

What works in global health partnerships?

Reflections on a Nigerian-German project collaboration



Authors: Chinedu Okoroafor¹, Flora Haderer², Obiora Okafor¹, Jerome Dooga¹, Ute Zocher³, Tochi Okwor¹. 1 NCDC, 2 Robert Koch Institute, 3 Independent Consultant

The challenge in global health partnership

Bringing stakeholders from different disciplines, professions, settings, and countries together provides opportunities to look at health challenges from different perspectives, develop suitable ideas to tackle them, and leverage diverse capacities.

In diverse partnerships, cultural norms, practical contextual realities, and institutional practices often create challenges for the development of good and equitable relationships and functional, satisfactory team work.

In the project NiCaDe IPC, an interdisciplinary team from the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control and Prevention and the Robert Koch Institute in Germany collaborated to build training capacity for infectious disease preparedness and response among health care workers in Nigeria.



Method

In our work, we followed **principles of teamwork based on the Participatory Approach and systemic understanding.**

- 1** Planning, revising, adapting and implementing all project activities as well as its content **participatorily.**
- 2** **Co-creation:** Considering everyone as an expert and encouraging joint development of strategies and content
- 3** Recognizing **situational and institutional context** and its implications
- 4** Encouraging **open, respectful, non-violent communications.**
- 5** **Feedback Loops:** facilitating continuous input and adaptation based on team members experiences.
- 6** **Prioritizing teamwork** as a constantly evolving process of interaction and learning.
- 7** **Allocate time and external support for reflection** on teamwork, roles and function throughout the entire project.
- 8** **Coherence:** We applied this approach both for working with the target group and for our team work

Results

- ✓ **Leverage team diversity** through improved understanding and trustful relationships that built confidence for task ownership.
- ✓ Delivered on project objectives with **quality and adaptability in a highly complex** and frequently changing implementation setting.

Conclusion and Lessons Learnt

- An approach to team work that is based on the participatory approach and on a systemic understanding, can help to overcome challenges in global health partnerships.
- Working across cultures, disciplines, professions, and countries means to **develop a joint communication language, value system**, and an understanding of other. **Understanding the sensitivities that diversity bring** and managing the challenges that may occur is crucial so that they become a strength rather than a hindrance to achieving project objective.
- Bridging capacity in an interprofessional and intercultural team is better defined as a **complex learning process** than a technical working group.
- The approach **requires and promotes** of each member, **personal commitment**, high level of **identification** with the project idea, high degree of **ambiguity tolerance** to navigate constantly changing contextual conditions, **open mind-set** to different working methods and ethics, willingness to question one's own professional and personal value systems and working habits, **self-reflection** and **conflict mediation**.
- Working in this way is **challenging for team members**, as it does **not always correspond to the value systems and expectations of the institutions** requires additional space/time and attention, **but offers personal growth and self-realization.**

References

- Chambers, R. (1994a) The origins and practice of Participatory Rural Appraisal, World Development.
Schneider-Landolf, M., Spielmann, J., Zitterbarth, W. (2017). "Handbook of theme-centred-interaction (TCI)" Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
Zocher, U., et al. (2019). Participatory approach to quality development in infection prevention and control (IPC) in Nigerian health facilities. Infection prevention in practice.

