

DCR AND NATIONAL KNOWLEDGE INSTITUTES

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.