge institutes.

DCR KN contribution to disseminating experiences and planning future programmes
- There is no common practice on how knowledge is disseminated and used for programming; possibly due to unique national contexts and combinations of DCR member organisations.
- Half the interviewees indicated how DCR KN contributed to disseminating knowledge and programme planning of DCR members and local partners – often in integrated processes.
- Four obstacles: doubts about NGOs using research, tight programme management disallows making changes, uncertainty about the quality of knowledge, and political sensitivities.

Collaboration with national knowledge institutes
- Four of the six DCR countries express interest and confidence to explore the potential to collaborate with knowledge institutes, one has doubts, and one does not believe it feasible.
- Five of the six DCR countries see direct benefits for DCR members and knowledge institutes by using each party’s strengths and wider benefits in sustainability and national development.
- Five obstacles are uncertainties about DCR members’ desire, knowledge institutes’ desire, flexibility in project management, financial expectations, and concerns about costs.
- Four facilitating factors would be explicit support from senior management, finding shared topics of research, using existing relationships, and protection against political sensitivities.
- Some of the interviewees had previous experience with contractual collaboration with knowledge institutes; very few knew of collaboration in their countries.
- Five DCR countries were interested to approach knowledge institutes to explore the potential.

Academic journals

State of affairs in Africa’s universities
- From being prestigious and well-resourced in the 1960s and 1970s, universities have been in decline since the economic crisis of the 1980s.
- Universities have made remarkable changes since the 2000s, particularly as they engaged with internationalisation, commercialisation, massification, and privatisation.
- Similarly, attention for ‘university’s community engagement’ and ‘research capacity building’ is getting increasing attention in universities and from donors.
- There is virtually no academic literature on collaboration between international NGOs and African universities.
National knowledge institutes in the six countries

Research priorities
- Most selected knowledge institutes have identified specific areas of research priorities.
- Most knowledge institutes define research priorities relevant to their immediate environment.
- Government influence over research priorities increases as political volatility increases.

Collaboration with international organisations
- All selected universities have experience in long-term collaboration with international organisations – mostly with other academic organisations. The non-academic knowledge institutes do not have such long-term international collaboration.
- Most international collaboration of universities has a clear role for student involvement in research, exchange, or learning activities.

Staff at Dutch headquarters of DCR member organisations

Collaboration with national knowledge institutes
- The experiences and views of HQ staff on collaboration with national knowledge institutes align to a very large degree with the country coordinators’ views.

Outlook beyond 2015
- Most staff do not see an interest in continued structural cross-agency collaboration with the other consortium members beyond 2015.
- ZOA, SCI, and HealthNet TPO staff saw no real role for their headquarters in supporting collaboration with national knowledge institutes. CARE, on the other hand, had some interest, under conditions, particularly funding.
- Most staff, nonetheless, could see specific benefits for both international NGOs and national universities in a structural collaboration.
- Strikingly, staff at all headquarters note they expect, or give room to, a leading role to country offices when it comes to considering collaboration with national knowledge institutes. Country coordinators had – earlier – indicated they expected guidance from headquarters.
- While headquarters are unlikely to find funds to support collaboration with national universities, some staff believe such collaboration will find an interested ear among some donors.
1. Introduction

At the DCR annual meeting of October 2013 in Veessen in the Netherlands, members discussed how best to consolidate the achievements of the DCR Knowledge Network (KN) in the six DCR countries. These achievements particularly referred to the dissemination of acquired practice-based knowledge, as well as securing a continuation of the growing practice of reflecting critically and systematically on the objectives and impact of programmes. Timely preparation for consolidation or integration of these achievements within national structures was deemed important in view of the fact that DCR activities as a consortium will cease in December 2015.

Consequently, it was decided the DCR KN coordination team at HealthNet TPO in Amsterdam would prepare a workplan to explore whether, and if so how, DCR could develop further collaboration with national knowledge institutes in the six countries where DCR operated: Burundi, DR Congo, Liberia, South Sudan, Sudan, and Uganda. A detailed workplan was elaborated, discussed, and distributed (dated 29 January 2014, annex 1). A research team was established, comprising the members of the coordination team (Ilse Hartog and Martijn Vink), two research interns (Kristine Larsen and Catherine Schook), and led by Gerard Prinsen as the external adviser of the DCR knowledge network.

The first step was to interview in-country DCR staff members in each country with five questions. A preliminary report on their experiences and perspectives was distributed in April 2014 to verify whether country coordinators as well as staff at headquarters of DCR member organisations in the Netherlands recognised the emerging ‘common patterns and trends’ (annex 2). Section 2.1 of this report contains the verified findings from these interviews reflecting the current ‘state of affairs’. In addition, the external adviser conducted a literature search to determine what other organisations and other research had found when reflecting on collaboration between international NGOs and African universities. This ‘state of the art’ is summarised in section 2.2.

As a second step, the DCR country coordinators interviewed selected national knowledge institutes about experiences and perspectives regarding collaboration with international NGOs. They also used the interviews to assess interests in collaboration beyond 2015. The findings are presented in section 3.1 of this report. As a third, and parallel, step, the research team interviewed staff at the headquarters of DCR member organisations in the Netherlands to verify whether they aligned with the experiences and views of the country coordinators and to record the views at headquarters about knowledge networking in the six DCR countries beyond 2015. The views from headquarters are presented in section 3.2. Together, these two sections contribute to an ‘outlook beyond 2015’.

One year after its inception, this report on ‘Knowledge networks in fragile states’ provides the participants in the DCR annual meeting of October 2014 in Veessen with a summary of the state of affairs in DCR regarding national knowledge networks, a summary of the global state of the art on collaboration between international NGOs and national universities, and an outlook for national knowledge networks beyond 2015. After reading this report, it will be clear that outlook is one of a path with opportunities and obstacles, uncertainties and questions. A path that few people have taken, although several of the interviewed people noted it should be explored. Perhaps the following quote from an interview between a country coordinator and the external adviser sums it up:

“I think one of the challenges for us is that it would be great to understand this concept, or how you define a knowledge network. In my mind (laughs), forgive me, it is not clear in terms of, one, the theoretical concept that is in your mind, and, two, how you see that operating, practically on the ground. It would be great to see an example of what you think is a well-functioning knowledge network in any of the countries where international development is taking place.” – DCR South Sudan
“That is a fair comment ... Let me just put it like this; one of the reasons why I got involved with the DCR is that I think it is a fascinating network. You are bringing four quite different NGOs together, you are working in six different countries, and you are doing it in a post conflict context. That is difficult at three different levels – too many organisations, too many countries, and a context where institutions are very weak. And yet, the members have said let’s give this a try.” – Interviewer, DCR KN external adviser

2. Current state of affairs on national knowledge networks

2.1. The experiences and perspectives of DCR country coordinators

To determine the ‘baseline’ and the ‘building blocks’ for the potential development of a DCR strategy for collaboration with national knowledge institutes, interviews with the DCR country coordinators were the starting point for this research. The five open questions for these interviews were:

- Thinking about ‘national knowledge institutes’ – what specific institutes come to your mind?
- Thinking about DCR’s professional knowledge or lessons learned – could you describe one or two that would be interesting to share with these national knowledge institutes?
- Looking back at your experiences with the DCR Knowledge Network, has this contributed to disseminating your past experiences or programming your future activities? If ‘yes’, how would you describe this contribution? If ‘no’, what were the obstacles?
- Do you think there is a role for national knowledge institutes as collaborating partners in a national knowledge network to disseminate acquired knowledge, and/or to generate knowledge for future programming of DCR members? If ‘yes’, how do you think such a national knowledge network could be established? If ‘no’, what would be the obstacles?
- Do you have any direct experiences regarding collaboration between international NGOs and local knowledge institutes? If you have; what was the purpose, what helped and hindered the collaboration? If you have no direct experience, can you refer us to others?

2.1.1. Methodology

The interviews with DCR country coordinators had a dual purpose. The primary purpose of these questions was to acquire an understanding of the ‘starting point’ of a possible process to develop national knowledge networks. A closer look at the questions will reveal the secondary purpose of the questions: assisting the DCR in-country staff in assessing the opportunities for collaboration with national knowledge institutes.

The first group of interviewees were the six DCR country coordinators. Upon their advice, the research team then sought to interview a second person in each country who was deemed knowledgeable on matters related to collaboration between DCR members or other aid agencies and national knowledge institutes. To seek breadth of experience and avoid organisational bias, these second interviewees were to originate from another DCR member than the first interviewees – where possible. All interviewees were provided with the five questions in advance and ten interviews took place between January and April 2014 via skype (Table 1). With the consent of the interviewees, the interviews were
recorded and transcribed. Each interviewee received a draft of the transcription for correction and approval before the text was included in a database.

Table 1. In-country DCR staff interviewed by the research team

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DCR country</th>
<th>Interviewees</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Burundi (CARE, HN-TPO, ZOA) | • DCR Country Coordinator (HNTPO)  
• Director of a partner organisation of ZOA | 1     |
| DR Congo (CARE, HN-TPO, SCI, ZOA) | • DCR Country Coordinator (ZOA)  
• Programme Manager (CARE) | 2     |
| Liberia (CARE, SCI, ZOA) | • DCR Country Coordinator (ZOA)  
(DCR Liberia declined to explore in a 2nd interview) | 1     |
| South Sudan (CARE, HN-TPO, SCI, ZOA) | • DCR Country Coordinator (SCI) | 1     |
| Sudan (CARE, ZOA) | • DCR Country Coordinator (CARE)  
• M&E coordinator (CARE) | 2     |
| Uganda (SCI, ZOA) | • (former) DCR Country Coordinator (SCI)  
• Advocacy & communication Specialist (SCI) | 2     |
|                   |                                                                             | 10    |

2.1.2. Knowledge institutes around the DCR in the six DCR countries

In response to the first question – Thinking about ‘national knowledge institutes’ in your country, what specific institutes come to your mind? – virtually all interviewees started by noting that as DCR they had limited experience in working with national knowledge institutes. (Even though, as will be elaborated later, some of the DCR member organisations do seem to have experience in such collaborations.)

The first striking pattern from this question is that all interviewees think first and foremost of ‘universities’, when thinking of knowledge institutes. The interview question did not specify the four categories of knowledge institutes as listed in Table 2, but these categories emerged clearly from the responses across all six countries. In fact, about two-thirds of the knowledge institutes mentioned by name are universities, and the remaining one-third of knowledge institutes mentioned by name are distributed over the other three categories: government research institutes, NGOs, and private firms. Obviously, there is some overlap. Four of the six countries included private universities in their list:

“First of all we need to think of what we call the ‘Official University’ or the National University of Burundi, which is the oldest … Recently we’ve been having what we call ‘private universities’ coming up and there are now quite a number of them.” – DCR Burundi

The second pattern is that interviewees in the six countries differ clearly in the breadth of knowledge institutes they perceive to be potentially relevant for research collaboration. Two countries – Uganda and South Sudan – present names across the full breadth of all four categories. Three countries are quite similar in their listing of national knowledge institutes (DR Congo, Burundi, and Sudan) in that they predominantly look towards universities, but also have some eye for institutes in the other categories too. Liberia takes a position on its own. While it mentions universities as well as private firms as knowledge institutes, it has also concluded that neither of these institutes have sufficient

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1 Arguably, this might suggest that a country’s overall position on the scale of ‘state-of-institutional-post-conflict-recovery’ is less of a determinant for potential collaboration with national knowledge institutes than could be expected, because Uganda and South Sudan are at opposite ends of the scale among the six countries.
capacity to merit a further exploration at this point in time of their potential for collaboration. (Which explains why only one interview was held with DCR staff in Liberia.)

Building on the latter aspect, the reasons highlighted by interviewees for the limited past and current experience with national knowledge institutes can be grouped into four categories – all presented with diverging emphases in each country. These will be detailed more in the next sections of this report, but, in a nutshell, the first category of reasons revolves around national knowledge institutes quality or effectiveness of management.

“[Two universities] will not be helpful for us in this case because they ... don’t have a good management system. [One] does not really have an acting director. They are now struggling with who is going to manage, who is going to lead the university.” – DCR DR-Congo

“They cannot agree on basic administrative issues such as dismissing lecturers for corruption ... about six months ago that the President herself declared education to be a mess” – DCR Liberia

A second category of reasons relates to the poor levels of (financial and infra-structural) resources for national knowledge institutes, in particular universities.

“They cannot organise big workshops or invite as many people as they would like, they cannot organise many workshops because of funds. They don’t have enough funds.” – DCR Burundi

“They don’t have internet, they don’t have a library...” – DCR South Sudan

“The National University is trying to get IT facilities but it used not to have any.” – DCR Burundi

A third issue would be that some interviewees conclude that many national knowledge institutes, particularly universities, have no focus or interest in rural development or doing research for ‘practical’ development issues:

“We found that they are working only in human research – like political, sociological etc. They don’t have much experience in the development domain.” – DCR DR-Congo

“Most of the universities are highly delinked from day-to-day programming realities. Their focus tends to be more on the academic theories etc.” – DCR Uganda

“People write books on various subjects to express different opinions .... But in terms of carrying out a serious research work, I am not aware of that ... The kind of training that people have been receiving in our universities is not really research-oriented.” – DCR Burundi

A final category of reasons for the limited collaboration between DCR and national knowledge institutes so far is that interviewees believe the quality of the institutes’ research work is too poor. Moreover, some interviewees believed the balance between costs and quality of research by national knowledge institutes could be a matter of concern.

“[One of the DCR members] tried to work with [an NGO doing research] on education. – we all thought it could be used on that kind of work but actually [we] were not very happy with them.” – DCR Sudan
“Honestly, I have not heard any NGO that would contract a university to conduct any of their studies or baselines or anything like that ... A company that claims they have the expertise in conducting evaluations ... they did the internal baseline study for DCR and most of the results were not really useable.” – DCR Liberia

“Even if you do pay a significant amount of money, the actual end result, I have been told, can be questionable.” – DCR South Sudan

Table 2. Number and type of national knowledge institutes identified by in-country DCR staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DCR country</th>
<th>University, Govt Body, NGO, Consulting Firm</th>
<th>Unis</th>
<th>Govt</th>
<th>NGOs</th>
<th>Firms 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Burundi</td>
<td>Dept Agronomy of National University Burundi</td>
<td>4+</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Dept Social Sciences of National University Burundi</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Faculty Agronomy of University of Ngozi</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Faculty of Law of University of Ngozi</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(A number of) private universities</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agriculture Science Institute for Rural Development (ISABU, in Ministry of Agriculture)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Institute for Agricultural and Zootechnical Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>DR Congo</td>
<td>Higher Institute for Rural Development (Institut Supérieur de Développement Rural, ISDR) Great Lakes in Goma, North Kivu</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ISDR in Bukavu in South Kivu. Both ISDRs are ‘higher institutes’ similar to universities.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>University of Lukanga</td>
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<td></td>
<td>University of Graben</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liberia</td>
<td>University of Liberia</td>
<td>1+</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(A number of) private universities</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Private sector research institutes</td>
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<td>South Sudan</td>
<td>Juba University</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sudd Institute, research institute (Firm)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>NGO Forum (of INGOs and local NGOs)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Health Forum (Sharing info among actors health sector, INGO funding, house in MoH)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Local consultancy company, linked to Chamber of Commerce, but also to Government.</td>
<td>1+</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some unnamed other public, as well private, unis.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>Ahfad University For Women, Khartoum</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Government’s Development and Peace Studies Centre at the University of Nyala, South Darfur</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>Makerere University Institute of Social Research, plus Economic Policy Research Centre</td>
<td>5+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>+</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Gulu University, Institute of Peace &amp; Conflict Studies</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Anglican Church University Mokono</td>
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</table>

2 The specific numbers in this table refer to named local knowledge institutes. When the ‘+’ sign is added to a number or a column, it is meant to indicate that one or more other – unnamed – knowledge institutes of this profile are mentioned in the interviews. This generally indicates the interviewees know such potential partners exist, but have no experience or knowledge about these institutes. The ‘-’ sign indicates this type of knowledge institute was not mentioned by the interviewees.

3 The divide between “NGOs” and “Firms” is intended to express that NGOs undertake research to underpin advocacy work and/or the implementation of their development programmes, whereas firms undertake research primarily at request of paying clients. However, in practice the difference can be diffuse. NGOs and firms may both engage in research activities on a billing principle against going market-rates.
Table 2. Number and type of national knowledge institutes identified by in-country DCR staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DCR country</th>
<th>University, Govt Body, NGO, Consulting Firm</th>
<th>Unis</th>
<th>Govt</th>
<th>NGOs</th>
<th>Firms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>− Catholic Martyrs University Nkozi</td>
<td>16+</td>
<td>3+</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3+</td>
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<td></td>
<td>− Islamic University in Mbale</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>− A mention of 5 other universities (10 total in Uganda)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>− A mention of ‘government-aligned’ research institutes</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>− Centre for Basic Research (NGO)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>− Action Coalition for Development (NGO)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>− African Leadership Institute (NGO)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>− Some unnamed private consultancy firms</td>
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</table>

2.1.3. DCR knowledge and lessons shared with national knowledge institutes – so far

The second interview question – Thinking about professional knowledge or lessons learned, could you describe one or two that your organisation has acquired and would be interesting to share with these national knowledge institutes? – revealed one pattern above all; not much of the DCR knowledge and lessons learned had been shared with national knowledge institutes.

To date, the DCR KN has assisted DCR teams in the six countries to carry out 14 research projects on a wide range of themes agreed by the Consortium. However, few of these research reports are shared beyond the DCR members – and that seems to apply for the full research reports as well as the shorter Research Briefs that accompany most of the full reports. Moreover, virtually none of the interviewees detailed how DCR or its member organisations shared other ‘knowledge and lessons learned’ – for example base-line studies, mid-term reviews, or evaluations – with national knowledge institutes. Yet, as interviewees note this, most add that this sharing actually should have taken place.

“I think it would be good to share lessons from studies like that with them. ... No we have not distributed that either.” – DCR Uganda

“I haven’t done that yet but I think I should.” – DCR Burundi

“It is also important that we don’t keep the findings of research studies at our own level, but that we disseminate it. With universities for example.” – DCR DR-Congo

“After the DCR was formed I cannot say that we disseminated very much knowledge to those institutes. ... At the DCR here, we do not actually go out of our way and think who should be using it, or who can benefit from it. We don’t do that.” – DCR Sudan

“Furthermore this paper could be shared with the Juba University. ... Could, could, but hasn’t.” – DCR South Sudan

“So we see it primarily being more useful for the practitioners themselves rather than for academic institutions.” – DCR Liberia

While DCR members do not actively share research and lessons learned with national knowledge institutes, they do share their research and lessons with their local partners – local NGOs, local groups, local authorities – who are directly involved in the implementation of the programmes. Through formal
as well as informal networks, research and lessons can be shared with other NGOs, but practices seem to vary per country.

“I don’t know if we share it widely with practitioners [but] DCR currently has nine local partners so we share this kind of knowledge [with them].” – DCR Liberia

“NGOs are generally pretty good at sharing information. For example when [DCR member] completes a paper on, for example, a village development committee, they publish, sharing on their website and through relevant forums.” – DCR South Sudan

[In this location] where the four DCR members are working together, we found that it could be interesting to interact, to discuss and share with such institutions on what we are doing and what we achieved.” – DCR DR-Congo

“[DCR member] hired a consultant from Holland to come and do a research ... A report was produced but I am not sure if it has been published. For us we did not think of even holding a meeting for sharing the report with other people. Maybe we also are victim of that attitude of not being interested with research.” – DCR Burundi

Looking towards the future of developing a strategy for collaboration with national knowledge institutes, most of the interviewees in the six countries were quite interested to share, and believed they had something valuable to share with national knowledge institutes.

“Yes, I think generally our knowledge from working with civil society, working deeply in the rural communities; I think that would be of interest to [name] University ... I think it is something that we need to add to their academic knowledge, especially because we have a longer arm in the rural areas than they do. ... The other thing is, I would say, humbly, that we have good knowledge on community governance because we formed committees; we know the dynamics of how those communities work...” – DCR Sudan

“We can share it with such institutions ... We can also share with them our experiences on ... local development committees” ... We can then share with [a university] our approaches and achievements on this area. I think in global we can share with them...” – DCR DR-Congo

“This [research] paper I think is useful to most NGOs in the field that are working with community based organisations. It is also useful for the government.” – DCR South Sudan

Some DCR countries have begun in 2014 to collaborate with national knowledge institutes and are creating wide and public platforms to share and discuss ‘lessons learned’ from research projects. The box below, for example, shows the leaflet for a public event in Juba in South Sudan on the findings from a DCR research into the implications of customary and statutory laws on land acquisitions. This event brings together staff from private research firms, NGOs, the Government’s Land Commission, and the national university.
2.1.4. DCR KN contribution to disseminate experiences and plan programmes

The above finding that knowledge and lessons acquired by DCR KN are hardly shared with a wider network of national knowledge institutes, leads almost naturally to the third question about the 'how and why' of the knowledge networking that actually does take place among DCR member organisations and their more immediate local partners: Has the DCR KN contributed to disseminating your past experiences or programming your future activities? If it did, how would you describe this contribution? If not, what were the obstacles?

With regard to this question, the interviewees show a rather diverse picture on how the DCR KN has contributed or impacted the work practices and work processes in a given country. In fact, there was no clear majority of the interviewees over the six countries that shared clear or common patterns of how DCR KN has contributed to work processes and programming. Aside from the fact that each country presents a unique set of challenges and institutional structures, some interviewees explain this diversity – of which several interviewees are well aware through annual DCR exchange meetings – by pointing at the different ways in which DCR members in each country have come together in the consortium. In this, each DCR country has a different number and different combinations of member organisations, which may have caused seemingly rather diverse operational DCR practices in each country, and this includes knowledge networking.

"Everything has to do with how the DCR started in a country and I think Liberia and Congo are the only two countries where the members actually decided to make a strategic choice to really work in the same areas but also in the same communities. That is not the case for Sudan or South Sudan ... it all goes back to the country programme design.” – DCR Liberia
Even so, a careful reading of the interviews suggests three patterns that were shared by clusters of two or three DCR countries. A first pattern is that about half the interviewees clearly stated that DCR KN activities have impacted the programming of activities or led to adjustments in ongoing implementation. They were able to illustrate this with specific examples and they had a positive appreciation of this DCR KN impact.

“I would say yes in terms of programming activities, I think we have benefited from the Knowledge Network efforts … we have been very mindful to make good use of the [research’s] recommendations … to improve our work. Especially the relationship between the DCR members as well as the seven local partners that we have in the six districts where the DCR programme is implemented in the northern part of the country.” – DCR Uganda

“DCR KN research on ‘adult literacy’ led to new activities or adaptations for two members … DCR KN research generated knowledge that led to better targeting of some activities of one member (re ‘inclusion of poorest’).” – DCR Burundi

“For future programming I can use … the research on inclusion of the poorest. …. We have to keep in mind that poorest must be involved if we want to empower them.” – DCR DR-Congo

“It is so unfortunate that we have done such a big work in our communities in many provinces but the government doesn’t seem to know that there is a model that can inspire the TRC [Truth and Reconciliation Commission] which is about to be established.” – DCR Burundi

The second pattern suggests that when dissemination of lessons learned does take place – and it seems to do this more clearly in some countries than in others – it is directed mostly towards fellow members of the consortium. (This point was already noted in the previous section.) Interviewees in some DCR countries talked about very regular, administratively integrated, knowledge sharing among staff of DCR member organisation. Often, but not always, it was mentioned this also includes direct and on-the-ground engagement with local partners and local stakeholders.

“We have what we call a quarterly DCR review meeting … at an off-site location. So we spend the whole day with the representatives of the member organisations and the local partner organisations … And then we always also look at the lessons learnt for the quarter and of course also the challenges and successes … We also organise an annual review … a two-day event. We set up three mixed teams so same participants, member and partner staff, we go to three different field locations on the first day and we are trying to discuss with the various beneficiaries …... to determine their perception on what kind of change the DCR program has offered them in their lives and so that is part of the annual review …” – DCR Liberia

“The [research] topics basically have come from the members in the field. There is discussion at the grassroots level with NGOs that DCR members are working with and the staff of the partners, which include beneficiaries. We have quarterly meetings in Juba where all of the members come together and discuss what topics of research might be based on their field discussions and questions they believe need to be answered.” – DCR South Sudan

“These [DCR member organisations] are two different organisations. Because of that difference, it took us a long time to really gain each other trust and speak at ease when we come together. They have different cultures, different backgrounds, they have even different visions and missions and different ways of looking at things.” – DCR Sudan

“Two consortium members [named] are approaching partnership in a slightly different way. The way they relate with partners and the way they work in partners, the implementation of
their partnership principles vary, although there are [also] quite a number of areas of similarity.” – DCR Uganda

“Our effort has been more in helping the existing consortium members and also partners to improve on their programme work … is concerned. We have not had that chance to take it beyond the DCR consortium members.” – DCR Uganda

The third pattern hints at the influence DCR KN activities have had on interviewees’ wider perspective, their appreciation of a bigger picture around the development programmes they were implementing.

“I think we have all learned a lot from this kind of practice and I think everyone has also realised that when you are so focussed on one thing you fail to see the bigger picture and that sometimes you can get good advice from people who are not even operating in that domain and I think people are trying to make use of that.” – DCR Liberia

“When I planned for activities or implement a project in the past, I often analysed only conflicts. I didn’t know that I could do some research on what we are doing on many areas as we are doing it now.” – DCR DR-Congo

“The Knowledge Network challenged our way of thinking but it is also very interesting to notice the role it played in changing our mind as far as research is concerned.” – DCR Burundi

When the interviewees moved away from the above outlined impact of DCR KN activities and reflected on the obstacles with regard to sharing past lessons and using research on this for future programme planning, four recurring themes seemed to appear. As with the above patterns, these themes appeared in the responses from interviewees in clusters of two or three countries. A first theme would include the doubts whether international and national aid agencies – including DCR members – see the relevance in sharing research findings, lessons, and reports. Who wants to know, and don’t countries already have a high flow of information and data sharing going on?

“[There is] no wider practice [of knowledge sharing] among NGOs. There are meetings by NGOs where they invite others, but they just say, ‘Last year we did this, this and that and the results were this, this and that’. That’s all. I don’t think there have been readjustments of each organisation’s planning based on what they have heard during those meetings.” – DCR Burundi

“So it is true that there are lots of meetings, joint meetings attended by different platforms and information sharing I think on websites and emails, so where you have common mail groups for particular platforms, for example the education platform.” – DCR Uganda

A second obstacle emerges from answers associated with concerns that development programmes of DCR members can be very tightly planned in terms of time and budget; too tight to allow for changes on the basis of ‘lessons learned’. Some interviewees pointed out that there might not be much of a point in researching and sharing experiences and effects, if there is no room in time, budget, or contract with donors, to make adaptations. In such a context, programme managers may just be under pressure to carry on down the path already taken.

“Sometimes some of this improvement or adaptations cannot be made due to budgetary consequences they would have … [a DCR member] does not always have the ability or the means or the capacity to really make significant adaptations. … We are really trying to integrate this knowledge and these lessons into the programming and often it is done, but I
would say that I know in specific cases [some DCR members] are more flexible about this and [other DCR members] a little less.” – DCR Liberia

“But when you want to work now with this staff member [on knowledge networking or research], he never has time ... KN is an extra activity that is appear in the staff job description [but] he is not involved, he is not committed, and he does not want to use his time for such activities.” – DCR DR-Congo

“I think we operate a lot based on projects and donor directives. Sometimes the tendency is to quickly rush through the project and tick the activities ‘done’ without being mindful of generation of knowledge to guide not just the current project but future programming. That is why for most NGOs I see, based on my experience, are very reluctant to devote time into knowledge generation and management.” – DCR Uganda

A third obstacle comprises concerns about the quality of the content of the research commissioned or conducted by DCR members; is it good enough to be shared, or does it make us look bad or bumbling? This uncertainty about the quality of work, or actual poor experiences with the quality of work delivered, was also voiced earlier as a reason not to engage national universities or national consultants. On the other hand, there is also an awareness that rigorous debate and critique are part of learning.

“I thought; let’s share this with the NGO community even if it is not excellent. One of the concerns ... was; if the papers is not excellent, does that make DCR look bad in the eyes of the donor? My view on this is that if the document has been reviewed by the DCR team it is OK to share, then it should be shared widely. That way other researchers can add to it or pull it apart. That’s good; research is there to be discussed.” – DCR South Sudan

“The results [of a research] were that there were so many discussions ... we invite people out at the DCR but not in a systematic way, because we are still hesitating. Now that I am feeling confident I feel the need to ... take into account the importance of sharing the knowledge network findings with other NGOs.” – DCR Burundi

A final obstacle relates to concerns about the political sensitivity in government circles over research findings from DCR KN activities. Disseminating such research findings may be perceived as embarrassing the government, or they may be seen as contradicting or undermining government policies or institutions.

“Here, maybe we are developing more of a specific culture of implementation of work. Unless we are asked to do something, especially when it comes to the government, unless we are asked to do a particular thing, we do not volunteer and expose ourselves. The reason is that, whatever we say or give, could be misinterpreted used against us ... This is the way we work in this context.” – An interviewee in country A

“The other concern for DCR was being careful in making sure that the information, if it was read by the government or another party, that they wouldn’t be offended by some of the findings ... maternal mortality [is] generally a topic all are interested in. When the topic is around governance, transparency, human rights then things get a little more complicated.” – An interviewee in country B

“What I know is that ... the government put a lot of pressure on them [an NGO disseminating research] and it is said in the media and the general talk that the Executive Director was forced out.” – An interviewee in country C
2.1.5. Role for national knowledge institutes in a knowledge network

The answers to the previous three questions shed some light on the environment around the DCR KN activities in each country, and looked into present practices of knowledge sharing and creation with national knowledge institutes as well as among DCR members and local partners. The next, fourth, question looks forward: Do you think there is a role for national knowledge institutes as collaborating partners in a long-term national knowledge network to disseminate acquired knowledge, and/or to generate knowledge for future programming of DCR members? If ‘yes’, how do you think such a national knowledge network could be established? If ‘no’, what would be the obstacles?

The overall trends in the answers to the previous questions suggested two things. First, at this moment in time, not much of the DCR generated knowledge is created with, or shared with, national knowledge institutes. Second, DCR KN activities have contributed to growing or expanding practices of knowledge creation and knowledge sharing among the four DCR members and with their local partners, although the character and operational practices of knowledge management vary across the six DCR countries.

Against this backdrop, four of the six DCR countries expressed a clear positive interest when asked whether they saw a role for national knowledge institutes as collaborating partners in knowledge networks that would go beyond December 2015.

“Now we [already] have a working relationship with them ... helping us with their technical know-how of research, of evaluations and of assessment ... This is likely to continue” – DCR Sudan

“We are meeting again next week on Tuesday so that we can talk clearly about possible collaboration [with] the University of [name].” – DCR Burundi

“It is something that we need to explore further. I have not had the chance to follow this kind of collaboration before ... we would ... go out and visit the universities to see what it takes to enter into this kind of partnership with universities.” – DCR Uganda

“Yes, definitely.” – DCR South Sudan

In contrast, two DCR countries expressed reservations about collaboration with national knowledge institutes – for two different reasons. One DCR country team concluded these knowledge institutes were not in a position to commit to fruitful long-term collaboration (DCR Liberia). Another DCR country team was enthused by the idea of collaboration, but expressed reservations about the actual possibilities due to the rather diverging views held by the DCR member organisations with regard to such a collaboration (DCR DR-Congo).

“We’ve had another meeting at which among others we discussed this issue with KN linkage to other knowledge stakeholders and the opinion of all was very strong that we don’t pursue this.” – DCR Liberia

“In some case I can say ‘yes’ [to a role for national knowledge institutes as collaborating partners] ... But in some cases I can say ‘no’ because [named] DCR members are not committed to the knowledge network. They are not committed for the research and then everything becomes very difficult.” – DCR DR Congo

When talking about motives for, or potential benefits of, a collaboration between DCR member organisations and national knowledge institutes, all but one of the interviewees believed there were immediate and operational benefits for both parties – using each party’s strengths and assets to the
other party’s benefits – as well as more long term advantages in the sphere of sustainability and national development.

“Working with the universities, you are working somehow with people who can be the key for sustainability … The other thing is … if you are putting strengths together some gaps that can be filled in … That is the advantage of putting strengths together, putting capacities together, supporting each other … collaboration, not for us, but for the country.” – DCR Burundi

“The importance of knowledge institutes in generating knowledge for the future, in collaborating with them, sharing experiences, I think the national knowledge institution are a good way to consolidate that aspect.” – DCR DR-Congo

“The benefits … are so many for both parties … students coming out of the universities … lack the practical knowledge to … make a difference in development practice. So collaboration between development partners and knowledge institutes would greatly add value to the … students. In the same way … most NGOs do a lot of project-based interventions with little time to step back and reflect and learn and use the lessons to inform programming. This kind of partnership I think would greatly make a difference in the work of NGOs.” – DCR Uganda

However, while most interviewees were enthusiastic about the prospects and benefits of collaboration with national knowledge institutes, they also identified a number of obstacles; factors they believed had effectively held back such as collaboration in the recent past or could do when it would be explored in the near future. An analysis of the responses regarding these obstacles suggests DCR countries shared views in clusters of two to four countries, identifying five potential or experienced obstacles to a collaboration with national knowledge institutes. The five obstacles are detailed below in no particular order, as the analysis of the responses could not determine any weight or hierarchy in these obstacles. Nonetheless, some obstacles are connected to each other or represent the ‘flipside’ of a helping factor. (A list of four helping factors, also in no particular order, will be presented after the list of the five obstacles.)

A first obstacle for collaboration with national knowledge institutes revolves around uncertainty among interviewees whether the four DCR member organisations actually have an interest or desire to carry on the knowledge networking within the countries after the funding of the consortium of the four ends in December 2015. Interviewees point out the DCR Knowledge Network activities constitute only a minor element in the overall funding of the consortium.

“I’m not sure if DCR members [believe] the national knowledge institutes will be relevant or helpful in the future because DCR members don’t understand what is important of the Knowledge Network and the research.” – DCR DR-Congo

“DCR has several components and the main focus of most people is the programme itself … they see it [the knowledge network] as a very small component … We see primarily 2014 to be pretty much the last year for the research … what is going to happen in 2015 … most of the programmes will phase out by mid-year.” – DCR Liberia

“The DCR contribution to [DCR member organisations] was less than 10% of their portfolio. … So when we talk about the future collaboration between the organisations and those knowledge institutes we need to remember that [DCR is] just one project of many … What [do] we mean by this long-term collaboration, because the DCR is going to end.” – DCR Sudan
“The knowledge network ... need so to be given some extra attention and perhaps get a buy-in from the entire management ... Would they be ready to take it beyond 2015?” – DCR Uganda

A second obstacle to collaboration builds on this uncertainty of DCR members’ interest or desire for collaboration with the national knowledge institutes. Some interviewees expressed doubts about the interests for collaboration on ‘the other side’. They noted universities may be much more interested in ‘academic theories’ than development practice; local NGOs may be focused more on implementing activities; and private sector consultants may mostly be driven by the acquisition of contracts, rather than knowledge.

“[We have] to contact the knowledge institutions to share with them how [we] implement activities. To share with them some recent findings and to ask them, for example, if they are impressed by what [we] are doing, can they organise some research, can they organise some field visits...” – DCR DR-Congo

“I don’t know if this would be of interest to local knowledge institutions. For private sector companies, I really do not think so because they are not there to generate knowledge ... [Would national university researchers be welcome to do their research with DCR members?] I do not think that should be a problem. But then the thing is they have to be proactive and find us ... I do not think most would refuse such a request [but] I don’t really hear this being done. That also maybe says something about how much curiosity there is.” – DCR Liberia

A third obstacle to collaboration with national knowledge institutes emerged when some interviewees projected the above doubts about interests and practices regarding local NGOs and private sector consultants to the four DCR member organisations themselves. In effect, these responses seemed to argue that the practices of DCR members could also be largely driven by the interests of immediate project management – leaving little room to develop interest in wider knowledge generation, and learning about the wider impact of programmes and projects.

“We operate a lot based on projects and donor directives. Sometimes the tendency is to quickly rush through the project and tick the activities “done” without being mindful of generation of knowledge to guide not just the current project but future programming. That is why for most NGOs I see, based on my experience, are very reluctant to devote time into knowledge generation and management.” – DCR Uganda

“In many projects I worked with I focussed on results. For example, we focussed a lot on crops production to increase production ... I never focussed [on the impact of programme design] on the poorest.” – DCR DR-Congo

“The M&E being focussed on project deliverables rather than the overall outcome ... people in the field are focussed on actual deliveries, focus on the number of school benches delivered or whatever activity they are undertaking sometimes without stepping back and looking at the larger picture .... programme managers who are focussed on the day to day operations.” – DCR South Sudan

The fourth and the fifth obstacles relate to finance. On the one hand, several interviewees noted that national knowledge institutes might be expecting to obtain significant financial resources or gains from a collaboration with DCR members. This raises the question as to what extent these collaborations or partnerships would be driven by financial transfers, rather than the joint development of knowledge.
“... the universities, just the fact of asking them to collaborate, we as international NGOs working through a donor, if we don’t watch out, we would create expectations as if whatever they are going to do would be covered by the Netherlands funds ... [A research done by the university] was going to cost around €12,000 and then we paid something like €8,000 .... It was a reduction of about €3,500 or €4,000 because the number of collines (hills), the number of numerators, a number of days, were reduced.” – DCR Burundi

“Well, not if there is nothing in it for them. I do not think they would be willing to do it on voluntary basis and we do not have anything to offer. ... I would assume that they probably do have some kind of research agendas, but I have never heard of any of these universities as trying to promote themselves in this area.” – DCR Liberia

“The context in Uganda is also highly money orientated for most institutions. These kinds of undertakings require a good amount of funding.” – DCR Uganda

“International NGOs sometimes hire lecturers as consultants.” – DCR Burundi

“Expensive .... a researcher from [named] University, they were charging from 500 to 1,000 dollar a day to have a University Senior Researcher or a PhD working on a collaborative research project with the DCR programme or other external actors ... research students from Master’s courses ... charge minimum 75 dollar ... with this think-tank, again the cost is also prohibitive.” – DCR South Sudan

“Some NGOs really want to focus on one topic, but if there is money/opportunity to do something that is not their area of expertise they often will still do it.” – DCR South Sudan

“They usually don’t get much funding just to undertake research so it is very much related to the finance and the finance position is very weak.” – DCR Liberia

The fifth obstacle, on the other hand, revolves around concerns by interviewees about the actual costs of undertaking knowledge networking activities in collaboration with national knowledge institutes. Irrespective of payments from one party to another – which would point at a contracting relationship rather than a collaborative relationship – some interviewees simply note that doing research in one way or another carries expenses. Currently, the DCR KN has an annual budget of €5,000 for ‘research’. For the sake of the conversation, this amount was often taken as a benchmark around the question of what research costs would be.

“I think we just needed to manage that amount correctly. I think that will be enough per study ... but when you talk about €5,000 it shouldn’t be a big research ... Something that must be cautiously prepared and sampled because it is really the minimum.” – DCR Burundi

“To bring people from [the capital] to [rural areas] is very costly regarding accommodation and transportation ... They are very fearful about the field and insecurity, rumour stories and real accidents in the field.” – DCR Sudan

“The resources that are allocated for the Knowledge Network ... are fairly limited. On a yearly basis currently we are informed there is €5000 ... if we wanted to take it beyond the DCR, I think we would need adequate facilitation to bring together a number of stakeholders like universities ... that requires some budget allocation.” – DCR Uganda
“The knowledge network idea ... is good, the question is, how it functions in a failed state? I think there would be a degree of development required in some countries for agencies or institutions to have resources available to participate in such research.” – DCR South Sudan

While the above responses suggest there was a trend in the responses on the matter of costs of research that the €5,000 was the bare minimum or just not enough, interviewees who expressed these concerns also noted that aside from immediate financial expenses, there were also longer term financial gains. In addition, careful selection of people and shared objectives were deemed to go a long way in keeping costs to a minimum.

“The part that we work as a consortium is meant, yes to share information, with the aim of having a better quality of programming, at the same time, in the long run, to save money.” – DCR Sudan

“They would need to be helped to believe that it is possible, that it is practical, it may not require a lot of budget here and there. Maybe it is about identifying the right people within the respective institutions.” – DCR Uganda

“It likely depends on what the two institutions would want to pursue ... For the case of [name of example of collaboration between international agency and a university] ... most important was to build the capacity of the teaching staff... a number of them were sent to different training institutions mainly to get knowledge, it was not about the money.” – DCR Uganda

Next to these five obstacles to a collaboration with national knowledge institutes, the interviewees also listed helping or facilitating factors for such a collaboration in response to: ‘How do you think such a national knowledge network could be established?’ Again, in clusters of two to four countries, the following four helping or facilitating factors can be distilled from the interviews.

A first facilitating factor – and most often mentioned – refers to senior line management in the DCR member organisations as well as the national knowledge institutes expressing explicit support for such a collaboration. This, in turn, needs to be translated in clear allocation of responsibilities for this collaboration to specific, and motivated, staff. (In effect, this facilitating factor is the flipside of the first obstacle elaborated previously.)

“[Staff] think it is the idea of the Country Director who wants to collaborate with that institute.” – DCR DR-Congo

“My concern here is the leadership on both sides.” – DCR South Sudan

“There are many parties at these institutes, like professors, research assistants .... it would be relevant to have a focal point. This should be a research assistant, since they are more motivated than professors ... because this is such an opportunity, a person like that would be very motivated.” – DCR DR-Congo

“In case of long-term collaboration, there should be someone at [named DCR member] who will be responsible for this, the partnership with universities.” – DCR DR-Congo

“The DCR can start this discussion. We can start something at the steering committee. We can say this is what we see/think for the future. But at the same time we should know that at the end of the day it is really an individual organisation’s decision.” – DCR Sudan
“The famous research collaboration I have been referring to [between a DCR member organisation and a University], it is highly influenced by [headquarters in Europe] because they see the added value in engaging universities in projects of that kind to inform future programming trends. It is highly being supported by the headquarter body.” – DCR Uganda

A second helping factor for establishing collaboration between DCR members and national knowledge institutes would be finding an agreement between the two parties that ensures each party’s distinct – but not necessarily diverging – interests can be satisfied. Immediate objectives and the long-term interests of aid organisations and knowledge institutes do not naturally align; but interviewees believed it would be quite feasible to discuss and agree on a number of specific research topics where collaboration would clearly benefit both parties, avoiding topics that are sensitive or not relevant to either party.

“Let’s say an agency wanted to do a maternal mortality study in one area of South Sudan. The Ministry of Health would be really willing to participate in that and maybe even provide some support in undertaking that research. I think it just depends what is the type of research ... It is just matter of discussion and having common shared values and wanting the same outcomes.” – DCR South Sudan

“I think for the universities, anything that uses their knowledge ... in practical areas, I think would be of interest to them ... the institute I mentioned on conflict studies. Would they not be interested in looking at a practical aspect or even to conduct further research on issues around fragility? ... But of course it would be up to us for now to impress upon them that there is something that they can get from it ... So I see that the possibility of collaboration becomes stronger if you have ... shared interests.” – DCR Uganda

“Provided that we have identified the priority issues together, if we collaborate with them we share the responsibilities, which makes the work sustainable and it is more promising.” – DCR Burundi

A third factor that could assist collaboration between DCR members and national knowledge institutes would probably be to simply use and expand existing personal relations between in-country DCR staff and staff in knowledge institutes. Several interviewees indicated they have good personal contacts in particular knowledge institutes and in a few instances, these contacts have already expressed interest in collaboration. Rather than select potential partners for collaboration primarily based on institutional profiles or reputations, working based on already expressed interests, trust, or respect, is likely to save time.

“[Two researchers from a national university] talked with me asking about collaboration in how the DCR can help them to train their students, and activities like they need to have summer training ... They went with me to the field. They have a lot of questions and suggestions for participation.” – DCR Sudan

“I haven’t had contact recently but I have been working with that university on a very, very rich basis. In my previous job, and even now from time to time they phone me.” – DCR Burundi

Finally, a fourth factor that would help developing collaboration between DCR members and knowledge institutes emerges from some (post-conflict) environments where doing research around poverty and the work of international NGOs is a politically sensitive matter and can be subject to scrutiny by the state’s security services. Some interviewees pointed out that the collaboration with a reputable national knowledge institute could substantially reduce scrutiny and mistrust by the local or national authorities. The trust that a national knowledge institute may have developed may ‘rub off’
on international NGOs. However, the knowledge institutes in such a collaboration need to be chosen carefully.

“You can face constraints from the government as INGO because the government does not want NGOs to report on some issues ... When we use the national institutes for these studies we found that government is very flexible to accept the questions. They were not doing that in the past [when] ... even in the field they checked your interviews ... someone from national security ... follows you even during the interviews ... You cannot do your study as you like. But the study we are doing right now it is going very good and we found that it is going smoothly because it supervised by the local university.” – An interviewee in country A

“The partnership between NGOs and knowledge institutes is the new kind of partnership, the knowledge institutes are more respected by the government than NGOs.” – An interviewee in country B

“Their current leadership [of a named national knowledge institute] is made of people who are so much involved in politics. Their chairman is a very close friend of the presidential family ... They have been working with a number of our donors ... Dutch embassy ... as well as DFID. But because of their political issues I found their research work on issues of nutrition, performance of the public service ... Therefore it may be one institution that may be a little bit tricky to work with.” – An interviewee in country C

After discussing this question about the potential role for national knowledge institutes as collaborating partners in a national knowledge network, the interviewers raised the question whether the interviewees were interested in approaching two or three institutes they deemed of greatest potential interest for exploratory interviews. Five of the six DCR countries replied positively and are currently having or planning such interviews. Several of them expressed a sense of urgency or an appreciation of the potential.

“For me it is clear that if we want DCR members collaborate with knowledge institutes we have to try to convince them now.” – DCR DR-Congo

“When I looked at ... the last paragraph about the issue of exploring the interest from the institutes. That was the most important part ... for us to actually be able to determine that we can make some progress or not.” – DCR Uganda

As a final note on this topic, in some of the interviews the conversation also reflected on the potentially more fundamental implications of developing a long-term collaboration with knowledge institutes; addressing attitudes and expectations of a contractual relationship. Currently, much of the research desired by DCR members is contracted out to researchers who need to meet specified objectives, short-term deadlines, and predetermined outputs. In a long-term collaboration between DCR members and national knowledge institutes, this could shift to curiosity-driven objectives, open-ended calendars, and mutually usable outputs. Or, to put it in managerial terms; moving from ‘terms of reference’ towards a ‘memorandum of understanding’.

“More of a strategic partnership with knowledge network institutions. That would require a special memorandum of understanding with obligations etc. [Current practice] is more about a contractual relationship with consultants, researchers and it is a one-off thing. This that is being proposed is something that can go long-term of a strategic partnership with such institutions.” – DCR Uganda
“[Current relationships] between the DCR and the partners, I think, [are] a contracting relationship. You determine the partner you work with ... engaged in the kind of areas that suit the interest of the DCR member ... Also the money comes in, I think you have a bigger say and the partners are more inclined to pull ... because the money also comes through you, you have a bigger say in terms of control and in terms of all of the processes.” – DCR Uganda

“Research institutes ... they don’t exist to undertake research for the purpose of just generating knowledge on the topics of interest, but rather to undertake studies as a subcontractor.” – DCR Liberia

“[Universities] look at themselves as consultants ... as contractors. I think the idea of having long-term relations with those universities is going to help.” – DCR Sudan

2.1.6. Other experiences of international NGOs and national knowledge institutes

Knowing that the six in-country DCR teams currently did not have any long-term collaboration with national knowledge institutes, the fifth and final question in the interviews endeavoured to discover whether the interviewees knew about the existence of such collaborations from previous professional experience or their current professional environment. The purpose of the question was to make an inventory of other parties’ experiences and see what could be learned from these. After all, also in this field, some wheels might have already been invented. The final question was: “Do you have any direct experiences regarding collaboration between international NGOs and local knowledge institutes? If you have, what was the purpose, what helped and hindered the collaboration? If you have no direct experience, can you refer us to others?”

Three of the nine interviewees reported they had some direct experiences with collaborations between international NGOs and national knowledge institutes, two of them in the country where they also currently work, one in other countries. Most of the remaining six interviewees had heard of some form of such collaborations in their current professional environment. However, when the interviewers probed the interviewees’ direct and indirect experiences, it seemed that many of the presented experiences actually seemed to be based on a ‘classic’ contractual relationship whereby the knowledge institutes were hired on the basis of reference to produce specified research output regarding research questions defined by the international NGO.

Nonetheless, the interviewees also mentioned several examples of experiences that might be moving more toward a form of longer-term collaborative driven relationship between international NGOs and national knowledge institutes where mutual opportunities were used to satisfy each party’s interests. Table 3 provides some details of these quite possibly more interesting experiences. If time allows, DCR KN might endeavour to collaborate with the DCR country coordinators to collect some more documented information – and lessons learned – on these collaborations between aid agencies and national knowledge institutes.

Table 3. Examples of experiences with collaboration between INGOs and knowledge institutes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Burundi | • A few potentially interesting examples of the involvement of students as researchers, and longer-term research projects, but INGOs remained the contracting party setting the terms.  
  - Aid agencies involved: USAID, and a consortium of CARE, CRS, and World Vision.  
  - Knowledge institutes: National University, University of Ngozi |
| DR Congo | • A few potentially interesting examples of longer-term research projects, but the INGO remained the contracting party setting the terms.  
  1. Aid agencies involved: Vétérinaires Sans Frontière, World Vision  
  2. Knowledge institutes: ISDR North Kivu, ISDR South Kivu |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liberia</td>
<td>• No known examples.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Sudan</td>
<td>• Possibly interesting experiences in the Forum of NGOs in South Sudan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• A few interesting experiences with NGO Forums fulfilling a critical research role elsewhere:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Knowledge institutes: Association of International NGOs (AIN) in Nepal, the Iraq NCCI.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>• Prior to the DCR operating in Sudan, ZOA and CARE had a rather open collaboration with the Ahfad University to do mutually beneficial research in South Kordofan and South Darfur. The collaboration was cut short due to the conflict, but some interesting documents may be found.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Aid agencies involved: ZOA, CARE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Knowledge institute: Ahfad University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>• Without involvement of DCR, SCI is collaborating with the University of Gulu on an action research project titled ‘I Am Learning’. Some interesting documents may be found.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The ICRC seems to have a long-term collaboration with Makerere University, comprising cross-agency teaching, research, library development. Some interesting documents may be found.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Aid agencies involved: SCI, ICRC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Knowledge institute: Gulu University, Makerere University</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.2. The wider global experiences and perspectives: A literature search

At the start of the research, the research team expected several other international NGOs would already be collaborating with national knowledge institutes and that such collaboration had been subject of research in itself. To see what valuable lessons could be gleaned from other organisations’ experiences, a literature search was undertaken to investigate the ‘state of the art’.

2.2.1. Methodology

The literature search used common academic search engines (e.g. Web of Science, Scopus, Discover) and Google Scholar to scan academic and peer-reviewed journals, going back more than five years to January 2008. Initially, the literature search was guided by various search terms around the “African knowledge institutes”, “collaboration” and “international NGOs” – in conjunction with the names of the six countries in which DCR members operate. This yielded very little. A second literature search scoured for articles on “African universities” and “international cooperation”. This resulted in a collection of 112 potentially relevant articles. Upon closer scrutiny of abstracts, headings, and conclusions, a list of 66 articles were deemed to be of potential relevance for DCR members in developing a strategy for collaboration with African universities. (These 66 articles are woven through the findings presented below and listed at the end of this report.) For ease of future literature searches, the journals that published most of the articles used in this overview are listed below (Table 4). One observation need to be made; several African universities publish their own journals and these may contain studies on their collaboration with international NGOs. Unfortunately, many of these journals are not easily accessible or their contents are not included in the searches of common search engines.

Table 4. Journals accessed most frequently for articles on universities in Africa

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education Policy</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa Education Review</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal of Higher Education in Africa</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Higher Education</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Examples of experiences with collaboration between INGOs and knowledge institutes
2.2.2. Overall finding: DCR’s interest in national knowledge networks breaks new ground

Strikingly, the literature search in peer-reviewed or academic journals did not find any articles with an exclusive or distinct focus on the collaboration between national knowledge institutes in Africa and international development NGOs. This suggests the DCR members CARE, HealthNet TPO, SCI, and ZOA are breaking new ground; venturing into areas where few international NGOs have gone. Obviously, this perhaps surprising finding comes with a few caveats.

First, the lack of academic articles does not mean NGOs such as the DCR members CARE, HealthNet TPO, SCI, or ZOA do not collaborate with national knowledge institutes such as universities, think tanks, or research centres. In fact, the section on existing contracts between DCR members shows such a collaboration does take place. But then again, the request to DCR members to send in copies of such contract yielded only a handful of examples, which underscores the impression such collaborations are uncommon. Second, the literature search was limited in time and breadth. A longer search with more search terms quite probably will find a few articles. However, the scarcity of academic articles on the collaboration between international NGOs and national knowledge institutes does mean such a collaboration is unlikely to be occurring frequently and such collaborations have not often been studied or analysed by independent researchers.

Third and importantly, the literature search has narrowly focused on academic or peer-reviewed articles. A broader research would include the so-called ‘grey literature’ and is – with our current experience of drawing blanks in academic sources – more likely to find articles or reports on the collaboration between international NGOs and universities because we know it does take place. Unexplored but potentially good sources would include publications by international NGOs themselves (media releases, policy papers, or evaluation reports, etc.), unpublished Masters’ and PhD theses in universities, and professional journals and development websites that are not academic or peer-reviewed (e.g. Eldis, The Broker, Chr Michelsen Institute, capacity.org, Humanitarian Practice Network, etc.). However, such a literature research would probably demand several days of googling, snowballing, and networking. If DCR members think it worthwhile, a specific research could be commissioned to explore the grey literature.

Because the literature search found virtually no examples of collaboration between international NGOs and African knowledge institutes, and because the earlier interviews with DCR country coordinators had revealed they mostly looked at universities (and not think tanks, NGO, or research institutes) when thinking of national knowledge institutes, a second perspective was taken to the literature search. Instead of focusing on ‘African knowledge institutes’ and ‘international NGOs’, the academic and peer-reviewed journals were now scoured for articles on ‘African universities’ and ‘international cooperation’. The purpose of this wider research was to acquire a better understanding of the factors that are most likely to influence any future collaboration between DCR members and African universities, as their most likely partners in knowledge networking.

This second literature search identified a number of issues that seems to be dominating the debate on strategic challenges of African universities and the influence these challenges are likely to have on collaboration between African universities and international organisations. The sections below lists and describes these challenges in a nutshell. Two of the most cited publications have guided our listing of these categories. First, a sixty-page article by Swayerr of 2004 (Sawyerr, 2004) is cited 192 times in publications about African universities (also see commentary by: Saint, 2004). Second, Mamdani’s extensive case study of the reforms at Makerere University in Uganda between 1989 and 2005 has been cited 108 times (Mamdani, 2007), mostly as a typical example of how African universities have changed dramatically in the last couple of decades (also see commentary by: Kamola, 2012). Though coming from different political perspectives, the analyses in both publications are remarkably similar in identifying areas where change is taking place. This, in conjunction with their high citation rates, suggests a certain consensus underpins the categories listed below.
At the risk of simplifying matters too much, it can be argued that into the early 1980s, most African universities were prestigious and reasonably well-resourced institutions that the nations’ political leadership deemed of critical importance for national development. However, the economic crisis of the 1980s eroded the financial and human capital resources of most universities. The emphasis on ‘education for all’ by international donor agencies since the late 1990s further weakened resourcing of universities. In response to declining resources, and driven by a policy environment that was increasingly market-oriented, most universities moved towards new fields and challenges. “The result has been a halt in the decline in many instances, and revival and growth in several others” (Sawyerr, 2004: 1).

However, before looking at the ‘areas of growth’ for African universities, it would be wise to acknowledge that the ‘halt in the decline’ still leaves most universities in a rather poorly resourced and worn-out state. This matters as it will impinge greatly on the potential, motivations, and actual operations of any collaboration between these universities and international NGOs such as the DCR members. The choice of words in various articles depicts these conditions. “Many African universities [are] in a state of crisis without the basic physical infrastructure such as the internet connectivity, books, laboratory equipment and classrooms” (Ndirangu & Udoto, 2011: 209).

Several publications focus on the poor conditions of libraries and internet connectivity at African universities, which leaves students and researchers disconnected and unable to contribute to the global debate and research (e.g. Ayoo, 2009; Echezona & Ugwuanyi, 2010; Kanyengo, 2009; Kotecha, 2009). A detailed analysis of internet access and usage among the 82 top universities in Sub-Saharan Africa found their use of internet and libraries, “far below that of the developed world” (Wordofa, 2014: 275). Similarly, several publications detail concerns about the quality of research capacities of African universities. Partly this is driven by universities’ emphasis on increasing the number of students and teaching hours at the expense of resources spent on research (also see ‘massification’), and partly this is driven by the poor human resource policies and labour conditions that sees many academically qualified researchers move to the private sector, international NGOs, or moonlighting (Kagoda & Katabaro, 2013; Wangenge-Ouma, 2012; Wight, 2008).

Interestingly, these points were also highlighted in the interviews with DCR country coordinators and with staff at headquarters of DCR members in the Netherlands when they commented on the potential for collaboration with universities. In addition, it should be noted they were commenting on universities in fragile states, whereas most of the literature on ‘African universities’ focuses on universities in stable and middle-income countries. Repeating a few quotes from the interviews in early 2014, illustrates how country coordinators are very much in line with the concerns reflected in academic research: “They don’t have a good management system”, “They don’t have internet”, “They don’t have a library”, “They don’t have enough funds”.

2.2.3. Other findings: internationalisation, commercialisation, massification, privatisation

The previously cited work of Sawyerr (2004) and Mamdani (2007) both point to four particular areas of growth, change, or challenges for African universities: internationalisation, commercialisation, massification, and privatisation. In each of these four areas, the literature search leads to a few patterns or analyses that are relevant for DCR member organisations when considering collaboration with African universities.

In the first area – internationalisation – the literature search finds that ‘Internationalisation’ became a new strategy for universities across the globe since the early 2000s, including African universities. For international NGOs seeking to collaborate with African universities, two aspects of the debate on
internationalisation are particularly relevant. First, until about the mid 2000s, most of the debate around internationalisation in African universities was explicitly defined as collaboration between universities: “The process whereby a university engages with another university situated in another country” (J. Knight, an authoritative source of 2004 cited in: Botha, 2010: 2) (See also: Boeren, 2014.). Only in the latter half of the 2000s did the internationalisation debate in most African universities broaden and begin to include cooperation with non-academic international partner organisations, mostly with multilateral bodies, although no detailed references were found in this literature search. Nonetheless, even though the debate has broadened, most discussions on internationalisation revolve around teaching (curriculum, exchange of students) and joint academic research funded by Northern donors (Jowi & Huisman, 2009; Oyewole, 2009).

The second aspect of the internationalisation debate that is relevant for international development NGOs such as the DCR members revolves around the character and content of the activities under the banner of internationalisation. Does internationalisation lead African universities to direct their attention to the global (market place) interests at the expense of attention to local (development) interests? Articles define this tension as “internationalizing or Africanizing higher education” (Botha, 2010), “between localisation and internationalisation” (Dhaher, 2009), “the good and the ugly” (Jowi, 2012), or “between local powers and international donors” (Oanda & Khelfaoui, 2011). In this debate, a central question is to what extent international cooperation assists in developing local, African, research and knowledge or whether it entices African universities to face outward and turn its back on local or national priorities. A widely shared concern seems to be that internationalisation in African universities tends to produce, “not necessarily relevant content” (Oyewole, 2009: 332) and “internationalisation can become a threat to the quality of higher education” (Oyewole, 2009: 320).

Again, in their interviews, several DCR country coordinators clearly expressed the same concern when they commented on the universities in their environment: “Most of the universities are highly delinked from day-to-day programming realities. Their focus tends to be more on the academic theories” and “They don’t have any experiences in the development domain”, or “Even if you do pay a significant amount of money, the actual end result, I have been told, can be questionable”.

The second area relevant for collaboration with African universities is their move towards commercialisation. Against the backdrop of stagnant public funding and an increasing market-orientation of university management, the commercialisation of public universities – engaging in activities with a primary motive to generate revenue – became the way most universities developed over the last two decades. Some argue this was driven by financial necessity and institutional survival (Ogachi, 2012). Others positively promoted commercialisation and international partnerships not only for financial benefit, but as the way towards “building new … universities in Africa” that “bring together … research, training, commercialization … connections with the private sector and farmers, and extensive international partnerships” (Juma, 2012: 1). Irrespective of the debate around motives, in the managerial practice of public universities in Africa, commercial considerations seem to have become a primary consideration. At Makerere University, for example, a fixed budget allocation to academic units is being replaced by an activity-based allocations that also seek to support, “the initiative and energy of money-making units and individuals” (Magara, 2009: 81).

Again, when these analyses are compared to the interviews with DCR country coordinators, it becomes clear that the country coordinators have experiences or hold views with regard to collaboration with universities that reflects findings from academic research: “Highly money orientated”, “[Is there potential for collaboration with universities?] Well, not if there is nothing in it for them. I don’t think they would be willing to do it on voluntary basis.”

The third area of change in African universities can be labelled ‘massification’. The World Bank estimates the growth in enrolment at public universities between 2006 and 2015 leads to a doubling
of the number of university students. As an illustration; Benin’s 58,560 students in 2006 are projected
to grow to 192,700 students in 2015, and Zimbabwe’s 56,732 in 2006 to 96,700 in 2015 (World Bank,
2010: 32). Inevitably, the number of lecturers and tutors cannot keep pace with such a growth, so the
student-staff ratio will increase, worsen, significantly. Which leads several articles to draw conclusions
along these lines: “With the massification of higher education, the African higher education system is
undergoing a profound structural crisis … cause of the debilitating state” (Some, 2010: 73) and
concerns over the quality of education (Kimathi & Henry, 2014). Several continent-wide data analyses
point out that the increased enrolment of university students has not been accompanied by an
increase in government funding, which has in most cases remained static (Yang & McCall, 2014). Faced
with costs for the educating these students and with a managerial strategy that is opting to “shift the
locus of their resource dependence to the market,” most universities have significantly increased their
fees and introduced cost-recovery or profit-making systems for accommodation, catering,
photocopies, library use, etc. (Wangenge-Ouma & Nafukho, 2011: 169).

The fourth and final area of change among African universities is privatisation. Several articles equate
the public universities’ drive for internationalisation, commercialisation, and massification with an
encroaching privatisation. Oanda & Jowi, for example, point out how public universities “have
dispersed to the rural areas both as a strategy to expand access and to position themselves as business
entities … campuses of public universities in rural areas sometimes serving as private income
generation units, outside strict public sector oversight” (2013: 49). However, in a more narrow sense,
the emergence of private universities – operating without government funding as a profit-driven
enterprise – represents a steadily growing trend. World Bank figures show this trend, nonetheless,
differs sharply from country to country. While on average about 20% of Sub Sahara’s university
students are enrolled in a private university, the numbers range from 5% in Ghana to just over 50% in
Burundi and variation is mostly driven by the regulatory and commercial national environment (World
Bank, 2010: 75).

For DCR members policy-making it is not only important to work on the premise that the presence of
private universities differs in each country, but it equally important to explore various types of private
universities. A few articles seem to concur in a categorisation in three types: religious, elite, and tuition-
dependent private universities. Growth occurs mostly in the latter type, which is generally least likely
to engage in local research but most keenly interested in status-enhancing partnerships with
international organisations (Mugabi, 2012). Moreover, when NGOs consider partnerships with public
or private universities, they should also consider the two are often formally and informally networked.
Kenya’s private Mt Kenya University and Uganda’s Makerere University have a formal partnership to
their mutual commercial benefit (Munene, 2009: 264) and private and public universities are
informally connected through the fact that the former rely mostly on the part-time ‘moonlighting’ of
academic staff employed by the latter (Thaver, 2008: 139).

Once more, the experiences of DCR country coordinators align with the findings from the literature.
When interviewed and asked to name potentially relevant national knowledge institutes, four of the
six country coordinators included private universities in their lists. “Recently we’ve been having what
we call ‘private universities’ coming up and there are now quite a number of them.” Moreover, one
country coordinator noted: “International NGOs sometimes hire lecturers as consultants.”

2.2.4. African universities and community engagement

While the challenges for African public universities in internationalisation, commercialisation,
massification, and privatisation may open doors for collaboration between international NGOs and
universities – even if these doors may not necessarily open in the desired direction – the literature
search also found two additional areas of lively debate and expanding interest in African universities
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search also found two additional areas of lively debate and expanding interest in African universities

that have relevance for CARE, HealthNet TPO, SCI, and ZOA if they seek to develop national knowledge networks in partnership with universities: community engagement and research capacity building.

First, community engagement. The literature search’s findings suggest lively debate in African universities revolves around universities’ collaboration with local actors in local government and community groups. This debate is largely predicated on the fact that many African universities have mission statements that explicitly seek to, “respond to education, research and community needs” or work towards the “attainment of equitable and sustainable socio-economic de of Tanzania and the rest of Africa” (Zeelen, 2012: 158). It is likely that DCR members may find common ground and shared interests if they approach universities with under the banner of ‘community engagement’. Most of the articles on universities’ community engagement focus on research methodologies involving academic staff, students, community representatives and community members – for example, techniques for participatory impact assessments, action research, etc. – rather than reporting on research findings (e.g.: Bender, 2008; Fletcher & Zuber-Skerritt, 2008; Gottschick, 2008; Khoboli & O’toole, 2012; Lazarus et al., 2008; Leibowitz et al., 2010; Matthews, 2010; Netshandama, 2010; Nhamo, 2013). Some articles, however, do take a more explicit focus on the wider, societal and developmental, relevance of collaboration between universities and communities (Mattes & Luescher-Mamashela, 2012; Morley et al., 2009).

It should be noted that a majority of this debate is carried by South African universities, probably the best-resourced universities in Africa, and for collaboration with universities in fragile states these articles may be more useful as source of inspiration than as a source of practical guidelines. Again, the literature search in academic journals found very little of direct relevance to collaboration between international NGOs and universities in fragile states. The literature search found two articles that review work with particular attention for higher education in fragile or post-conflict states, exploring not only how violent conflict affects universities, but also focusing on how universities can contribute to rehabilitation and de-escalation (Harber, 2013; Pacheco & Turner Johnson, 2014).

Some of the DCR country coordinators expressed views that line up with the above. For example, one country coordinator referred to the wider mission of her organisation: “Working with the universities … collaboration, not for us, but for the country”. Similarly, another country coordinator underscored how collaboration with a university was driven by the training of students in certain research strategies: “[They] talked with me asking about collaboration in how the DCR can help them to train their students, and activities like they need to have summer training”.

2.2.5. African universities and research capacity building

The second debate is around ‘research capacity building’ in African universities. Such a capacity building is often related to longer-term perspectives and to wider, national, development goals. Regarding the longer-term perspective; Crossley’s thought on “time as a concept and resource” in capacity building are insightful (Crossley, 2009). Moreover, with respect to the wider goals, several articles underscore that domestic research capacity is, “essential for good policy-making and ultimately for better [health, education, agriculture, etc.] outcomes. Research for policy should be led by a country’s own scientists, but very few universities in low-income African countries are able to ‘home-grow’ ... researchers” (Bates et al., 2011: 211). In fact, articles about how research from home-grown researchers influences policy-making are not easy to find (Bennett et al., 2011).

As with internationalisation, most articles about research capacity building refer to a collaboration between universities – in North-South, or in regional South-South partnerships (Babaci-Wilhite, 2013; Barrett et al., 2011; Kebede et al., 2014; Kotecha et al., 2011; Mullan et al., 2011; Obamba & Mwema, 2009). No reference was found that included international NGOs. The literature search also suggests
two additional points of relevance for DCR members. First, going by frequency, it seems that most articles on research capacity building concentrate on the public health sector (e.g.: Crane, 2011; Ezeh et al., 2010; Kaaya et al., 2012; McKee et al., 2012; Mirzoev et al., 2013; Uys & Middleton, 2011; Whitworth et al., 2008) and much less on agriculture or education (e.g.: Abukutsa-Onyango, 2008; Osiru et al., 2012). Second, as often, most articles refer to research capacity building in middle-income, stable, environment. In contrast, capacity development in a fragile state requires additional – and sometime contrary – approaches (see recent work of: Brinkerhoff, 2014; McIoughlin, 2014).

As yet, there is no discernible role or contribution for international NGOs in the research capacity building in African universities, although it seems rather obvious that NGOs and local partners in communities are well-positioned to ensure the research meets local development needs, rather than the curiosity of international researchers or policy-makers. In fact, some of the DCR country coordinators hinted at early and positive experiences in the collaboration with national public universities: “Most important was to build the capacity of the teaching staff... a number of them were sent to different training institutions mainly to get knowledge, it was not about the money.”

2.3. Existing collaboration between DRC members and national universities

The current DCR country programmes in the six countries do not have any long-term collaboration agreement – i.e. an agreement beyond a consultancy contract – with a national knowledge institute or university. In fact, only three of the ten interviewed staff members had any direct knowledge of more structural collaboration between an international NGO and a university (see section 2.1.6). This, actually, simply reflects the general state of affairs. However, in various conversations and interviews staff members mentioned at least three of the four DCR members – i.e. CARE, SCI, and ZOA – do have agreements for collaboration with universities. A quick querying for documentation related to these collaborations provided the research team with five copies of agreements or reports (Table 5).

Table 5. Examples of existing collaboration between DCR members and knowledge institutes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DCR member</th>
<th>Collaboration with</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CARE</td>
<td>University of Hargeisa (Somaliland)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>University of Nyala (Sudan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ahfad University for women, Khartoum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCI</td>
<td>University of Gulu (Uganda)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZOA</td>
<td>Higher Institute for Rural Development (ISDR) Bukavu (DR Congo)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agriculture Faculty (Ethiopia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HealthNet-TPO</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A review of these few – incomplete – documents about these collaborations with national universities triggered the following first impressions:

- All agreements are with universities, and not with other knowledge institutes such as governmental bodies, NGO-think tanks, or private consulting firm. This aligns with the findings from the interviews with DCR country coordinators, when two-thirds of the knowledge institutes they listed were also universities (see section 2.1.2).

- Of the five documents seen, only two seem to be longer term (> two years) collaboration addressing strategic interests of both parties (i.e. CARE’s collaboration with the University of Hargeisa and ZOA’s collaboration with the ISDR in Bukavu). The other three seemed to be shorter term consultancy contracts with specific deliverables.
Although different in scope and form, the collaborations with the University of Hargeisa and the ISDR in Bukavu are similar in that they involve supervised students as ‘learning researchers’

3. National Knowledge Networks after December 2015?

3.1. The experiences and perspectives of national knowledge institutes

To explore the interests and potential for collaboration with national knowledge institutes, five of the six DCR country coordinators volunteered to interview two or three of the national knowledge institutes they thought most interested, promising, or active in the field. (DCR members in Liberia, as indicated previously in section 2.1.5, did not believe any of the Liberian knowledge institutes were in a position to meet the needs of the programmes.) As detailed in the document “Outlining a strategy for collaboration with national universities, knowledge institutes and knowledge networks in DCR countries” (see annexes), the country coordinators presented two questions to potential partners in a national knowledge network:

- What are your areas or priorities of research?
- What are your views and/or experiences regarding long-term (more than one year) collaborative partnerships for joint research with international aid organisations?

3.1.1. Methodology

DCR country coordinators consulted with members of the research team over the list of knowledge institutes they had identified earlier to select two or three institutes they wished to approach for an interview. At the time of writing this report, the five country coordinators had selected and interviewed nine knowledge institutes, while a number of interviews were still pending. In line with the expectations, most of these were universities and most interviews took place between March and July 2014 in the offices of these nine knowledge institutes (Table 6).

The interviews served a dual purpose. First, and foremost, the interviews were used by country coordinators to explore the potential for collaboration in national knowledge networks beyond December 2015. In this light, the ‘occasion’ of the interviews generated the opportunity to get to know each other. The DCR country coordinators used the occasion to communicate an interest in collaborating with the selected knowledge institutes, without actually having to spell out explicitly that the interviewee was being considered a potential partner. The second purpose, of course, was to gather information for this report to be shared in the wide networks of the Consortium. Because relation-building was the first objective, the country coordinators did not record and transcribe the interviews. Instead, they wrote the research team short-and-quick reports of the interviews.

Considering the character of these short reports, the research team’s analysis of these reports presented in the next two sections should be considered as merely ‘indicative’ of an overall first impression across the five countries, rather than information on any specific knowledge institute. For this reason, the quotes or data from these reports by country coordinators are not linked to specific knowledge institutes.
Table 6. National knowledge institutes Interviewed by DCR country coordinators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>National knowledge institute interviewed</th>
<th>Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Burundi</td>
<td>1. Ngozi University</td>
<td>University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Bujumbura University (no report received yet)</td>
<td>University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Gitega Institute of Agriculture (no report received yet)</td>
<td>University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DR Congo</td>
<td>4. Bilingual Christian University of Congo (UCBC) in Beni</td>
<td>University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Higher Institutes for Rural Development ISDRs in North Kivu and South Kivu (interviews still pending)</td>
<td>University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberia</td>
<td>Not applicable.</td>
<td>Not applicable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Sudan</td>
<td>5. Ebony Centre for Strategic Studies (ECSS)</td>
<td>Firm/NGO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Leading Minds Institute</td>
<td>Firm/NGO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. The SUD Institute</td>
<td>NGO/Firm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>8. Ahfad Women University - Rural Extension, Education &amp; Development (REED)</td>
<td>University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. University of Nyala - Peace Institute (PI)</td>
<td>University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>– Interviews are pending; personnel changes have prevented follow-up.</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.1.2. Research priorities of national knowledge institutes

The first of the two questions in the interview with the selected national knowledge institutes was, “What are your areas or priorities of research?” The purpose of this question was to find out if the knowledge institute has its own research agenda – rather than being a client-driven and oriented by immediate demand. The research team deemed the potential for longer-term mutually satisfying collaboration greater if an interviewed knowledge institute had its own research agenda, objectives, methodological approach, and/or build-up knowledge base that would have some overlap with the research interests of DCR members. From an analysis of the short reports by country coordinators suggests three first impressions stand out.

First, most of the selected knowledge institutes were in a position to list rather specific series of their research priorities. Only a few of the knowledge institutes opted to remain rather general, for example when one noted it research priorities were, “in the social domain”, or another said their research priority was “rural development”. In contrast, the random and incomplete listing below gives an impression about the extent to which a majority of the interviewed knowledge institutes had defined rather specific research priorities and – presumably – been developing specific expertise and specific knowledge bases (Table 7).

Table 7. Specific research priorities of interviewed knowledge institutes (random order)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Citizen visibility in budget process</th>
<th>Conflict prevention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private sector investment in agriculture</td>
<td>Government Development Plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corruption</td>
<td>Accountability and public service delivery</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4 All three knowledge institutes interviewed in South Sudan appeared to be a blend of an NGO and a private firm, as all three fund their activities through consultancies, without receiving operational subsidies or grants. The three also held rather different relationships vis-à-vis the South Sudanese government.
Table 7. Specific research priorities of interviewed knowledge institutes (random order)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land use</th>
<th>Land tenure issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Governance as tool for state formation</td>
<td>Public health and food control policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human rights and women’s rights</td>
<td>Impacts of road rehabilitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Livelihoods (farm and non-farm activities)</td>
<td>Water resource management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative energy technologies</td>
<td>Rural ICT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second impression – following on from the first – is that most of the knowledge institutes selected by the country coordinators appear to be quite attuned to the specific conditions and dynamics in their immediate environment. For example, by focusing on research topics such as ‘road rehabilitation’ or ‘land tenure issues’. Perhaps even bolder, some of the knowledge institutes seem to be willing and able to address politically more sensitive research issues such as ‘corruption’, or ‘conflict prevention’.

The third impression from the interviews with knowledge institutes on their research topics is that in particular circumstances, the above two impressions do not apply or cease to be a matter of autonomous prioritisation. Knowledge institutes appear to have less of an own research agenda and inclined to align with government policies and priorities if they are more dependent on (short-term) contract funding and/or operate in politically more volatile environments.

“The primary focus however is on [research] topics that are important to the government.”

“The [knowledge institute] seems closely tied to the government. The [interviewee] was coming from a meeting with the acting Vice President and had armed guards escorting him.”

“In 2012 the Government invited the [knowledge institute] to do an assessment of the government governance structures … and then to inform the new government. The [knowledge institute] likes to create research and policy debate around these issues.”

3.1.3. Experiences of knowledge institutes in collaboration with international NGOs

The second of the two questions in the interview with the selected national knowledge institutes was, “Do you have any long-term (more than one year) collaborative partnerships for joint research with international aid organisations?” If the answer was ‘yes’, then country coordinators enquired into formal structures and experiences, and if the answer was ‘no’ then the knowledge institute's interest and expectations were discussed. The short reports by country coordinators leave the following two impressions as relevant for DCR members considering the development of national knowledge networks.

First, as knowledge institutes, all interviewed universities had long-term collaboration agreements with international partner organisations. In contrast, none of the interviewed non-academic knowledge institutes had any such agreements. A few particular notes from the reports on these international collaboration agreements by the universities are:

- These collaboration agreements were all multi-annual; and some agreements had been renewed regularly or covered periods of up to six years.
- One of the interviewed universities had two international collaboration agreements; others listed seven or perhaps more.
- Most collaboration agreements were with other universities – either in the East African region, or with European or in the USA. There were fewer collaboration agreements with multi-lateral
development agencies (WHO, UNDP, UNICEF, WFP, FAO, etc.) and collaboration agreements with international NGOs were even fewer (Concern and CARE are mentioned).

The above notes need to be read with care. Some of the interviewed knowledge institutes clearly differentiated between a multi-annual contract to deliver certain services and a multi-annual MoU to develop a partnership, other interviewees seemed less clear. On the former perspective; one knowledge institute had a detailed written view on partnerships as international collaboration:

“We are not a consultancy firm ... we offer our proficiency and engage in partnerships with development organisations and NGOs for mutual benefits ... a collaboration that can reasonably be expected to have mutual (though not necessarily identical) benefits.”

Second, several of the interviewed universities had well-established structures and processes to engage their students in collaborative research with international partners. (As an aside; only two universities mentioned they had a dedicated ‘research institute’ with academic staff to do research with partner organisations.) These universities had established detailed procedures for the academic supervision of students, others organised students’ research in specific “summer training” programmes. One university presented students and partner organisations with three distinct research avenues (field research driven by students, internships in development organisations, or research assignments directed by community organisations). Most universities had experience in supervising or organising research by students for local or international development organisations. Universities presented several advantages of the involvement of students in research:

- Students are exposed to a professional environment where students will later work. One said: “International NGOs are good trainers because of their active work related to the issues taught by the school.”
- Universities with international collaboration agreements are more attractive to prospective students.
- Students do not charge commercial consultancy fees; they are often paid an allowance (although these can vary significantly) and reimbursements. This benefits all parties.
- Expanding on the mutually beneficially ‘cost’ aspect; two universities had the opportunity for partner organisations to offer partial scholarships (up to 88% of the enrolment and study costs) to Master students who would do research for the partner organisation.
- Partner organisations benefit if they engage students originating from regions with political tensions or complex conditions of transport, accommodation, and communication because these students are more effective and context-sensitive in their research than ‘outsiders’.
- Partner organisations do not have to dedicate too much time to the supervision of student-researchers, as it is largely done by academic staff.

3.2. The experiences and perspectives of DCR member organisations at HQs

Hitherto, this report explored the experiences and views with regard to national knowledge networks within Burundi, DR Congo, Liberia, South Sudan, Sudan, and Uganda. This last section of the report presents the experiences and perspectives of staff at the headquarters of the four DCR members in the Netherlands: CARE, HealthNet TP, SCI, and ZOA. In May 2014, the four DCR members received the preliminary report with the results from the interviews with DCR country coordinators titled “Emerging
patterns and trends across six DCR countries”. In June and July, staff were interviewed in their offices on the following questions:

- To what extent are the ‘Emerging patterns’ in the experiences and views of DCR country coordinators similar to your own professional experiences and views?

- Some country coordinators expressed uncertainty whether DCR members actually want to continue knowledge networks after December 2015. What is your organisation’s view on the knowledge networking activities beyond 2015?

3.2.1. Methodology

The interviews with staff of DCR member organisations has a dual purpose too – as all the interviews. First, the interviews served to verify or cross-check to what extent the preliminary analysis of the views of the DCR country coordinators was shared at the four headquarters in the Netherlands. Second, the interviews served to explore the views at headquarters of the four individual DCR member organisations about their views and possibilities regarding collaboration with national knowledge networks in the six DCR countries after 2015, when DCR ceases to have funding. The interviews were fully transcribed and some HQ staff added written comments (Table 8).5

Table 8. Staff of DCR member organisations at HQs interviewed by the research team

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DCR member</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CARE</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Save the Children International (SCI)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HealthNet TPO</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZOA</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2.2. Similarities of experiences and views between country coordinators and HQs

The interviews at the headquarters of CARE, SCI, HealthNet TPO, and ZOA revealed clearly that the interviewed staff members shared the general doubts and questions of DCR country coordinators with regard to collaboration with national knowledge institutes. The preliminary report with the views of country coordinators contained no surprises for staff at HQs.

“It was not surprising to read that many of them have doubt about the capacity of, for example, national universities and have not really explored or experienced this … It is difficult to determine the capacities of universities or knowledge institutes.” – CARE HQ staff

“[The report] reflects the principal issues. We have always known this. [...] When it comes to collaboration [with local knowledge institutes] there is not much to gain.” – ZOA HQ staff

“The doubts [of field offices about national knowledge institutes] seem justified. As far as I know, SCI Netherlands projects don’t engage much with local knowledge institutes. They do engage with Netherlands-based institutes.” – SCI HQ staff

5 Interviews, transcripts and commentaries by HQ staff were in Dutch. Te English translation in this report is ours.
“I do think the solution lies in collaboration between national knowledge institutes, universities and the [development] organisations ... but in daily practice it does not work.” – HealthNet TPO HQ staff

Aside from the general questions and doubts, the interviewed staff at the headquarters also shared country coordinators’ experiences in the four specific categories explaining limited collaboration between international NGOs and national knowledge institutes. Below a few illustrations of these shared experiences in the four categories, respectively: ineffective management, poor financial and infra-structural resources, limited focus on research of local relevance, and poor quality of research.

“We terminated the collaboration [with a university] on a specific project because they simply did not deliver the results.” – CARE HQ staff

“Generally, the capacity of the universities is often weak. As one can read, sometimes there is no library, they don’t have an internet connection.” – CARE HQ staff

“Universities struggle to be taken seriously at an academic level. So their focus is more on academic performance.” – HealthNet TPO HQ staff

“We made a contract with [local research institute] to measure harvests in a scientific way ... they made quite some mistakes. Starting with the basic calculations.” – ZOA HQ staff

Notwithstanding these shared doubts about the collaboration with national universities, two of the DCR member organisations – CARE and ZOA – have a few agreements for longer term collaboration with universities. CARE mentioned rather recent agreements in Sudan with the University of Nyala and Ahfad University for Women of Khartoum and a longer running agreement in Somaliland with the University of Hargeisa. ZOA mentioned its collaboration with the Kedarif Agricultural Centre in Sudan. (This probably comes in addition to collaboration mentioned.)

“The country office has a long running relationship with the university [of Hargeisa]. But it is not always easy.” – CARE HQ staff

“A positive experience with the Kedarif Agricultural Centre in Sudan with whom we have a contract, an MoU ... I am not impressed with everything they do. There are a few real flaws in their knowledge. On the other hand, they do have a lot of knowledge and experience with the land and the farmers ... connecting well with farmers’ reality.” – ZOA HQ staff

In sum, the (limited) experiences and perspectives on collaboration with national knowledge institutes of DCR country coordinators and staff at headquarters of the DCR member organisations are remarkably aligned in their doubts.

3.2.3. Views at HQs about national knowledge networks beyond 2015

In the earlier interviews, a few DCR country coordinators talked about their uncertainty whether the four DCR member organisations actually want to continue working on knowledge networks in the six countries after the Consortium’s funding ends in December 2015. In fact, for some this uncertainty was a brake on exploring the opportunities with national knowledge institutes. Operationally, the four DCR member organisations will continue to be present and implement projects in the six countries after 2015 (Table 9).
Table 9. Presence of DCR member organisations in the six ‘DCR countries’ after 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>DCR member currently present</th>
<th>DCR member present after 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ZOA</td>
<td>SCI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burundi</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC Congo</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberia</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Sudan</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, when it came to thinking about a potential for continuation of the cross-agency collaboration among DCR member organisations, several staff doubted that would happen.

“It would have been better if DCR had picked up on this matter earlier... You will see people, for example country coordinators, in 2015 looking for other jobs ... If you want something [with national knowledge networks] then it has to come from the member organisations. I’m thinking of ZOA, CARE.” – ZOA HQ staff

“When we talk of structures, I am not sure if we will continue after 2015. Although it is not a bad idea to continue exchanging knowledge ... this is just the structure we are in. And when this DCR structure ends and the donor no longer expects us to collaborate, then it is likely to peter out.” – CARE HQ staff

When staff at the Dutch headquarters were asked whether they believed the individual organisations were interested and/or able to support a continuation of knowledge networks in the six countries, three of the four DCR member organisations – ZOA, SCI, and HealthNet TPO – saw no clear or explicit role for Dutch headquarters, albeit for different motives.

“We don’t have a focus on capacity building of local or national [knowledge] institutes. We never had it either ... it is not in our mandate. I don’t see it happening, a structural collaboration with national knowledge institutes.” – ZOA HQ staff

“It will depend on possibilities and presence of knowledge institutes in the countries. However, it is not part of our core business. ... We have no long-term or overall vision regarding collaboration with national knowledge institutes.” – SCI HQ staff

“We do not have the capacity [...] We do not have the resources. Even if I had a vision, I would still need to find money ... We have to deal with the limitation of being project-oriented, I think perhaps even more than ZOA.” – HealthNet TPO HQ staff

CARE, on the other hand, noted a cautious interest in collaboration with local knowledge institutes – also expressed in their collaboration with universities in Somaliland and Sudan.

“Do we have a vision [on national knowledge networks]? It would be too much to say we have a vision on this. But it is part of our vision to work as much as we can with local actors ... so I think collaboration with national universities fits with our vision on strengthening civil society.” – CARE HQ Staff

Having noted this, CARE staff did elaborate on several conditions for supporting national knowledge institutes. For example, they felt good quality of research capacities was important, as well as an agreement on clear output from the university and good personal contacts. The most critical condition,
nonetheless, for CARE – and SCI – was acquiring specific funding for long term collaboration with, for example, a university.

“Unfortunately, CARE is very dependent on project funds ... So that is the big problem. I do not see possibilities to finance this from the ‘unrestricted’ budget.” – CARE HQ staff

“Even if we see the importance, as a project-oriented organisation we have to see external finance coming in for such a collaboration [with national universities].” – SCI HQ staff

CARE, HealthNet TPO, and SCI staff shared some judicious reflections on how they think a collaboration with national knowledge institutes could be initiated. CARE and HealthNet TPO underscored the importance of a careful approach, emphasising the need to find ‘common research themes’. SCI noted actually finding these common research themes might be difficult.

“I think the first, introductory, conversation is very important ... to find out whether the university, college, or the person, has a real interest in the [research] topic [...] If we align on a theme ... then our work can be of interest to them because it generates knowledge that they can use other research.” - CARE HQ staff

“You have to take a step back and look for the themes that are of interests to [university] partners ... What are the themes that need researching?” – HealthNet TPO HQ staff

“The questions researchers would like to investigate are not always relevant for the target groups of the project or SCI. It can be difficult to find common or overlapping objectives.” – SCI HQ staff

In all four interviews, staff also stress the importance of personal relations, personal interests. Perhaps personal trust trumps formal institutional MoUs and agreements.

“We talk about universities, but at the end of the day individuals will be enthused for collaboration ... You have to engage key persons in a university, not so much talk about university as an institution.” – HealthNet TPO HQ staff

“[Our contact person in the university] was fired and for quite a while nobody was responsible [for the collaboration]. So it was all rather dependent on the person who happened to be the contact person.” – CARE HQ staff

“We have a project ... the rector of the university has to sign the agreement, so it is formally an agreement with the university, but it is actually with the researcher.” ZOA HQ staff

“It takes time and effort to get to know people and develop a relationship before one actually gets to doing the real research.

In a general framework of knowledge networking, several staff at headquarters noted the potential benefits they could see mutual benefits for both development organisations and the national knowledge institutes such as universities in a structural collaboration.

“Working with local researchers and universities has an added value in terms of knowledge what is really happening locally ... the research we did with knowledge networks on the influence of traditional authorities on resource allocation could never have been done by an international researcher.” – CARE HQ staff
I think some universities will see an interests in having contacts in rural areas and do research via a [development] organisation [...] It could be part of the curriculum [...] And universities find it interesting to show connections [...] On paper it all looks good.” – HealthNet TPO HQ staff

While support from Dutch headquarters for national knowledge networks – such as collaboration with national universities – is unlikely to be forthcoming or coming without specific funding being acquired, staff at these headquarters did make three observations that leave room for thought or conversation about a potential collaboration with national knowledge institutes beyond 2015.

First – and rather strikingly – as DCR country coordinators look towards staff at headquarters for support or guidance on collaboration with national knowledge institutes, the staff at headquarters underscore it is people in country offices who can and should determine whether or not longer term collaboration with universities happens or not.

“The collaboration agreement with Nyala University is not with CARE Netherlands, but between the CARE country office and the university [...] In Sudan and Somalia it is driven very much by the country offices. We are very dependent on the vision of the country office. If the country office does not want to invest energy in this, then it is pointless. [...] But if the country staff want it, then there is no problem. It is not something we decide over here.” – CARE HQ staff

“Interest [for collaboration with a university] differs in each country [...] If there is a country director... who has done research and got a PhD, then he will be more interested in a collaboration with universities.” – ZOA HQ staff

“Some of our in-country offices may collaborate with local knowledge institutes in programmes, but we in the Netherlands would not really know if it is not related to programmes we as SCI Netherlands finance. [...] We could encourage such initiatives. I do not have the impression in-country offices initiate this by themselves.” – SCI HQ staff

Second, while headquarters are unlikely to have discretionary funds to invest in collaboration with national knowledge institutes, staff at three headquarters do think donors might be interested to include collaboration with universities in project design.

“[This collaboration] was actually driven by the EU. They wanted a project but on the condition that [local] researchers would be involved.” – ZOA HQ Staff

“I think donors would be interested to add an activity [of collaboration with a university]. For example, this EU project ... the activity would not be to generate knowledge, but the collaboration would have to contribute to a specific result. [...] It is more difficult to fund general capacity development of universities.” – CARE HQ staff

“Above all, it depends on the donors whether it [research with national knowledge institutes] is included in the project design and budget ... Sometimes donors award ‘extra points’ if a proposal has a research component.” – SCI HQ staff

Third, staff at HealthNet TPO raised a few more practical and some fundamental issues on knowledge networks that merit further thought when talking about collaboration between development organisations and universities. At a practical level, these issues referred to the ‘gap or connection’ between research questions and practical relevance of research for projects, as well as the actual use of websites as repositories of research documents.
“Research questions, even if they are locally defined, link to application. [...] Some people say, ‘research is not necessary’. The Board also asks, ‘What is the value of this research?’ All this is about the gap between knowledge and application.” – HealthNet TPO HQ staff

“You create that [DCR] website with all documents ... Why would you browse it? ... If you have a problem in your work ... you are not going to check out the website of ZOA or CARE or SCI. You are more likely to go back to your own previous contacts and resources than to look around in the consortium ... How can we resolve that?” – HealthNet TPO HQ staff

At a more fundamental level, staff at HealthNet TPO raised issues relating to the debates around ‘quality of research’ and the reputational risks that may be associated with the sharing of questions and research.

“As NGO we also struggle with the issue of ‘quality of research’ ... If you opt to strive for academic criteria you meet expectations in the sharing of research. However, trying to meet academic criteria will create barriers in the field.” – HealthNet TPO HQ staff

“International NGOs specialise [in certain fields or topics]... their activities aim to improve matters ... that presupposes certain knowledge and expertise. This legitimises their existence and their activities ... sharing of knowledge can weaken their position, strengthen the competition. Also asking for knowledge, asking for too much knowledge on their specialisation can undermine their position indirectly because it may indicate they don’t know what they are doing.” – HealthNet TPO HQ staff

In closing, several staff at headquarters used the interviews to share some of their more strategic, almost philosophical, puzzlement regarding collaboration between international NGOs and national knowledge networks. It seems a good idea, but it does not happen – very much in line with the findings from the literature search.

“For long-term development of a country and its people, good research ... is needed. However, the operational and short time focus of projects makes this hard or impossible to achieve. Results are often not immediately visible or hard to account for. It is hard to turn this into a win-win.” – SCI HQ staff

“It would be logical [for development organisations] to seek collaboration with universities and knowledge institutes. On paper, that is very logical. But I do not know why it does not happen. That is a sorry affair, because I have one foot on both sides and I can’t make it happen.” – HealthNet TPO HQ staff

“We are not programmed to think, ‘We are going to do this research with them [national knowledge institutes]’. I think there has to be a change in culture, in our thinking. But then again, I see it does not happen on the ground. And one wonders, ‘Why does it not happen?’” – CARE HQ staff

4. Conclusions

From the conversations with DCR country coordinators, representatives from national knowledge institutes, and staff of DCR member organisations it clearly emerges there is very limited experience in structural collaboration between international NGOs and national knowledge institutes. In fact, a literature search confirms this scarcity of such collaborative experiences. This is evidence that DCR
personnel in country offices and at headquarters are well attuned to international development practice.

When thinking about it, most DCR personnel at all levels have expressed detailed doubts and questions about the viability or usefulness of a collaboration with national knowledge institutes in Burundi, DR Congo, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda. The list of problems detailed in this report is long, and the obstacles are big. A lack of directly available funding is but one of the challenges and the petering out of cross-agency cooperation among DCR members in the Netherlands after 2015 is just another.

Nonetheless, a majority of the country coordinators has explored the potential for collaboration with national knowledge institutes in direct conversations with national universities or research institutes. They mostly found knowledge institutes – particularly universities – that have experience in working with international academic partners. Moreover, they found the selected universities often have research priorities that are focused on development issues in their immediate environment and they have reasonably well established processes to engage students in ‘fieldwork and research’. The country coordinators probably also found many of their doubts and questions reconfirmed – in spite of the interest for collaboration they may have encountered.

At country level, some DCR country coordinators have moved ahead and begun exploring – on a modest scale – actual collaboration with national knowledge institutes. In spite of their doubts and questions. At the level of headquarters, some staff members have expressed bewilderment; they believe collaboration between international NGOs and national knowledge institutes is logical or the best way forward in the long term. And yet, they note: “I can’t make it happen” or “Why does it not happen?”

Perhaps the overall conclusion of this research could be that the path to collaboration between country offices of CARE, HealthNet TPO, SCI and ZOA and national knowledge institutes lies in the hands of the country offices. Staff at headquarters cannot make it happen. Moreover, they indicated they are increasingly looking for guidance from country offices and are willing to support their initiatives.
5. **Annexes**

The following annexes are available from the DCR knowledge network coordination at HealthNet TPO (Martijn Vink, Ilse Hartog).

1. Document titled “Outlining a strategy for collaboration with national universities, knowledge institutes, and knowledge networks in DCR countries” of 29 January 2014, which served as the Terms of Reference for the research team.
3. Fully transcribed interviews with the DCR country coordinators (see 2.1.)
4. Fully transcribed interviews with representatives of the DCR member organisations (see 3.2)
5. Adobe pdf versions of the literature listed in the references.

6. **References**


Mattes, R., & Luescher-Mamashela, T. (2012). The roles of higher education in the democratization of politics in Africa: survey reports from HERANA.


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