

# **Academic-NGO Collaboration in International Development Research: a reflection on the issues**

*Working Paper*

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## Introduction

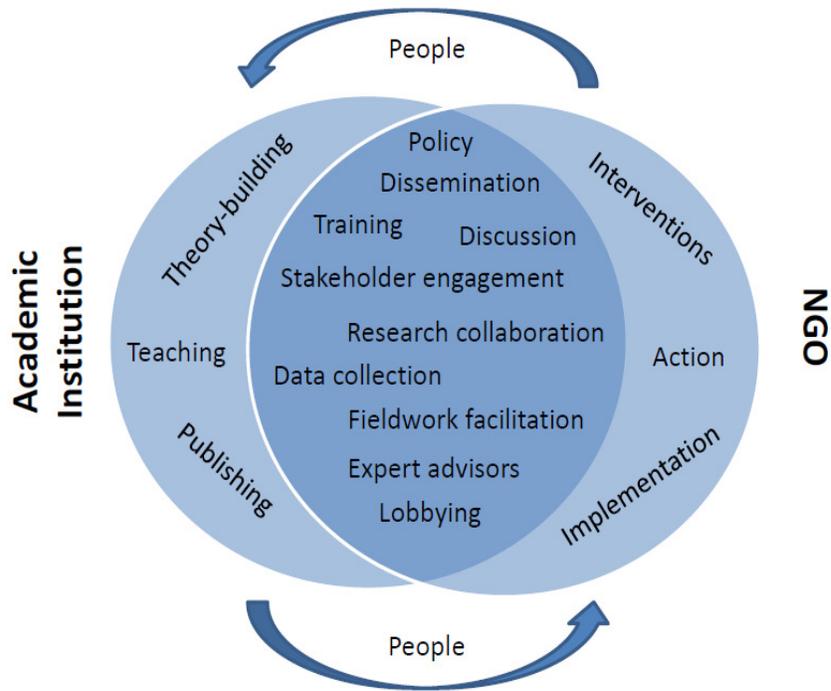
There is a renewed interest in research collaboration between NGOs and academics in international development. International development, like many areas of public policy in the UK, Europe and beyond, is increasingly framed by an evidence-based logic. The evidence-based logic is inextricably tied in with a demand for demonstrable impact from development interventions. A similar logic prevails within academic institutions – the need for academics to be able to demonstrate how their research is having an impact upon society. Consequently, spaces seem to be opening for more engagement between academics and practitioners, whether it is within joint research projects or in sharing expertise and knowledge on the framing and use of research.

In early 2012, the Development Studies Association of the UK and Ireland funded a small project involving the International NGO Training and Research Centre (INTRAC), World Vision UK and the John and Elnora Ferguson Centre for African Studies (JEFCAS) at the University of Bradford. The project explored current thinking on research collaboration between academics and practitioners in international development, drawing upon existing literature and the experiences of a small sample of collaborative projects (annexed). A workshop brought academics and practitioners together to tease out issues enabling and prohibiting collaboration. The project was driven by questions such as: why do academics and NGOs collaborate; what is required for successful collaboration; what institutional and philosophical barriers exist to collaboration, and how can these be overcome? This working paper draws together the thinking which emerged during this project. It provides an overview of the literature and theoretical perspectives on collaboration, summarises a range of approaches from the case studies explored, and considers how these relate to existing conceptualisations of collaboration. It aims to provoke critical thinking and debate on new trajectories for academic-NGO collaboration. The paper concludes with an exploration of current challenges to collaboration. It calls for a more nuanced and robust understanding of how collaboration between academic institutions and NGOs can lead to better outcome in development interventions, programmes and projects.

## Background: collaboration in context

There is a longstanding debate on how to bridge the gap between research and practice and improve communication between researchers and NGO practitioners. Although there are many practitioner-academics (people with an academic background who are actively engaged in international development) and academic-practitioners (academics who are heavily involved in development practice), the interface between research and practice in relation to NGOs remains a contentious area within Development Studies. A review of the literature suggests that academic-NGO practitioner research collaboration has had mixed results with regards the experience of working collaboratively. On the one hand, some scholars argue that there are clear divides between academics and NGO practitioners and areas which remain unique to each; on the other hand, our experience is that there are many overlapping areas and exchange of people between the two worlds as figure 1 shows.

Figure 1: NGO-Academic interface



Academic literature on research collaboration in international development in recent years has veered towards how the research findings are disseminated and used outside of the academic setting. This reflects the pressure that researchers are coming under to demonstrate how research is used and the relevance of research in general. Within international development, this has generated a great deal of work on research-to-use and the research-policy interface. This body of work has incorporated a wide range of potential end-users within developing countries and internationally: politicians, policy-makers, practitioners and activists.

However, we are also seeing new avenues opening up for more collaboration *throughout* the research process. Collaborative relationships and partnerships serve multiple purposes, for example in helping to expose and frame research questions, allowing interaction throughout the research process, supporting data collection and analysis, and providing outlets for sharing, feedback and dissemination. They also emerge for different reasons. In some cases, collaboration between academics and NGOs might come out of shared interest or as a result of longstanding relationships between individuals in both arenas. However, it can also emanate from the opportunity to attract and/or secure funds from research councils or international donors. The underlying premise is one of a win-win situation in which NGOs provide access to empirical experience and evidence, and the academic partner brings theoretical framing and methodological expertise.

## Theories of Collaboration

'Collaboration' is often used interchangeably with concepts like partnership. It has become a buzzword in international development especially in implementing and delivering programmes across different boundaries. According to Sullivan and Skelcher (2002), collaboration gives practitioners and researchers room to permeate organisational and scholarly boundaries in order to spur inter-organisational, sectoral or inter-governmental partnership through vertical and horizontal engagement. The underlying assumptions in collaboration are that it requires shared interest, motivation and common goals, and that collaborative partners always have the same vision in a given research project. These may be more ideal than real, as expectations from each partner as well as the rationale for collaboration may differ greatly.

Many research projects go through defined stages – formative, production and consumption. While some literature tends to view collaborative research from the production stage or consumption stage perspective, we view collaboration as transcending one research stage, that is, collaboration can occur at different stages of the research process. Our interest therefore lies in collaboration from the perspective of academics and NGO-practitioners working together from the onset/inception phase of a research project through to the consumption of its outputs. Another term used for this type of collaboration is 'co-production' of research (see Jung et al. 2012).

Sullivan and Skelcher (2002) provide three theoretical perspectives on collaboration: optimist, pessimist and realist.

### ***The Optimist Perspective***

The optimist perspective on collaboration takes a positive and altruistic view of collaboration, thus seeing stakeholders as altruistic people with less interest in the immediate but more in the ultimate. It creates a world whereby collaboration is driven by partners' interest to achieve a better society through a shared vision built on sustainable partnership rather than one-off collaborative partnership. In this view, collaborative research would involve academics and practitioners working together in equal partnership from the inception and design of a research project through production to the consumption of its output and beyond. This theory assumes that sustainability and long-term partnership is the driving force in collaboration rather than a single project-based partnership. The motivational factor for collaboration from the optimist perspective emanates from the exchange theory that reflects the desire to solve common problems by sharing and finding common solutions. According to the optimist theory perspective, collaboration is driven by identifying a shared problem with partners aiming for long-term sustainable collaboration to address the problem. Approaches to such collaboration include collaborative betterment, where one partner invites a similar partner that shares the same ideal for collaboration, and collaborative empowerment which involves engagement in setting partnership priorities from the formative stage to the consumption of the research (Himmelman, 1996).

### ***The Pessimist Perspective***

Contrary to the optimists, the pessimist perspective views collaboration as driven by the motivation to enhance the power of the stakeholders. This theory derives from resource dependency theory (RDT). The collaborative relationship entails mutual dependency with a desired motive by each partner to control and influence the behaviour and *modus operandi*

of the other. This is closely related to the exchange theory of the optimist perspective but differs in its view of the end product of collaboration. While exchange theory perceives of collaborators as altruistic and committed to sharing a common interest above the interests of individual organisations, resource dependency theory sees collaboration as an opportunistic channel, where partners strive to enhance their power/resources and control the behaviour of others. Power is central to this theory (Emerson, 1962). Since the organisations or collaborators are primarily interested in a collaborative effort that would enhance their power/resources, it presupposes that their participation in any collaborative endeavour is based on guaranteed success in enhancing their resources and power; otherwise such collaboration is perceived as unproductive. Benson (1975) provides a more nuanced view of this theory and argues that behind every organisation there are certain key ingredients that ensure their continued existence as an entity. Collaboration is dependent not only on the extent to which the outcome will enrich the resources of the organisation, but also on how the aftermath will add credibility to their future work. In inter-organisational collaboration, partners might not focus on the financial power of potential collaborators, but also on the wider capital including network and interest that might manifest from working together. From this perspective, the motivation for collaboration hinges on the political economy of securing both current and future valued resources (Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002, p. 41). This perspective sees collaboration mainly as an opportunity-seeking venture; collaboration can occur at any stage of the research process in-so-far-as it will enrich the power and resources of the organisation in the end.

### ***The Realist Perspective***

Realists take a more pragmatic approach, focusing on the influence of change on collaboration, which is capable of swaying collaborators to either side of the spectrum from altruistic motivations to resource and power motivations. A clear view of the realist perspective is offered by Alter and Hage's (1993) evolutionary theory, which argues that the dynamic nature of collaboration is informed by political, economic and technological changes and the incessant demand for quality in services that have propelled organisations, institutions and agencies to seek better ways of delivering services through collaboration. Collaboration is an evolving process that requires learning and adaptation; it is not an automatic activation of action, but depends on contextual factors and is enhanced through learning (Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002). Like the pessimist perspective, the realists consider that collaboration might come in at any stage of the research process. What is important to this view is the influence of change in an organisation's decision to take part in a collaborative research project. The organisation's philosophical approach to collaboration might be swayed as a result of changing patterns and demands by donors, government or other stakeholders in international development. Value for money, service efficiency, donor requests, opportunism and other factors can trigger collaboration at any stage of research.

## **Typologies of Collaborative Research and Partnership**

The existing literature outlines various types of research collaboration between academics and NGOs. Roper (2002) identified five typologies based on scope of the collaboration, the initiator and the level of participation of each partner. The first two are the **expert-consultant** model and the **expert-trainer** model in which the academic is viewed

as the expert whose role it is to identify and improve NGO capacity gaps. The NGO commissions the consultant (academic) to deliver on an already designed and specified outcome; the services to be delivered will be laid out in a formal agreement or contract. Co-production, joint learning and sharing of skills and knowledge are not the goal, and shared values and interests are less important, and there tends to be a one-directional movement of instruction. Although the NGO is usually the initiator of such collaboration, the partnership is asymmetrical because the academic is more likely to perceive practitioners as 'students'.

The third type identified by Roper is the **joint-learning model**, where partners are co-conspirators and co-producers. Parties identify and originate the research process and are focused on long-term interest and sustainability rather than short-term benefit. It therefore reflects the optimist perspective in recognising the importance of shared interest and vision, and the building of better understanding between the partners. It also entails interdependency as opposed to linear dependency and is set on normative rules determining acceptable behaviour and violation of trust. Roper's last two types are the **best practice model** and the **theory-development model**. The best practice model is a form of collaboration in which an academic researcher identifies and documents best practices that could be shared and replicated by other similar organisations or NGOs. The theory development model focuses more on theory building whereby an academic initiates a research project that is specifically focused on contributing to theory building, but which builds on empirical evidence gathered from NGOs, or through the intermediary of NGOs, which may facilitate fieldwork and data collection. Although the NGO may derive benefits from this research and overall objectives and interests may coincide, the outcomes are not pre-defined and such collaboration lends itself more to academics using the NGO as an outlet to fulfil their academic objective.

The CORE Group<sup>1</sup> identifies four types of research which its members are involved in and which lend themselves to collaboration in different ways: operational, formative, summative, and evaluative. Operational research (also sometimes called programmatic research or implementation research) is viewed as a continuous process that involves identifying and solving problems encountered in the design and implementation of programmes with the aim of assessing and redesigning projects for more effective delivery and the adoption of new strategies. Formative research is focused on behaviour change and interventions to bring about behaviour change, summative research focuses on impact measurement, and evaluation research focuses on evaluating the effectiveness of given interventions. Collaboration can happen with any of these types of research, with partners initiating, designing, producing and consuming research outputs and jointly assessing the impact of projects for future sustainable actions.

Building on Thompson (1996), Sullivan and Skelcher (2002) identify three type of organisational relationships for collaboration as contracts, networks and partnerships. Each form necessarily shapes the relationship between partners in different ways. A **contract** is a form of collaborative research based on a principal-agent relationship whereby sanctions can be applied accordingly for breach of contract. It is akin to Roper's expert-consultant and expert-trainer models. The **network** form is based on and starts from informal relationships regulated by obligations of trust, reciprocity and sustainability. These are grounded in individual relationships that transcend organisational boundaries and agendas. One unique

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<sup>1</sup> The CORE Group is a membership association of international health and development NGOs.

element of the network form of collaboration is the individual factor. Great importance is attached to the role of the hybrid individuals, “Reticulists<sup>2</sup>”, who are capable of working across inter-organisational and research boundaries. The **partnership** model is viewed distinct from contract and network forms and is more about joint decision-making and production (Klijn and Teisman, 2000, pp. 85-6). From this perspective, partners have shared responsibility in framing the need for action, as co-producers in determining what action is required and in agreeing on the various steps and means of ensuring actualisation of the action. Thus, collaboration is regarded as a mutually engaging process whereby joint interests are generated, articulated and eventually transformed into actionable research activities. Under this definition in a partnership relationship, each partner is required to cede some of its own power or self interest in pursuit of a shared outcome.

## The literature on collaboration in international development

There is a reasonable body of literature on state partnership with civil society or public-private partnerships (see, for example, Asthana et al., 2002; Benson 1975; Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002; Himmelman, 1996; Huxham, 1996), on collaboration in the health sector (see, for example, Lasker and Weiss, 2003; Boydell and Rugkåsa, 2007), on collaboration within management studies (see Amabile et al. 2011), and on collaboration between Northern and Southern based organisations and communities (for example, Johnson and Wilson, 2006). There is much less literature on academic-practitioner research collaboration in international development. This is surprising given that there is a lot of interaction between academic institutions and NGOs.

Roper (2002) is a key reference on collaboration in international development. Roper approaches collaboration through the lens of organisational learning and organisational development, drawing, amongst others, on the work of Argyris and Schön (1996), with collaboration primarily focused on research to improve NGO effectiveness, including through capacity building. Her work raises the key issue of the cultural and intellectual clash between academics and NGO practitioners, highlighting differences in ideology and philosophical logic (epistemological and ontological differences), as well as distinct institutional cultures and discourses. While some academics might concentrate on the methodology and research approach and how to arrive at generalisable rules, it may be that NGOs are more likely to focus on the practicality of research for development interventions, recognising contextual specificities. However, we should not assume that all academic traditions employ a linear and empiricist approach to the production of knowledge. The philosophical underpinning of ‘fact’ and ‘truth’ are highly variable between social science disciplines in particular. We should also give recognition to the considerable body of work by Robert Chambers and the many others working on participatory research methodologies in development. This work has had considerable impact on the working practice of NGOs and on the rhetoric of donor organisations (See Chambers 2005 for a route into this extensive literature). It is certainly true that tensions may arise if an academic struggles to communicate the research process and procedures to the practitioner in user-friendly terms,

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<sup>2</sup> For more on reticulists see Friend, J. K., Power, J. M. & Yewelett, C. J. L. (2003) *Public Planning: The Inter-Corporate Dimension*. London, Routledge.

or when the NGO feels that the research objective will not benefit their programme objective. Finally, Roper highlights issues around status, which can potentially block a practitioner's confidence in expressing and participating fully in the research or in rebuffing the academic contribution to the process.

To counter these problems, Roper suggests the need for both collaborative partners to be open and aware of each other's expectations from the onset. She highlights the need for all collaborative partners to take responsibility in understanding and learning what suits the other better, thus favouring the joint learning type of collaboration that is aimed at bridging the intellectual and cultural divide between academics and NGO practitioners. Roper's idea of collaboration is therefore akin to the realist perspective.

Other analysts, however, indicate that such a divide is not enough to jeopardise academic and NGO research collaboration. After all, many collaborative partnerships exist despite this perceived divide. Recently, [Enhancing Learning and Research for Humanitarian Assistance](#) (ELRHA) produced a report and interactive guide, built on case studies, to improve collaboration between academics and humanitarian organisations. Focusing broadly on collaborative relationships, the report challenges the assumption of two worlds between academics and practitioners and notes that the lines are increasingly blurred between academics, consultants, research practitioners and policy researchers. Collaboration is increasing, with individuals from both ends of the spectrum keen to work together (Hanley and Vogel, 2012). This does not mean that different world views and institutional dynamics will not have a major impact on collaboration. Like Roper, these authors stress the importance of both parties understanding each other and ensuring that research roles are complementary and fill identified gaps. For ELRHA, it is important that academics and NGOs work together through the stages of research process while learning from each other's strengths and addressing each other's weaknesses.

The pragmatism that lies behind many research collaborations also attracts attention in the literature. Morton et al. (2002), for example, explore how a capacity gap within NGOs to carry out research (in-house expertise, access to research facilities and information) leads them to seek that technical expertise through formal or informal interactions as well as collaboration. This work analyses the perspectives of NGOs about research, examining how the costs and the clash of mind-sets/attitudes affect collaborative engagement. It shows desire amongst some NGOs for greater participation and inclusion in research programmes. While better stakeholder involvement might improve research uptake, it is important that NGOs are also involved in assessing the development relevance of research outputs, giving feedback on evolving agendas, and bringing local knowledge and expertise to the research through field staff. The authors therefore call for early dialogue at the research outset to ensure that different interests are covered and that funding support to the NGO is included. It urges that collaboration between academics and NGOs should extend beyond research production, but also involve shaping and sharing research outputs for relevance and targeted dissemination. Fisher (2011) reiterates this finding, arguing that more attention is required on the power of practitioners in shaping research agendas.

The CORE Group (2008) likewise emphasise the realist perspective in research collaboration, arguing that for global health to reach the unreached, especially women and children, it is important that academics and NGOs, who offer a direct interface with the beneficiaries, interact in shaping research. However, this contains the implicit assumption that NGOs do have a direct interface with 'beneficiaries', this is not always the case. Moreover, through collaboration and participation NGOs benefit from increased research

capacity and the balancing and understanding of each other's strengths and weaknesses in research projects. If reports are documented properly and thoroughly it may lead to further research and project scale-up or sharing of best practices within and beyond the NGO circle, for example in collaboration with academics. Such collaboration will increase NGO research skills and enable them to formulate research questions that fit their immediate practical requirements and also raise broader questions relevant to state, national or regional interests (CORE Group, 2008).

A final issue which emerges from the literature is the importance of individual chemistry in research collaboration. While institutional buy-in is crucial for academic-practitioner research collaboration, project team skills and knowledge, collaboration experience and personal motivation are key determinants for successful collaboration (Amabile et al, 2001; Hanley and Vogel, 2012).

What comes across in the literature examined here are the clear advantages of collaboration on the one hand - including broadening perspectives and joint learning, strengthening evidence, accessing funding, people, data and networks, and enhancing dissemination and the sharing of research outputs that feed into policy and practice – but the risks and impediments on the other hand which arise from power imbalances and differentiated perspectives (Jung et al. 2012). The benefits of collaboration in terms of better results – both academic and practical – appear relatively undisputed. However, we should also caution that 'results' in themselves are not sufficient. One of the greatest weaknesses of the 'research into use' case is that the process of policy making and implementation is deeply political. Research into use discussions sometimes assume a linear input-output relationship, whereby research findings can be directly and easily implemented in practice. There is considerable literature on why this may not happen- for example in relation to agricultural productivity. In theoretical terms, we see both the optimist perspective (joint desire to collaborate in the advancement of mutual objectives on a sustainable basis) and the pessimist perspective (power and resource dynamics which create motivations for, and tensions within, collaboration) coming through. It appears, however, that the realist, pragmatic perspective, that recognises both the push and pull factors, tends to be the default position. To consider this in more depth, we turn to a number of case studies explored in this project. They highlight a rather complex mix of types, motivations and approaches supported by different stakeholders.

## **Collaborative research in practice: Case Studies**

In this section we draw on a small number of cases studies of academic – NGO research collaborations. The case studies cover research on security, poverty, small arms, violence, and democracy, HIV/AIDS, Right Based Approach (RBA), farming, household economic improvement and health. Table 1 provides a summary of the case studies highlighting the research project name, funder, research objective and partners with an attempt to classify the case studies according to the typologies of partnership presented by Sullivan & Skelcher (2002) and Roper (2002). Further detail on each case study is available in the appendices to this working paper.

Table 1: Case Studies Summary

<b>Case Study</b>	<b>Partners</b>	<b>Research Objective</b>	<b>Classification (based on Roper (2002) &amp; Sullivan &amp; Skelcher (2002))</b>
Armed Violence and Poverty Initiative (AVPI)	International Cooperation and Security (CICS), Saferworld & International Alert	Explore an understanding of how and when armed violence exacerbates poverty and vulnerability	Donor-funded principal agent-relationship. Best Practice/Theory Development Model Timescale - limited to funding period
Biting the Bullet	CICS, Saferworld & International Alert	Generate knowledge & critical debates on small arms & light weapons	Partnership underpinned by consortia of Donors – drawing on wider networks. Joint learning/best practice model Timescale - not limited to donor funds and evolved with institutional/individual relationships
Referendum in South Sudan Implication for Peace, Security & Reconstruction Process in Northern Uganda	ARiD & ACODE with individual academics affiliates	Examine the implication of South Sudan referendum on peace and conflict in Northern Uganda	Research commissioned by NGO Consortium- principal-agent relationship Expert-consultant model Timescale limited to specific project
RBA and HIV/AIDS in Uchira & Moshi, Tanzania	University of Bradford & Village-to-Village Tanzania	Examine the effectiveness of using Rights-Based Approach for access to HIV/AIDS services & safety nets	Informal network built on individual relationships over long time period. Some donor support to specific projects but no principal-agent relationship. Joint learning model- with some Expert-Trainer inputs
Stimulating Household Improvements Resulting in Economic Empowerment	Centre for Development Studies at Bath University & Harewelle International Ltd & PMTC Bangladesh	Designed to address MDG targets by 2015	Donor-funded project with consultant/academic lead partners allocating funds to other organisations- principal-agent relationships (possible resource dependency approach to partnership) Academic partner plays an Expert-Trainer

			role Timescale - limited to project
Evaluation of Country Programme Transition	Moynihan Institute of Global Affairs at Syracuse University & Plan Guatemala	Examine Country Strategic Transition to RBA	Expert-consultant/ Best practice model-research commission by NGO. Principal-agent relationship Timescale confined to project
The Kulima Programme	Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund (SCIAF), Centre of African Studies, University of Edinburgh & additional partners <sup>3</sup>	Improve sustainable agricultural system for smallholder farmers	NGO with network relationships with range of partners. Small scale funding to particular components. Limited principal-agent activity. Timescale - evolving and not always related to funding Joint learning (co-production model)
Transport and mobility problems in rural Tanzania: Improving Access to Health Services	Durham University & HelpAge International, with Research on Poverty Alleviation (REPOA) & Good Samaritan Social Services Trust	Examine and create evidence of mobility and access to transport & its impact on access to health services	Network relationships underpin later donor funding for a partnership. Joint-learning model - with some element of Expert-trainer
Community managed micro-finance in Malawi	DanChurchAid University of Southern Denmark, Oxford University, Rockwool Foundation & Livingstone Synod Development Department	Examine the impact of community managed microfinance in Malawi	Informal network relationships as the foundation Expert-consultant model employed. Empiricist approach to research may limit joint-learning. Timescale - relationships extend beyond projects

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<sup>3</sup> [Kasisi Agricultural Training Centre](#); [Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection](#); [Caritas Livingstone](#); [Caritas Mongu](#); Agakura Agricultural Training Centre; CADECOM Mangoche & [The James Hutton Institute](#)

These cases were derived from the networks of the partners on this project and reviewed according to a pre-defined set of questions. They are not intended to provide full coverage of all types of partnership but were prepared as an exploratory exercise through which to highlight emerging issues and differential configurations of partnership in research. The case studies in table 1 below shows a complex mix of different forms and types of collaborations. These cases affirm that collaboration between academics and NGO are multiple in form and can be motivated by many reasons, they may be initiated by both individual academics and institutions, and both funded by donors or commissioned by NGOs. Three factors emergent from the case studies are discussed here and provide the basis for future work on academic-NGO partnerships for research.

### ***Nature of Partnerships***

The case studies examined reflect the divergent reasons for research collaboration between academics and NGOs. Some are clearly based on an opportunistic response to a call for funding. This is supportive of a resource-dependency motivation for partnership whereby partners collaborate in pursuit of perceived gains in resourcing for all parties. Such cases tend to result in power asymmetry which relates to the nature of the partners involved as well as the substance of the principal-agent relationship between partners that might result the nature of the contractual relationships and management structures required by external funding.

A very tentative indication from the case studies that requires further exploration is that joint learning (co-production) approaches appear to be underpinned by longer-term pre-existing network relationships and are not confined to a funded principal-agent relationship (for example the two research projects working in Tanzania).

All cases of partnership did recognise the need to carefully define roles and expectations, however in partnerships which can be classified as joint learning (according to Roper (2002) the partner relationship exists outside of periods of donor funding.

### ***Skills development***

The cases in table 1 affirm the frequency of the academic acting as *Expert-Consultant* or *Expert-Trainer* in research partnerships. The type of research being done may also shape the role that the academic partner plays. The cases suggest that qualitative participatory approaches to research offer more opportunities for academic partners to play an expert-trainer role initially in a joint learning, but for this to evolve NGO and other research partners need to take more ownership of the research.

In research with more of a positivist underpinning the joint learning model may be more difficult to apply where research requires more technical skills. For example in the case study in table 1 relating to exploring microfinance in Malawi. The selection of a randomised control trial methodology necessarily limits a joint learning approach and the academic is impelled to act as an *Expert-Consultant*.

A number of the cases emphasise that the interests of NGOs engaging with academics is in the pursuit of building the research capacity of their organisation. Hence such collaborations tend towards the expert model. The case of Plan Guatemala highlights this as it suggests that NGO staff got involved in the project at the discretion of the academic expert. According to Ms. Bruno-van Vijfeijken, Co-Director at the Transnational NGO Initiative, "*staff at Plan Guatemala contributed some research questions at the design stage of the project. Afterwards, they mostly acted as gate keepers to resources and interviewees*".

The academics in this case were embedded with Plan and so it is likely that the relationship could evolve to a more joint learning approach as the research literacy of NGO staff increases.

### ***Power relationships and knowledge creation***

The reviewed literature suggests potential tensions in partnerships caused by asymmetries in power and philosophical differences in approach to outputs and ownership of research. However, the case studies reviewed here do not admit to such tensions. All give consideration to the need for honesty between partners and to carefully discuss expectations and assumptions. This is not to say that academic-NGO research partnerships do not experience such tensions but that in these case studies this appears to have been avoided.

What is less visible in the case studies and also an area requiring greater consideration is the potentially greater power asymmetries between Northern and Southern partners. From our cases it is possible to suggest that Southern partners appear to be more visible in partnerships classified as joint learning and network based, but the ARID-ACODE case also provides an example of an Expert-Consultant model used between two Southern partners.

This is certainly an area that requires further exploration. Freschi (2011)<sup>4</sup> highlights a particular challenge of competition for the attention of the ‘best’ Southern research institutions when they are often in demand by large multilaterals and more powerful (and better paying) development actors. And similarly the pattern of the ‘best’ researchers in the South being engaged in fairly limited (and unreflective) consultancy tasks was recently highlighted by Mahmood Mamdani (Mamdani quoted in Freschi, 2011). Mamdani argues that consultancy research is ‘seeking answers to problems posed and defined by a client’ and contrasts it to university research which includes ‘formulating the problem itself’. He argues that academic research and higher education in Africa is becoming dominated by a ‘corrosive culture of consultancy.’ Interestingly for this debate he refers to this as the ‘NGO-ization of the university’ with academic papers having turned into ‘corporate-style power point presentations’ and a ‘chorus of buzz words have taken the place of lively debates’. He argues that the global market tends to ‘relegate Africa to providing raw material (“data”) to outside academics who process it and then re-export their theories back to Africa’.

The use of the label ‘NGO-ization of the university’ serves as challenge for INGOs about how they interact with Southern partners in particular given their greater resource power. If they are simply contracted to conduct fieldwork, with analysis carried out exclusively in the North, then there is the danger of not only losing valuable insights in the process but more widely of undermining the INGO’s purported value added of promoting solidarity and partnership with the poor, and distinguishing themselves from more centralized, bureaucratic development actors. We can see this relationship in a number of our case studies for example the Security case studies and perhaps in the Bangladesh case.

And herein lies a dilemma – in a culture of aid effectiveness and value for money, there is a temptation to follow this extractive approach to field research, with no investment in building the longer-term capacity of Southern research institutions to lead intellectual enquiry and policy debates in their own contexts. Therefore that limited pool who are

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<sup>4</sup> African Universities: Creating True Researchers or “Native Informers” to NGOs? AidWatch blog, posted May 5, 2011, available at <http://aidwatchers.com/2011/05/african-universities-creating-true-researchers-or-%E2%80%9Cnative-informers%E2%80%9D-to-ngos/>

considered the 'best' will remain as a highly demand elite of native informers, offering a veneer to support the need for research partnerships with Southern institutions. This is where the content of the 'value for money' agenda needs to be carefully shaped, ensuring that such longer-term, broader 'impacts' are not devalued – such that value for money becomes the enemy of a focus on impact.

## Emerging Issues and New Directions

[INTRAC](#), [World Vision](#) UK and the John & Elnora Ferguson Centre of African Studies (JEFICAS) of the [University of Bradford](#) with the support of [DSA](#) organised a two-day workshop in London on the 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> May 2012 entitled 'Cracking Collaboration' to explore ideas on the academics- NGO practitioner interface. Participants included a good mix of academics and NGO practitioners. Indeed many of those present spanned the boundary between academia and NGOs in their careers. Interactive workshop sessions were used to unpack experiences of academic-NGO research partnerships.<sup>5</sup>

Key findings from the workshop were that:

1. While different perspectives exist, and many prejudices persist amongst academics and practitioners, at least within the social sciences the divide that is often referred to between academics and practitioners does not stand up to scrutiny. Most of the researchers involved in this project had experience on both academia and NGOs and there is considerable movement between these 'worlds'. This divide might be more profound within the natural sciences.
2. While a reasonable literature base exists on research take-up, there is less literature which engages with processes of research collaboration throughout a research project.
3. Many different types of collaboration exist, but projects rarely fit existing typologies of collaboration.
4. Funding opportunities are key drivers of collaboration, and the funding question can have both positive and negative impacts on collaborative relationships acting as both a catalyst for innovative relationships and a constraint when funders set the agenda.
5. Our experiences of collaboration concur with much of the existing literature about the positive benefits of collaboration for sparking innovation and for addressing real issues; we likewise identify well-established obstacles to collaboration, such as institutional politics, different institutional timeframes and philosophies, and different outcome expectations and requirements. In particular the NGO need for quick results and positive stories is a challenge, as is the academic need for high-level peer-reviewed papers rather than more accessible outputs of use to practitioners.

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<sup>5</sup> A full report of the workshop can be accessed from: [http://www.intrac.org/data/files/Cracking\\_Collaboration\\_Workshop\\_3rd-4th\\_May\\_2012\\_Report.pdf](http://www.intrac.org/data/files/Cracking_Collaboration_Workshop_3rd-4th_May_2012_Report.pdf); and video reflections are available at: <http://storify.com/danielwvuk/cracking-collaboration-between-academics-and-ngos>

6. Other issues to address include: ethics guidelines for collaborative research, dealing with controversial results, use of research data, access to published research material, access to grey literature and data held by NGOs which is not publicly available, quality assurance of NGO research.
7. The costs of setting up and managing collaborative research are higher than more straightforward research projects and need to be built in from the outset
8. Research capacity within NGOs, especially for engaging in long, large-scale projects, tends to be limited. Real thought needs to go into the roles that each party should play and the strengths that they bring to the collaborative research. While NGOs should not seek to be research institutions *per se*, they have key roles to play in shaping, producing and using research, and some are fully engaged in particular types of research (e.g. Action Research).
9. Brokering of research partnerships where relationships do not already exist is difficult, and moving from a personal research relationship to an institutional relationship can be challenging.
10. We still know very little about how collaborative research can bring tangible benefits to local people, including how they are compensated for engagement in research projects; likewise we know little about the dynamics of collaboration between Southern research institutions and NGOs.

### **Next Steps**

Key conclusions for this paper derived from literature review, exploratory case studies and workshop outputs are that:

1. Existing conceptualisations of collaboration are insufficient to capture the range of research relationships which exist. The project has identified the beginnings of a co-production model which might challenge current thinking about research production. More work is required on this. Related to this is the need for a better understanding of the opportunity costs of collaboration. This will almost certainly mean identifying and tackling institutional obstacles in NGOs and Universities. Collaboration needs to be driven by innovation, need and long-term capacity-building, rather than by isolated opportunities and one-off project funding.
2. Further research is required on collaboration in Southern countries. NGOs (Southern as much as, if not more than, northern) need to better assert their role as shapers of research agendas, not just as consumers. Further NGOs and researchers in developing countries need to engage in demands for access to data and research, particularly when they have a stake in its generation and its use. For this to occur, honest consideration of power differentials is required in research collaboration for it to work well.
3. Even when NGOs are not producers of research, increased understanding is required of research processes (data collection and analysis) in order to use research findings well. This will require greater research literacy on the part of NGOs and donors.

### **Key recommendations**

- Funders (research councils, foundations and donors) should provide more funding for innovative and long-term collaborative research, particularly research which pushes beyond traditional academic outputs and tackles burning issues arising from real needs. Such research could give much greater consideration to the mechanics of collaboration and co-production in research.
- High-level discussions are required within academic institutions and NGOs to tackle issues such as: obstacles to effective and meaningful collaboration in international development; ethics within collaborative research; training needs and skills gaps; access to data and research for academics from NGOs and for NGOs from academics. This needs to be debated within key organisations such as the DSA, Research Councils, UKCDS, NGO Networks and DFID.
- Academics and practitioners in international development need to engage with the open access publishing debate, and by extension, debates around what constitutes quality in international development research.
- Spaces need to be opened for NGOs and Southern Institutions to shape research agendas, for example through representation on research funder panels and advisory groups.
- More research is required into many of the issues raised during this short project, notably on whether a co-production model can be identified, on Southern research collaboration and benefits for local people, and on the opportunity costs of collaborative research.

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## CASE STUDY 1: ARMED VIOLENCE AND POVERTY INITIATIVE

**Research Project Title:** *Armed Violence and Poverty Initiative*

Academic partner: *Centre for International Cooperation and Security, University of Bradford*

**NGO Partners:** *Saferworld and International Alert*

**Funder:** *DFID*

### **Background of the collaboration and research project overview**

The Centre for International Cooperation and Security (CICS) at the University of Bradford conducted a 24-month research programme on Armed Violence and Poverty Initiative<sup>6</sup> (AVPI) sponsored by the UK Government's Department for International Development (DFID) from 2004 – 2006.

### **Key objective**

The key objective of the DFID funded research project was to explore an understanding of how and when armed violence exacerbates poverty and vulnerability, an area which was initially considered neglected in policy and research. In addition, the research focused at ways of informing programme design and evaluation in the field of armed violence and development as a means to alleviating poverty. It involved conducting assessments and catalogues of the impact of armed violence and associated insecurity using thirteen case studies.

### **Project set-up, design and implementation**

CICS initiated the AVPI research as a small project but its rapid expansion attracted involved other donor agencies necessitated engagement of two Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Saferworld and International Alert. The expansion of the research programme was in response to the need for understanding the problems created by the availability of arms, their violent use and how armed violence could be reduced and integrated into poverty reduction work<sup>7</sup> at both policy and programme levels.

Throughout the research programme, CICS provided the overall leadership of the research process – from inception, design, implementation, dissemination of the research outputs and review. Being the lead research institution, CICS engaged the services of the two partners, consultants and individuals who became part of the core team working at the Centre at the University of Bradford.

Whereas, the AVPI initiative started as a single project, it culminated into four major projects, that included: a) A Briefing Papers series on armed violence and poverty reduction measures in the areas of DDR (Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration), SSR (Security Sector Reform), Conflict Assessment, and Rural Livelihoods; b) An assessment of the impact of small arms projects on arms availability and poverty; c) A research project

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<sup>6</sup> Owen Greene and Mike Bourne (2005) "Armed violence and conflict assessments", *Briefing paper*, March 2005. Available at:

[http://www.brad.ac.uk/acad/cics/publications/AVPI/briefing/AVPI\\_Conflict\\_Assessment\\_Briefing\\_Paper.pdf](http://www.brad.ac.uk/acad/cics/publications/AVPI/briefing/AVPI_Conflict_Assessment_Briefing_Paper.pdf).

[20 April 2012].

<sup>7</sup> For more details, see: DFID (2003). "Tackling Poverty by Reducing Armed Violence: Recommendations from a Wilton Park Workshop: 14 – 16 April 2003", (London, DFID, 2003). Available at:

<http://www.dfid.gov.uk/pubs/files/tacklingpovredviolence.pdf>.

which documents and analyses the circumstances in and processes by which armed violence exacerbates poverty and development; and d) A research project which documented the impact of arms transfers on poverty and development.

At inception and during its implementation process, the staff at the Centre for International Cooperation and Security (CICS) at the University of Bradford provided overall managerial role. The core research project team at CICS consisted of two categories of staff – core staff and staff who were hired on contractual basis with expertise in peace research. As the research project grew in scope spanning over transitional and developing countries so was the need to expand the size of the staff who needed to cope with the workload and expertise. Consequently, CICS sought the essential services of NGO practitioners and consultants whose expertise were in Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) so as to meet the evolving capacity needs of the project.

Each of the participating organisations and individuals had a significant role to play during the project life cycle. With CICS providing the overall leadership of the project, the partner organisations (Saferworld and International Alert) were specifically responsible for the analysis of secondary data and management of various case studies while the consultants, who occasional hire were demand driven, supported specific tasks which called for their expertise. The research expertise of the staff at CICS justified the Centre's leadership of the research design – developing the research tools (survey questions, etc.), participating in the data collection process, data analysis and report writing. Besides participating in management of specific case studies, the collaborating NGOs also jointly participated in the writing of the final research report.

Various research outputs from the initial joint survey conducted informed core discussions at the conference, which CICS and its partner co-organised at Wilton Park in March 2003 with support from the UK Government's Department for International Development (DFID). It was at this conference that the framework for further engagement and assessment were designed and indicators for monitoring the links between armed conflicts and poverty were also designed.

### **Collaborative outcomes and lessons learnt**

Although some challenges were encountered during the collaborative research project, it was largely a success story. To some extent, the success of the joint research programme can be attributed to three interrelated indicators: progress toward achieving the goals of the research collaboration, effective team functioning, and benefits for the individuals and participating organisations in the collaboration. CICS' prior collaborative experience was very vital in the research project as it ensured from the onset that the goals of the collaboration were clearly defined, the partner institutions understood what was at stake regarding the outcomes of the collaboration and the engagement matched the needs, capacities, and interests each member.

The pooling of skills and perspectives provided complementarity which enabled the consortium to jointly plan the project process, which included highlighting existing and developing future indicators for monitoring and measuring the links between armed violence and poverty, and the ways in which an organisation or project could design an intervention to address these issues in a holistic manner. The indicators became particularly useful in measuring the results provided during the case studies that the NGOs conducted.

In addition, it became clear from the SALW research experience that addressing the societal problems through collaborative effort of academics and practitioners provides

useful entry points for wider engagements with other critical stakeholders: communities, governments and security sector agencies that can greatly create an impact by reducing the human cost of SALW violence. Moreover, the collaboration provided an opportunity for bridging essential human capacity gap within the research project by attracting the requisite expertise from within the consortium and through hiring new staff with complimentary expertise from outside the team. Trust among individuals within the research was found to be an important component of the collaboration that stems in part from an expectation of longevity of collaboration and dedication of each member. Furthermore, the collaboration also provided an opportunity for the academic and the practitioners to learn from each other and to perfect in their role differentiation.

However, being a large collaborative research project, challenges during the delivery phase abound. The main challenge which emerged was task-related conflict which stemmed from having different perspectives on the research process and ways of solving a problem. This is also consistent with literature on innovation which suggests that although new ideas may be useful and can potentially arise from the combination of very different viewpoints, they may lead into tensions. Being the case with this research collaboration, a core group of dedicated members eventually emerged in the course of research, which provided a key role in the reorganising the tasks of each members of the consortium. The intervention style proved helpful in addressing emerging conflicts within the organisation that included laxity by some members of the consortium who were unable to accomplish their tasks as required. Part of the reasons some team members could not perform were either due to capacity issue or to over dependency by non-academics on the expertise of academics during the research design, data analysis and report writing.

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## CASE STUDY 2: BITING THE BULLET PROJECT

**Research Project Title:** *Biting the Bullet Project*

**Lead/Academic partner:** *Centre for International Cooperation and Security, University of Bradford*

**NGO Partners:** *Saferworld and International Alert*

**Funder:** *DFID, Dutch, Canadian, Finnish, Switzerland and Japan*

### Background

The Biting the Bullet Project initiated in 2000, was a collaborative research project involving three institutions – the Centre for International Co-operation and Security (CICS)<sup>8</sup> at the University of Bradford and two Civil Society Organisations – the International Alert<sup>9</sup>, and Saferworld<sup>10</sup> and was sponsored by a consortia of governments: the UK Government (DFID, Foreign Office Conflict Pool Mechanism and Ministry of Defense), Dutch, Canadian, Finnish, Switzerland and Japan (which provided aid in kind).

### Key objectives

The main objective of setting up the Biting the Bullet Project was to generate knowledge and critical debates on small arms and light weapons.

### Design and implementation of the programme

The research consortium was formed on equal partnership and division of labour. Three Directors were appointed with one from each institution depending on the institutional expertise. CICS, for instance, was the most experienced among the consortium in the field of research and was entrusted with the leadership of the research directorate while a staff member from Saferworld was in charge of small arms and light weapons directorate.

Initial seed-funding for the Biting the Bullet Project was sought for the purpose of investing in generating knowledge and critical debates on small arms and light weapons. Consequently, the Biting the Bullet Project facilitated wide-ranging and well-informed debates between governments and civil society organisations in the run-up to the UN Conference on the *Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects that was organised* in July 2001. In preparation for that conference, the consortium produced series of policy briefings (Bourne & Greene, 2004) on key issues for informed discussion. As a result, the UN member states agreed on a Programme of Action (PoA) at the conference, which became the primary global framework for tackling the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW). Following the conference, Biting the Bullet team continued to jointly engage in two major areas of activity related to the promotion of the international

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<sup>8</sup> CICS is a centre for academic and applied social science research with extensive expertise in small arms and security related issues. It is based at the Department of Peace Studies at the University of Bradford, which is world leading research and teaching centre in peace and conflict studies.

<sup>9</sup> International Alert is an independent peacebuilding organisation that has been working in over twenty countries and territories affected by violent conflict around the world with specific focus on business, humanitarian aid and development, gender, security and post-conflict reconstruction.

<sup>10</sup> Saferworld, an independent non-governmental organisation, works with governments and civil society internationally to research, promote and implement new strategies to increase human security and prevent armed violence.

understanding of key issues relating to the implementation of the Programme of Action while creating opportunities to discuss controversial critical issues which emerged at the 2001 UN Small Arms Conference.

The extensive collaborative research undertaken by CICS, International Alert and Saferworld involved collecting data from a wide range of primary and secondary data sources, spanning over 180 countries. The researchers used country case studies in making their in-depth analyses. Whereas the collaborative research project was primarily the work of the three main research partners (hereafter referred to as the Biting the Bullet project members), the research was made possible in close co-operation with over 100 other participants and contributors from around the globe, majority of whom being members of the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) – a global movement against gun violence that comprises of a network of more than 600 civil society organisations active in 100 countries.

As the lead consortium commissioned to do the research, the Biting the Bullet project team provided the overall leadership of the research process including its design and implementation. The team held regular consultative meetings through which members would report on their assigned tasks, received feedback, suggestions and progress reports from each other. In addition, such forum also provided opportunity for new tasks to be allocated, future meetings planned and emerging conflicts resolved.

Some of the specific task that was carried out involved providing the requisite information for preparing the national case studies, types of data to be collected, data collection strategies, analysis and dissemination of research outputs. Whereas the core Biting the Bullet research team and independent analysts were responsible in the initial research project design phase, their efforts were supplemented through contributions and expertise of project partners such as IANSA members and other individuals, in collecting and collating secondary data and conducting further research. The Network proved vital in feeding in data from different countries and as well as triangulating the information that was gathered through the case studies.

The Biting the Bullet project team approached several Government officials in the countries under investigation to participate in data triangulation through attending and participating in various workshops. This process involved verifying and validating facts which the participating countries were to provide in relation to their national periodic reports on PoA implementation to the UN. This was prompted by the wide-ranging and extensive issues that the research had raised and researchers took considerable efforts and care to verify and assess their facts, reliability and validity.

### **Outcomes and lessons learnt**

Despite registering successes in the research process, there were some hiccups encountered that could have influenced the quality of the research process and outputs, some of which included: lack of transparency in many countries which made it difficult to conduct research on certain aspects of implementation and in some cases verification of information was not easily feasible; the scope of the programme of action provided significant opportunities for interpreting what constituted implementation-focused action; and concurrent implementation of the Programme of Action meant that the data from report several countries were incomplete.

As a follow-up, the Biting the Bullet convened an informal Small Arms Consultative Group Process which facilitated discussion on and the development of shared

understandings of critical issues that proved controversial at the 2001 UN Conference. Participants in this Small Arms Consultative Group Process consist of representatives of some 30 governments from all regions of the world, together with selected non-governmental experts and officials from the UN and other relevant international organisations. This consultative group process focused on two key and linked issues for which developing international agreement in 2001 proved difficult or impossible: these were on international guidelines relating to SALW transfer controls, and transfers of SALW to non-state actors.

Since 2003, the group has frequently held formal meetings in a number of countries and the continued consultation entered a new phase of activity aimed at generating practical recommendations for international measures on these two key issue areas and linking with the UN and other regional small arms processes. In the 2006 Review Conference after the implementation of the project, although it was found out that the collaboration was largely a success; the ongoing project has been tremendously scaled down due to funding limitations. This has also impacted on reconfiguring the project to covered three streams: writing briefing papers; tracking Plans of Actions contained in the international agreement 2001 and running of workshops. Even without any funding at present, CICS and Saferworld continue to write periodic reports on the project unlike their counterpart, International Alert, which sees no motivation in investing in Small Arms and Light Weapons.

### **Lessons for theory and practice**

There are several lessons that can be learnt from the Biting the Bullet collaborative research project in theoretical and practical terms. It should be noted that the academic institution (CICS/Bradford) collaboration with the NGOs (Saferworld and International Alert) provided unique opportunities for applying theoretical expertise/knowledge in the field of peace research to the project while at the same time was presented with an opportunity to test theoretical ideas and concepts in practice. The field experience was useful in gathering case materials for larger intellectual projects that may be of benefit to academia. The fact that the collaborative research project boomed from 2001 to 2006, it has, in addition, resulted into the establishment and strengthening of long-term relationships between individuals working in the project and the participating institutions. Collaborations across professions between academic-practitioner encompassing individuals from different professions and organizations presented a unique learning opportunity during the research. The long-term relations enriched individual and institutional experiences in being more effective in creating global impact through the interventions in SALW and security related issues, which complimented the work of the UN and many governments. However, the successful outcomes of this research collaboration, should not be treated as a rule, but rather be regarded as an exception between academic institutions and the NGOs. Although there may be huge potentials for academic – NGO collaborations with shared values commitment and vision, there are practical challenges, especially when such collaboration involves unequal partners, than what may appear at the surface.

Several factors can make academic-NGO engagements to be problematic thus undermining effective collaboration and realisation of full potentials of each partner. Some of the factors include: statuses and terms of engagement of the actors (where academics may be viewed by NGO practitioners as experts equipped with the requisite theoretical literature and toolkit of rigorous methodologies thereby creating a risk of dependency in the collaboration); NGO practitioners may also be sceptical or threatened by the credentials of

the academics and dismiss their contributions as being too theoretical and irrelevant (Rynes, S. L., *et al.* 2001) in the research process.

Another risks involved in the collaboration involving academic – NGO research collaboration is the fact that the two may operate from two different logics (Roper, 2002). Academics are usually inclined to identify facts that lead to generalisability of rules as well as probabilistic predictions unlike with NGO practitioners who, on the other hand, may be more concerned with a specific problem-solving in a particular context.

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## CASE STUDY 3: IMPLICATION OF REFERENDUM IN SOUTH SUDAN ON PEACE, SECURITY AND RECONSTRUCTION PROCESS IN NORTHERN UGANDA

**Research Project Title:** *Implication of Referendum in South Sudan on Peace, Security and Reconstruction Process in Northern Uganda*

**Academic/NGO Partners:** *Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment (ACODE)<sup>11</sup> and Advocates for Research in Development (ARiD)<sup>12</sup>.*

**Funder:** *Civil Society Organizations for Peace in Northern Uganda (COSPNU)*

### Background of the Project

The study on “The implication of referendum in South Sudan on peace, security and reconstruction process in northern Uganda” was commissioned by a consortium of NGOs, the Civil Society Organisation for Peace in Northern Uganda (CSOPNU), in 2010. The two-month research project was jointly conducted between December 2010 and January 2011 by two academics affiliated to two Uganda based NGOs – Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment (ACODE) headquartered in Kampala being the lead organisation and Advocates for Research in Development (ARiD), a northern Uganda based NGO as a co-consulting organisation. The academic affiliated to ACODE was the lead researcher for this project.

### Research Objectives

The research sought to examine the likely implication of the South Sudan referendum on the region based on the view that its outcomes were unpredictable at the time of the research. In addition, political analysts assumed that: unresolved conflicts in the region would sabotage the 2011 referendum<sup>13</sup>; resumption of hostilities after the referendum would lead to a massive influx of refugee problems; and renewed hostilities would also adversely reverse the socio-economic and political peace dividends already registered in northern Uganda. On the flipside, a successful referendum in South Sudan would lead to peace and stability; security of the region; and consolidation of peace, security and development in northern Uganda.

### Design and implementation of the programme

A number of factors informed the collaboration between ACODE and ARiD, these being the long history of personal and professional relationships between the Directors of the two organisations (they both studied at the University of Bradford, and have professional background in Peace Studies); ARiD’s prior experience in research in northern Uganda and South Sudan; locational advantage and already established networks of ARiD partners in northern Uganda and South Sudan; and ACODE’s reputation and experience in successfully bidding for large research grants.

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<sup>11</sup> Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment (ACODE) is an independent public policy research and advocacy think tank based in Kampala, Uganda.

<sup>12</sup> The Advocates for Research in Development (ARiD) is a not-for-profit research based organisation with its field offices in Pader, northern Uganda.

<sup>13</sup> See, Spiegel, J. & Prendergast, J. (2008). A New Peace Strategy for Northern Uganda and the LRA. Enough Strategy Paper 19 available at: [www.enoughproject.org](http://www.enoughproject.org). Accessed on 12/3/2012.

The research provided an in-depth analysis of Uganda's strategic interests and influence, and how it would play in the mix of regional, international and national strategic interests; examining the potential scenarios which were likely to be realised in Sudan and how they would impact on the post-conflict northern Uganda; assessed stability/tranquillity in post-referendum independent South Sudan or United Sudan and its regional implications; assessed Uganda's planning and policy response in anticipation of eventualities and consolidation of peace in northern Uganda, and how the Uganda's 2011 general elections could weigh in on the post-referendum South Sudan; and proposed policy recommendations on how regional states (and Uganda in particular) and institutions including the international community would practically prepare, harmonize efforts to support the conduct and outcome of the referendum, recognize its results and /or manage its implementations, and also ensure the sanctity and respect of the CPA and the right of self-determination by all the parties and to avoid renewed hostilities.

The research largely relied on qualitative research methodology with both primary and secondary data collected and analyzed. The researchers used jointly pre-determined interview questions developed through a rigorous process for the fieldwork studies conducted in both Uganda and South Sudan. The framework for the research was outlined in the terms of reference from which subsequent interview questions were derived. While the NGO consortium had their own perspective on how the research methodology, slight variations emerged in the due process from the cross-professional background and in conducting research in post-conflict context. Key informants consisted of officials from the governments of Uganda and South Sudan, civil society organisations, development partners and the United Nations agencies in the study areas.

The research tasks were divided between the organisations as follows: ACODE conducted elite interviews with key government officials, CSOs and UN agencies based in Kampala while ARiD was responsible for conducting in-depth elite interviews and focus group discussions with pre-determined government officials, CSOs, religious and traditional leaders and individual informants from northern Uganda. ARiD made prior contacts with potential research participants in South Sudan based on its already established networks in Juba. Despite the specific role differentiation, both organisations jointly conducted literature reviews, in-depth elite interviews with key informants and focus group discussions in South Sudan, data analyses and report writing. As a lead organisation, ACODE submitted the final agreed version of the research report to CSOPNU, the research funder, and disseminated the outputs to other key stakeholders.

### **Lessons learnt from the collaboration**

The success of the collaborative research project was attributed to financial support (the ability of the civil society consortium (CSOPNU) to meet the overhead costs of the research), familiarity with the context and the mutual understanding between the researching organisations, ACODE and ARiD. These factors combined to facilitate the conduct of the research on time.

Despite the gains in the collaboration, there were challenges that faced the collaboration in the research process. The complexity of the post-conflict context required flexibility and additional conflict-sensitive intellectual, social, and political skills in conducting the field interviews. This, however, presented a research paradox, as on the one hand, post-conflict contexts are fragile and researchers required ethical sensitivity to contemporary security matters that could be damaging for the region (e.g. the on-going LRA

rebel activities in the region). Yet on the other hand, investing in knowledge production regarding security and stability of the region was at the centre of the research. Through consultations with funding body, the research teams were able to mutually resolve the emergent tension. It was also apparent that the NGO consortium was interested in focusing in specific areas for their intervention. However, some of the issues that emerged from the research output were very theoretical and beyond the scope of their intervention, which tended to benefit academia other than the practitioners.

In addition, the collaborative research projects showed on the one hand on how porous the boundaries between social science research ethics and practitioners' expectations can be, and on the other hand, the reality in the researched community. Such a situation poses a dilemma that potentially risks undermining the academic researcher's autonomy. Besides, wide variations in knowledge development process and pluralism of research practices existed between the collaborating academics and the affiliated organisation/institutions on the one hand and between the academics and the NGO practitioners which funded the study. Oftentimes, these practices may be in conflict with each other and may lead to complex interactions, contestation of research landscape and harmonization of research processes, outputs, outcomes and their relevance. Nevertheless, research collaborations among similar academics affiliated to NGO practitioners presented a unique learning curve: it showed that there is no single way through which academic researchers can frame, produce, disseminate and use knowledge (Ven & Johnson, 2006). Finally, academic-NGO research collaborations require effective communication, open dialogues and transparency aimed at addressing emerging concerns and contestations in the research process in a timely manner.

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## CASE STUDY 4: HIV/AIDS & RBA IN MOSHI AND SAME DISTRICT NORTHERN TANZANIA

**Research Project Title:** *Rights based approach to building the capacity of People Living with HIV/AIDS in Moshi and Same Districts*

**NGO partner:** *Village-to-Village Tanzania*<sup>14</sup>

**Academic partner:** *University of Bradford*

**Funders:** *DFID's Civil Society Challenge Fund*<sup>15</sup>

### **Background of the collaboration and the research project**

The partnership between the University of Bradford and Village-to-Village, Tanzania (V2V-Tz) is an evolving one based on the personal contacts and research of Dr Anna Mdee dating back to 1996 (University of Bradford) and also involving Dr Jelke Boesten (University of Leeds).

The research collaboration has focused on the provision of basic services and explored local participation in community management of water and on community responses to with People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) in Moshi and Same Districts. It was through working with Community Researchers that the NGO V2v-Tz was created. This work has been funded by various bodies including ESRC grant (2004-6), a DFID research grant (2006-8) (with Bradford as the lead partner- with four others in Tanzania and South Africa) and from 2008-11 V2V-Tz led a delivery project working with PLWHA groups funded by the DFID Civil Society Challenge Fund. In this most recent case the University of Bradford support was informal and voluntary but also involved a formal research study in 2011 which has been written up as an academic paper and as a briefing report.

Therefore the collaboration has had both formal and informal aspects. Formal aspects relate to specific projects under external funding. Governance of these depends on meeting the requirements of the external funders and the Trustees of V2V-Tz. The partnership itself is driven by evolving and sustained informal relationships, in addition to formal institutional relationships.

### **Research Objective**

The overall objective of the research project was to explore whether activism by groups of people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) to claim their rights is an effective way of reducing stigmatisation and improving access to Anti-Retroviral Treatments (ARVs) and other social protection such as food aid and free education.

The research explored the effectiveness of rights based approach in building the capacity of PLWHA groups to reduce stigma and to gain access to resources in rural Tanzania.

### **Project set-up, design and implementation**

The research project aimed at supporting existing and new PLWHA support groups in accessing pre-existing representational structures such as the 'ward multi-sectoral AIDS

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<sup>14</sup> Village-to-Village, Tanzania is a small charity which works to promote rights and relieve poverty in rural Tanzania. V2VTZ implements projects in Education, Sustainable Agriculture and HIV/AIDS and also promotes and supports volunteer placements in the Kilimanjaro region of Tanzania.

<sup>15</sup> The details of the CSCF can be accessed from this link: <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Work-with-us/Funding-opportunities/Not-for-profit-organisations/CSCF/>

committee' (WMAC) (Mdee, Otieno and Thorley 2011). Such groups would be strengthened through working with members on their legal entitlements under the Tanzanian 2008 HIVS/AIDS Act. In terms of the project outcome the intended aim was to enable greater access for PLWHA to their entitlements under this act.

The V2V-Tz project has been working with 45 community groups in Moshi (24 groups) and Same (21 groups) districts since 2008. Although the DFID funding came to an end in March 2011, the V2VTz continues to support the community with advice as the critical consideration for the project design was that the groups should not be aid dependent and potentially cease to exist when the funding finished or cause further conflict over incoming aid resources.

The onset of the research collaboration was stimulated by the work of Anna Toner (Mdee) and Ernest Msuya in Uchira, Tanzania which dates back to 1996 exploring 'development' of the village. By 2004 this became more formalised through the creation of the NGO- Village-to-Village (Tanzania) and Village-to-Village (UK)- both constituted and formally registered organisations. Partners have worked together on funding applications, data collection and analysis, joint presentation to academic and policy forums, preparation of academic and policy outputs, delivery of capacity building projects. For the purposes of this case study we will focus on the DFID funded CSCF project which was implemented by V2V-Tz and was evaluated by a short joint research project with University of Bradford.

The research questions emerged from the DFID CSCF project which used a rights-based approach to build the capacity of PLWHA groups to reduce stigma and to gain access to resources and sought to explore the effectiveness of this approach using qualitative interviews with group members. The V2V-Tz project under review was originally designed by Mussa Mgata (HelpAge Tanzania – but studying Masters Degree in Bradford). Paul Otieno was recruited to implement the project but later became central to the research component. The project itself and the later research followed on from earlier DFID-funded research (2006-8) with much fieldwork undertaken by Jelke Boesten (University of Bradford- now moved to Leeds) supported in the field by V2V-Tz staff and facilities. It is difficult to tease out different agendas as Anna Mdee/Jelke Boesten/Lisa Thorley (University of Bradford) were also connected with V2V-Tz as Advisors. The research/NGO activity agenda of V2V-Tz were emergent and produced in dialogue with each other. For instance the fieldwork of Jelke Boesten in Same underpinned the activities of the CSCF project. V2V-Tz staff whilst often not having high level formal qualifications have become adept local researchers and analysts (Ernest Msuya and Paul Otieno).

Where relationships with local NGOs were not so embedded there have been problems. In working with another NGO, Kikuhe, there was a perception on the Kikuhe side that there would be a sustained funding relationship. Governance problems in this Kikuhe eventually led to its collapse. This has been written about in working papers and academic journals by Boesten (Mdee et al. 2012).

University of Bradford staff have tended to take the lead on the seeking of funding from external agencies but in close collaboration with V2V-Tz. V2V-Tz staff have been heavily involved in data collection- both with UoB researchers but also on an independent basis following training. Analysis has been a collaborative process and varies with the outputs and target audience. Some V2V-Tz staff have been involved with academic journal article drafting and conference presentations. They have also been joint authors on briefing papers (Mdee, Otieno & Thorley 2012a, 2012b).

The relationship between the University of Bradford researchers and V2V-TZ is a close and trusting one and this has allowed for a good degree of honesty between key personnel. Research has been shared on the JEFICAS blog and at workshops in the UK and Tanzania. It is also used as a case study in teaching the joint Bradford-Mzumbe Masters Programme in Dar-es-Salaam.

What has been more difficult to manage has been the reporting requirements of external funding. For example the log frame based reporting imposed on V2V-Tz by DFID CSCF was formulaic and driven by MDG-related aid jargon which was fairly meaningless to the V2V-Tz staff and UoB researchers alike. Reporting on both DFID and ESRC research projects is much more flexible.

### **Collaboration outcomes and lessons learnt**

The research on the effectiveness of the PLWHA project met its objectives and all parties are happy with the output of this project. This is still an evolving partnership and an academic journal article will shortly be submitted. Further follow up research will also be conducted with the newly established Mzumbe Centre for Society and Governance at Mzumbe University in Tanzania. This is the most positive aspect in that this is not a one off project based interaction but a relationship based on mutual interests. The research is of interest other stakeholders and policy makers in Tanzania for example- TAMWA Tanzania Media Women's Association<sup>16</sup> and TACAIDS- Government HIV/AIDS agency<sup>17</sup>.

From the point of view of University of Bradford, it is encouraged that academic staff concentrate on producing academic journal articles rather than briefing papers and that these are seen as having little academic value. Conversely academic journal articles would have little value to V2V-Tz in terms of them seeking funding to support their activities given the type of language that they use and the timescales of production. Of more use to them is baseline data and evaluative evidence to support the effectiveness of their work and to enable a critical reflective approach to designing their activities.

Possible lessons from this case are that:

- Effective collaboration cannot be achieved through one-off time bound project, it is underpinned by long term building of relationships and knowledge by all partners.
- Collaboration is time consuming and external demands of funders can impose a certain shape and language to working relations that requires negotiation.
- Long term co-production of research may develop the trust necessary to honestly evaluate impact and the contextual value of evidence.

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.tamwa.org/>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.tacaids.go.tz/>

## CASE STUDY 5: STIMULATING HOUSEHOLD IMPROVEMENTS RESULTING IN ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT (SHIREE)

**Research Project Title:** *Stimulating Household Improvements Resulting in Economic Empowerment (SHIREE)*

**Academic partner:** *Centre for Development Studies at Bath University*

**Consultancy partners:** *Harwelle International Ltd<sup>18</sup>; PMTC Bangladesh<sup>19</sup>*

### Background

It has been recently estimated by DFID and the Government of Bangladesh that around 10% of the population live in extreme poverty, meaning that they are living below the lower poverty line. This group are often vulnerable to social exclusion within their communities due to stigma related to their impoverished status (Green 2003). Furthermore, they occupy a unique structural economic position, which is difficult to alleviate as they do not have the necessary social or financial resources (Harriss-White 2002, Harriss-White, Gooptu 2000 and Devereux 2003). Hence, Devine and Wood (2010) argue that the 'extreme poor' are excluded from local, meso and macro-level social and political structures, which brings into question the responsibilities of the state and civil society for the welfare of these individuals.

According to Marsden (2011), it is being increasingly acknowledged by policy makers, NGOs and donors in Bangladesh that current development programmes are failing to address the needs of the extreme poor. There are social protection provisions that are designed to cater to people belonging to this group, such as the VGD cards. However, many survive on informal social and financial support from their relatives and members of the community. This has been linked to assumptions by stakeholders that the extreme poor are difficult to assist as they do not have the necessary financial and social resources to lift themselves out of poverty. For instance, in comparison to the moderate poor, they are less likely to be able to make productive use of their loans as they do not have land or social capital.

This indicates that there needs to be a greater policy and programmatic focus on the extreme poor in Bangladesh. Unfortunately, it can be difficult to effectively target this group and find innovative means of addressing their needs. Marsden (2011) stated that the extreme poor 'display diverse characteristics, live in more complex situations, face unique vulnerabilities, and experience shocks differently. This makes climbing out of poverty harder and arguably requires a different response' (p.9). Hence, the Stimulating Household Improvements Resulting in Economic Empowerment (SHIREE) programme was funded by DFID with the objective of researching and implementing interventions which targeted the poorest sections of the population in Bangladesh.

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<sup>18</sup> Harwelle International Ltd. is a consultancy firm committed to providing solutions to poverty alleviation and sustainable growth in developing countries (Harwelle International Limited 22 Apr 2012).

<sup>19</sup> PMTC Bangladesh is a well-established company with a record for completing development projects (Harwelle International Limited 17 Apr 2012).

## **Key Objectives**

SHIREE was designed to address the first Millennium Development Goal target of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger by 2015 (SHIREE 2012a). The other key objectives of the programme are to:

- Fund a variety of programmes conducted by international and national NGOs that aim to enable over 1 million people to achieve sustainable livelihoods by 2015.
- Reduce the vulnerability of those experiencing extreme poverty to economic and environmental changes.
- Undertake high quality research and disseminate key findings in order to improve how extreme poverty is dealt with by government, donors and NGOs in Bangladesh.

## **Design and implementation of the programme**

SHIREE is a very complex programme involving thirty-three NGOs, including six large-scale international NGOs, a governmental body, two management consultancies and a northern based academic institution (SHIREE 2012b). According to Dr. Devine, a Lecturer in International Development at Bath University, the research collaboration was stimulated by DFID's bid for project proposals for a large-scale poverty alleviation programme in Bangladesh. He was approached by Harwell International Ltd, which he had previously worked on another project with, to assist in their bid to become a member of the consortium.

The function of the programme is to supply NGOs with the necessary funds to conduct poverty alleviation interventions (Gota, de Corta et al. 2011). These interventions are financially supported by the Challenge Fund, which is worth £65 million and runs over a period of eight years (2008-2015). The Challenge Fund is managed by a consortium of partners, including Harwell International Ltd and the Centre for Development Studies, whose role is to competitively select the most effective poverty alleviation programmes and provide NGOs with implementation and research support.

Centre for Development Studies at Bath University plays a multiple role in the SHIREE programme. Their foremost function in the programme is to manage the Change Monitoring System (SHIREE 2012c), which provides data and analysis on patterns of extreme poverty and the effectiveness of interventions. This is measured through a variety of qualitative and quantitative research tools, including: (a) Household Profile, which is a detailed assessment of all households prior to the intervention in order to test their effectiveness; (b) Monthly Snapshot, a monthly evaluation of the interventions; (c) Socio-economic and Anthropometric Surveys, which demonstrates the longer term impact of these interventions on health and well-being of beneficiaries; (d) Participatory review and project analysis that is a review of the intervention based on the beneficiaries' experiences; and (e) Tracking Studies, which involves collecting narrative data from participants on their experiences of extreme poverty. SHIREE has already published a series of reports using these research tools to chart the impact of their interventions on alleviating extreme poverty (Gota, de Corta et al. October 2011, SHIREE 2012d, Ahmed, Abdul Bari, 2011 and Hossain, 2011).

The secondary role of the Centre for Development Studies is to provide participating NGOs with research support. After a successful bid for an intervention, NGOs will approach the Centre for Development Studies for advice on how to effectively monitor their intervention. Dr. Devine perceives his role in this area of the project similarly to that of a supervisor guiding a student in developing their research topic for their thesis, rather than as a collaborative partner. He stated:

*'SHIREE tries to give as much ownership to the NGOs as possible. Bath comes in to refine the research questions and design. They build coherence through the project... It is like with students, they come up with the questions and we take a supervisory role'.*

One possible reason for the Centre for Development Studies role in the project being supervisory rather than collaborative is that the programme is large scale and covers many interventions. This means that it is difficult to form collaborative partnerships within this programme between academics and practitioners. Nevertheless, Dr. Devine believes that Bath University plays a crucial role in the SHIREE programme, through ensuring that they are consolidating a corpus of knowledge and understanding on extreme poverty that can be used in shaping future research and policy on this topic. He commented, 'We lose something if we have these NGOs just working for themselves... They are breaking new ground... NGOs are appreciative of the expertise of academics. They appreciate that academics broaden their scope and improve the quality of their research'.

### **Expected outcomes and lessons to be learnt**

As the project is still ongoing, it is difficult to analyse if the research collaboration has been as yet successful. Unfortunately, it was not possible to receive any feedback on the project from NGO partners as most of them are living in Bangladesh, therefore are difficult to contact. Academic partners in the programme commented that they so far had a positive experience conducting research with their NGO partners. They had not as yet experienced any tensions with their NGO partners on the potential impact that their findings could have on obtaining funding for future interventions. Nonetheless, Dr. Devine clearly understood that potential audiences for research findings were reflective of socio-political structures inherent in NGO and academic institutions. For academic institutions, publications of research are used as materials to feed discussion amongst their peers on the subject at hand. On the other hand, research findings are used as a tool by NGOs to gain more funding, if the intervention was successful, and improve future programmes, meaning that their audiences are donors and peers within their organisations. Consequently, research findings can have a strong impact on NGOs as others may believe that they are reflective of their ability to deliver services.

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## CASE STUDY 6: A STRATEGIC EVALUATION OF THE TRANSITION OF ONE COUNTRY OFFICE (PLAN GUATEMALA) TO A FORM OF RIGHTS BASED APPROACHES (CHILD CENTRED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT)

**Research Project Title:** *A strategic evaluation of the transition of one country office (Plan Guatemala) to a form of Rights Based Approaches (Child Centred Community Development)*  
**Academic partner:** *Transnational NGO Initiative at the Moynihan Institute of Global Affairs at Syracuse University*  
**NGO partner:** *Plan Guatemala*

### Background

There has been a recent increase in the amount of publications and training workshops on rights-based approaches to development (Harris-Curtis 2003), underlining the importance that NGOs have attached to the concept. This is a departure from the traditional needs-based approach adopted in the 1950s-60s that defined poverty as an absence of resources essential for human survival (Russell and Smeaton 2009). Hence, it was envisioned that the role of NGOs was to meet the 'needs' of populations living in under-resourced areas (Boesen and Martin 2007). For instance, if illiteracy was identified as a pertinent issue then funds were supplied by donors to NGOs for educational interventions with specific targets set to increase levels of literacy within the population (Mitlin and Patel 2005).

The needs-based approach to development has been criticised by academics and practitioners as being so narrow in focus that it fails to address the structural roots of the issue, like gendered discrimination acting as a barrier to women's education (Gneiting, van Vijfeijken et al. 2009). Others have argued that this approach to development is harmful as it conceptualises individuals according to their level of need rather than their ability to sustain their own well-being. As Russell and Smeaton (2009) stated:

*'A legacy of the needs-based approach in Africa is that many receiving aid have learned to define themselves and their villages/communities by their needs and their deficiencies to the point where they can no longer identify anything of value around them.'*

In contrast, the rights-based approach to development conceptualises individuals as having rights rather than needs (Boesen and Martin 2007, Mitlin and Patel 2005 and Gneiting, van Vijfeijken et al. 2009). According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the rights-based approach integrates norms and standards enshrined in the international human rights framework into programmes and policies of NGOs (OHCHR 2006). Within this approach individuals are perceived as having inalienable political, social and economic entitlements and freedoms that deserve to be upheld (Harris-Curtis, Marleyn et al. 2009). They can act as 'right holders' who can claim their own rights to a basic standard of living. Meanwhile, NGOs are 'duty bearers' whose role is to recognise the rights of individuals receiving their services and ensure that they are held accountable for their actions (Boesen and Martin 2007). Molyneux and Lazar (2003) commented that the rights-based approach represents a 'move from a limited conception of need, conceived in terms of meeting a minimum of requirements, to a focus on rights entails a shift towards embracing a more strategic vision of what citizens are entitled to and require for their further development' (cited Mitlin and Patel 2005: p.7-8).

In 2003 Plan International adopted the Child Centred Community Development strategy which incorporated principles of the rights-based approach, such as increasing the awareness on the human rights of children and focusing on structural causes of deprivation. Plan International is a well-established international NGO that provides services to children and advocates children's rights in developing countries (Plan International 2012). It has traditionally used a needs-based approach to deliver services and establish links within the community (Bruno-van Vijfeijken 2011), meaning that this shift in policy comes with a unique set of benefits and challenges. Therefore, the Transnational NGO Initiative at the Moynihan Institute of Global Affairs at Syracuse University was commissioned by Plan Guatemala to undertake an independent evaluation of their organisation's transition towards a rights based approach.

### **Key Objectives**

The key objectives of a strategic evaluation of the transition of one country office (Plan Guatemala) to a form of Rights Based Approaches were:

- Gain an understanding of Plan's interpretation of a rights-based approach and assess if this approach is compatible with commonly accepted versions of the rights-based approach.
- Investigate how this shift in strategy has been translated into new programmes
- Evaluate the impact of these programmes

### **Design and implementation of the programme**

According to Ms Cobar<sup>20</sup>, this collaborative research project was initiated after the previous national director was interviewed for another study managed by the Transnational NGO Initiative. During the interview he discussed the prospect of conducting a project in Guatemala on Plan International's application of the rights-based approach in their programmes. It was well known that the Moynihan Institute of Global Affairs had previously investigated the rights-based approach to development with other NGOs; hence, Plan International was seeking their expertise on this field of research. As Ms Cobar stated, 'It was important for an external organisation, a university, to investigate from a theoretical point of view what a rights-based approach was. We wanted to learn from them as an outsider, it gives us a professional point of view of our work'.

During the implementation of the project, Plan Guatemala played a cooperative rather than collaborative role. According to Ms. Bruno-van Vijfeijken, Co-Director at the Transnational NGO Initiative, staff at Plan Guatemala contributed some research questions at the design stage of the project. Afterwards, they mostly acted as gate keepers to resources and interviewees. Between February and May 2009, researchers from the Transnational NGO Initiative were embedded full-time in Plan Guatemala's organization to conduct fieldwork. This involved a set of approximately 120 interviews as well as participant observations with stakeholders, including staff at Plan Guatemala, external national thought leaders, local government officials and beneficiaries. There was an additional component of participant observation, in which a researcher was embedded in the operations of Plan International.

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<sup>20</sup> Ms Cobar is the current National Director of Guatemala at Plan International

There were few tensions in this form of collaborative research as the roles of each organisation had been clearly defined and strictly adhered to. Dr. Bruno-van Vijfeijken claimed that the research collaboration was cooperative as the previous National Director of Guatemala at Plan International was 'intellectually curious', hence was interested in the process and outcome of research. She stated, 'Plan were open to making themselves vulnerable- they wanted to see how they compared with peers on the rights-based approach to development'. She believed that this attitude of openness created a cooperative environment for the researchers, as the NGO partners were willing to give access to data relevant to the project. Her experience on this project compared favourably to other projects in which fundraisers were apprehensive about the impact that negative findings could have on their ability to garner funding. These organisations failed to comprehend that the academic's role in the collaborative research project was to be constructively objective. She commented:

*'The NGO has to be willing to give access to all data. We are not doing a PR exercise. However, in most cases we were given full access'.*

Another factor which Dr. Bruno-van Vijfeijken believed contributed to the success of the partnership was that most researchers in her department had extensive experience either working as practitioners in NGOs or conducting collaborative research projects. These researchers adopted a 'prac-academic' perspective, which marries academic research with NGO practise. As a consequence, they were effective in communicating with their NGO partners as they understood their concerns and were able to mould the process of research to suit each party's needs.

### **Outcomes and lessons to be learnt**

According to feedback supplied by both the NGO and academic partners, the project has been successful as it had provided a nuanced evaluation of the rights-based approach adopted by Plan International. It was found that 'Plan's strategic change is not only visible in the organisation's strategic plans but has also found its way into the implementation of its programmes on the ground. Plan's relationship with local communities has shifted from technical interactions to more cooperative partnerships geared towards enabling the pursuit of their own development objectives' (Gneiting, Vijfeijken et al. 2009: p. 7-8).

Dr. Bruno-van Vijfeijken reported that the findings of the study were disseminated through reports and workshops held with Plan Guatemala. In addition, the findings were used to guide Plan Guatemala's next country strategy and led to a larger research project addressing rights-based approaches with Plan International in USA. She argued that the success of the research collaboration was an example of 'leadership'.

Ms. Cobar was similarly enthusiastic about the project and reported that practitioners at Plan International were keen to learn of both positive and negative results. She believed that the purpose of the research collaboration was for Plan International to reflect on their practices and improve future interventions. She stated, 'If you want to know if an approach works, the only way is having this experience and learning lessons: good and bad. There are difficulties if you don't do this. The rights-based approach is not easy to understand- for me it is good to have both sides.'

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## CASE STUDY 7: THE KULIMA PROGRAMME

**Research Project Title:** *The Kulima Programme*

**Lead NGO partner:** *Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund (SCIAF)*

**Academic partner:** *Edinburgh University's Centre of African Studies*

**Other NGO partners:** *Kasisi Agricultural Training Centre<sup>21</sup>; Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection<sup>22</sup>; Caritas Livingstone<sup>23</sup>; Caritas Mongu<sup>24</sup>; Agakura Agricultural Training Centre; CADECOM Mungochi<sup>25</sup>; The James Hutton Institute<sup>26</sup>*

### Background of the Kulima Project

Subsistence farmers in Zambia, Malawi and Burundi are experiencing increased poverty due to falling levels of food production. This results in the reduction of food-security, nutrition and income within the households of small-scale farmers. For instance, a recent survey on consumption of food items conducted by the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection estimates that the average nutritional daily intake of small-scale farmers is 1,300 calories and 300mg of calcium (JCTR 2012). This is far below the dietary recommendation by the WHO, which is 2,400 kcal and 100 mg of calcium per a day (WHO 2012). According to SCIAF this issue 'stems from many factors including severely degraded soils, falling soil-fertility, climate change, unsustainable conventional agricultural practices (e.g. use of inorganic fertilizer, chemicals), inappropriate husbandry practices (excessive tillage, crop-residue burning etc) and a lack of knowledge of alternatives.'

SCIAF has previously conducted projects in Zambia which aimed to promote Sustainable Agricultural Systems (SAS) to local subsistence farmers. According to SCIAF Sustainable Agricultural Systems is 'a way of farming that is environmentally coherent, economically viable and socially just'. It was at first expected by SCIAF and partner NGOs that neighbouring non-participating subsistence farmers would adopt the agricultural practices of the participating farmers after witnessing an increase in their productivity of crops. However, few non-participating farmers were willing to change their agricultural practices; furthermore, on occasion, some neighbouring farmers accused adopting farmers of witchcraft or stealing fertile soil from other farms. These preliminary results were a cause for concern as there is very little possibility of wide scale benefit from this innovation unless other members of the local community chose to adopt these practices. There is currently

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<sup>21</sup> Kasisi Agricultural Training Centre is a NGO which provides agricultural training through a series of short courses to participants living in Lusaka, Zambia. In addition, a set of radio programs on agricultural interventions are broadcast on a weekly basis. (KATC 2007)

<sup>22</sup> The Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection is a NGO which researches and advocates on issues linking social justice with Christian values in Zambia. They have previously researched the cost of living and access to health and education for vulnerable populations (SCIAF 2012b).

<sup>23</sup> Caritas Livingstone is a faith-based NGO in Zambia which aims to improve the livelihoods of the most impoverished and vulnerable sections of the populations through social interventions based in local dioceses. For instance, in 2005 Caritas Zambia provided maize and beans to thousands of vulnerable households in the dioceses of of Monze, Mongu, Livingstone, Chipata and Lusaka (Caritas Livingstone 2012).

<sup>24</sup> Caritas Mongu is a diocese within Zambia (Caritas Livingstone 2012).

<sup>25</sup> This NGO is part of the Mungochi Diocese of Malawi, which has previously worked with SCIAF to improve access to food for 300 households (SCIAF 2012a).

<sup>26</sup> The James Hutton institute is a NGO which researches agricultural issues with the aim of providing evidence-based solutions for land and environmental issues (James Hutton Institute 2012).

little or no known research on the adoption of agricultural interventions in sub-Saharan Africa. Moreover, according to Stephen Martin, SCIAF's Africa Programme Officer, governmental and NGO stakeholders remain silent on the issue of non-participation in agricultural interventions, meaning that little is known on this topic.

In addition, it has been difficult to persuade governmental stakeholders to encourage the widespread adoption of SCIAF's agricultural intervention by subsistence farmers. These stakeholders often have a vested interest in 'western' or 'industrial' agriculture, which promises to increase production in the short term but can have negative environmental consequences in the long term as it encourages the felling of trees, the continual growth of single crops and use of chemical pesticides. It is crucial to encourage governmental stakeholders to adopt this agricultural intervention in order to ensure that the appropriate infrastructure is in place for the continual usage of SAS by small-scale farmers.

SCIAF instigated the Kulima programme with the principle objective of contributing to the nutritional and food security of small-scale farmers through the encouragement of sustainable agricultural practices in central and western Zambia, central Malawi and Burundi. SCIAF and its programme partners received funding for five years from the Scottish government. The formation of the Kulima programme was guided by SCIAF's previous experience managing other food security interventions in this region of Africa. This programme will address social and structural factors which had affected the previous interventions, such as small-scale farmers' beliefs concerning their agricultural practices. Hence, the Kulima programme will approach the issue of food security from multiple angles through also addressing non-participation of farmers in agricultural interventions and advocating a change in future governmental policy towards SAS.

### **Key Objectives**

The key objectives of the Kulima programme are to:

- Advocate SAS to small-scale farmers in Zambia, Malawi and Burundi
- Deliver services to small scale farmers in Zambia, Malawi and Burundi in order to increase productivity and food intake
- Persuade the Zambian government to promote agricultural policies which support sustainable agricultural practices for small-scale farmers through a combination of research and advocacy
- Research contributing socio-cultural factors in the non-adoption of SCIAF's agricultural practices in Zambia.

### **Design and implementation of the programme**

The Kulima programme is being implemented through a complex partnership between a northern-based academic institution, an international NGO and four southern NGOs. SCIAF has previously worked with most of their southern NGO partners on other programmes. For instance, they were involved with Kasisi Agricultural Training Centre, Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection and Caritas Mongu for three years prior to the Kulima programme. These partnerships were instigated through these organisations religious affiliations. These NGO partners' roles were to fulfil the first two programme objectives of advocating SAS to subsistence farmers and delivering services to participants.

On the other hand, SCIAF had no previous relationship with any of the Northern partners before the Kulima programme. These partnerships were partly driven through the condition of funding from the Scottish government being that collaborative relationships

should be encouraged between organisations based in Scotland. Furthermore, SCIAF wanted to use the funding to 'buy in expertise' provided by these organisations to improve the implementation of future agricultural programmes<sup>27</sup>. In the case of Edinburgh University's Centre of African Studies, it was informally approached by SCIAF due to their concern on the lack of uptake of SAS by farmers in Zambia. As Stephen Martin stated, 'Unless you understand the farmers: their world views their worries. Unless we do all that, we cannot help them'.

The University of Edinburgh's Centre of African Studies plays a unique role in the Kulima programme as it does not contribute to any of the project objectives concerning either advocacy or service delivery. Their role in the programme is to investigate why beneficial SAS practices are not being widely adopted by farmers. Funding has been provided by the Scottish government for a MSC student to undertake ethnographic research amongst non-participating and participating farmers in the designated programme areas. As the Kulima programme has been running for a short while, the MSC student is in the initial phase of designing and implementing the research project. This process has been guided by her supervisor in the University of Edinburgh and a member of staff in SCIAF. The following phase will involve collection of data from field sites in Zambia.

As yet, there have been few tensions in this form of collaborative research as the roles of each organisation have been clearly defined and strictly adhered to. Nonetheless, each partner has been compelled to manage the expectations of their respective organisations, through acknowledging their structural limitations. Lawrence Dritsas, a lecturer at Edinburgh, commented that he had to adapt the initial research questions and methodology to suit the academic requirements of his department, as his primary role was to ensure that the student achieved their academic potential. On a few occasions, he asked for permission from SCIAF to delay their designated deadlines for research proposal and other materials from the student as it conflicted with completion of coursework for the masters. These differences in expectations have been resolved through flexibility of both programme partners. As Dr. Dritsas stated:

*'In this particular agreement, the expectation of the funder (SCIAF) is key. They have to understand what the student can do. The student has a little bit more independence than a consultant.'*

Staff at SCIAF, on the other hand, had to manage expectations of Southern NGO partners on what is possible to achieve within this research project. As Stephen Martin stated, 'The university has expertise on understanding anthropological issues. It is mostly theoretical, therefore may not have answers on how to address agricultural issues'. Hence, it was decided that the role of their academic partner was not to find solutions to the problem but to answer the question of why the phenomena of non-adoption of SAS practices happened. It is hoped that SCIAF can use research findings to guide future programmes.

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<sup>27</sup> The role of the James Hutton Institute is to scientifically verify the ability of SAS to increase fertility of African soil. It is hoped that the final results of this research will galvanize the Zambian government to further promote SAS. Additionally, they are providing guidance to southern NGO partners on agricultural interventions.

### **Expected outcomes and lessons to be learnt**

As the project is still ongoing, it is difficult to analyse if the research collaboration has been as yet successful. Currently, both research partners have been pleased with the direction that the research project has taken. SCIAF has been encouraged by the initial success of the Kulima programme and is planning to initiate other collaborative research projects with agricultural departments in Scottish universities to further investigate the efficacy of SAS practices for small-scale farmers in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Meanwhile, Staff in Edinburgh University believe that this type of research could be the way forward for 'impact' and 'evidence' oriented research as it provides training for students interested in pursuing a career in development. Dr. Dritsas commented, 'The charity is gaining benefit from getting their question answered. They are in turn doing a charitable act by giving the student, who may not have otherwise been able to do a masters, funding'.

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## CASE STUDY 8: LEARNING WITH OLDER PEOPLE ABOUT THEIR TRANSPORT AND MOBILITY PROBLEMS IN RURAL TANZANIA: FOCUS ON IMPROVING ACCESS TO HEALTH SERVICES

**Research Project Title:** *Learning with older people about their transport and mobility problems in rural Tanzania: focus on improving access to health services*

**Academic partner:** *Durham University*

**NGO partner:** *HelpAge International*<sup>28</sup>

**Other NGO partners:** *Research on Poverty Alleviation (REPOA)*<sup>29</sup>; *Good Samaritan Social Services Trust*

**Funder:** *DFID*

### Background

Recent research has highlighted that inhibited mobility and lack of access to transport can have a detrimental impact on older people's well-being in developing countries (Porter, Hampshire et al. 2010 and Schwanen, Paez 2010). Poverty is a common feature of older populations in African countries (e.g. Tanzania), where governments do not provide social security due to lack of resources and the common assumption that elderly people will receive financial support from their family (Barrientos, Gorman et al. 2003, Taylor, Seeley et al. 1996 and Gillespie 2008). In some cases, older people may not receive financial support from relatives as their younger kin have migrated elsewhere and are difficult to contact. Moreover, they may experience difficulties finding secure livelihoods, especially in rural areas wherein income from farming can be insecure. This in turn increases vulnerability to economic shocks and climate change.

It has been acknowledged that a possible route out of rural poverty is to find means of employment which are not entirely dependent on manual labour. Bryceson (1999) noted that rural households in Sub-Saharan Africa are diversifying into non-agricultural income generating activities in the absence of stable rural employment. Unfortunately, the generation of non-agricultural income may require travel to local towns or markets, which can be a difficult undertaking for older people suffering from disabilities or chronic illnesses. Moreover, lack of reliable low cost transport can inhibit older people's access to essential healthcare services and supportive social networks. Ipingbemi (2010) identified long waiting times for transport and poor facilities at terminals as having a negative impact on elderly people's ability to reach their desired destination in Nigeria.

These constraints on elderly people's mobility could have an adverse impact on other members of their family and community. In many Sub-Saharan African countries heavily afflicted by HIV/AIDS traditional family structures and systems of childcare have fallen apart as the main bread winners in households are incapacitated through HIV-related illnesses (Foster, Williamson 2000). In many of these cases, older members of these families are compelled to care for recently orphaned children (Barnett 2006 and Abebe, Aase 2007). Smith (2002) stated, 'Grandmothers often become the primary carers for these children.

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<sup>28</sup> Help Age International is a NGO that advocates for the rights of elderly people in developing countries. Additionally, they deliver social and healthcare services to older section of the population in under-resourced areas (Help Age International 2012).

<sup>29</sup> REPOA is a research NGO in Tanzania specializing in socio-economic and development issues (REPOA 2012).

Traditionally supported by their children, grandmothers are instead becoming burdened with new roles including caring for their sick children and grandchildren, and bringing up grandchildren who are orphaned' (p. 67). In this context, the mobility constraints that older people face can adversely affect their ability to fulfil their designated role as carer and bread-winner in their family.

Literature on older population's transport and mobility in Sub-Saharan African countries remains relatively sparse. Although it has been demonstrated by other researchers that lack of mobility can have an adverse impact on elderly people's well-being (Porter, Hampshire et al. 2010 and Schwanen, Paez 2010); there is little known research on how mobility and access to transport can affect older people's utilisation of healthcare and economic empowerment. The 'Learning with older people about their transport and mobility problems in rural Tanzania' project addresses the mobility constraints that older people experience in Africa and the impact that it has on their access to essential services. Additionally, this project explores how these mobility constraints affect the well-being of older people and their dependents.

### **Key Objectives**

The key objectives of the 'Learning with older people about their transport and mobility problems in rural Tanzania' project are to:

- Create a base of evidence concerning how mobility and access to transport in rural areas of Africa influences older people's usage of healthcare services and their economic empowerment.
- Identify transport-related strategies which enable older people in rural areas to travel freely.
- Ensure that key findings of the study are disseminated to policy makers and practitioners.

### **Design and implementation of the project**

The research collaboration for this project was stimulated by findings from a previous study, led by Durham University, focusing on child mobility in Ghana, Malawi and South Africa (e.g. Porter, Hampshire et al. 2010, Porter 2012 and Robson, Porter et al. 2009). Results illustrated that many children in these countries were living with older carers, indicating that elderly people's mobility and access to healthcare services were an important component of caring for their younger charges. Dr Porter, a senior research fellow at Durham University, reported that she had approached HelpAge International as these research findings 'suggested potential inter-generational mobility perspectives'. She had known of HelpAge International's research on the plight of older populations in developing countries, and had first met Mr Gorman when they had both been working in Nigeria during the 1970s.

This project also built on HelpAge International's experience of conducting a feasibility study of a tool used by healthcare practitioners in Tanzania to assess elderly patient's needs (HelpAge International 2007). The findings highlighted that spatial access to healthcare had an impact on older people's well-being. Dr Porter argued that the collaborative nature of the project stemmed from both parties interest in mobility and transport in developing contexts. She commented that the research question had emerged 'independently from

both sides'. Staff from HelpAge International echoed this sentiment, mentioning that the issue of transport had been recently emerging as a priority issue for their organisation.

The design of the project draws heavily on Dr Porter's previous experience on researching child mobility (Porter, Hampshire et al. 2010, Porter 2012 and Robson, Porter et al. 2009). The child mobility study utilised an innovative two-strand child-centred methodology, involving both adult and child researchers. There was a conventional study in which participants were interviewed by adult academic researchers, accompanied by a child-centred component of the study in which child researchers conducted a set of interviews. Dr. Porter stated that the project on older people's mobility 'fairly closely parallels the child mobility study [i.e. mixed method approach with qualitative and survey components, plus a third key strand of community co-investigators which has been key in helping to shape the research questions- in this case not child researchers but older people researchers.]'

The data collection was conducted in two stages- the first being a five day training workshop led by Ms. Heslop (a consultant at HelpAge) that brought together twelve older people researchers, five research assistants from REPOA, the Director of Good Samaritan Social Services Trust, and the lead researcher from Durham University. The purpose of the workshop was to train all the researchers on how to conduct interviews with older people and collect information on mobility and transport. During this workshop the researchers carried out pilot interviews in Vikuge in Kibaha District, Tanzania. The role of the NGO and academic partners was to learn from the older researchers, who enriched the project through their own experiences. Finally, researcher's feedback on the interviews was used to further refine the research questions and methodology.

Ms Heslop claimed that the workshop acted as a lynchpin through its innovative methodology that allowed participants to act as research partners. She believed that this strengthened the collaborative nature of the project by imbuing each actor, including respondents, with an equal status. The older people researchers contributed to each stage of research by continuing to interview participants after the workshop. She stated:

*'I have worked with academic partnerships and it is quite different... The interest was in older people- they played central stage.... And in that sense it was a partnership with a real equality about it, as opposed to partnerships driven by research questions of academics. In the past it seemed like we have played a minor role giving access to older people.'*

The second stage of research involved a larger participatory field study of 9-10 villages in Kibaha district over the time period of 5-6 weeks. Research was carried out by research assistants from REPOA and a few older people researchers. Qualitative and quantitative data was collected on mobility, transport and the availability of services for older people. Mr Gorman, Strategic Development Adviser at HelpAge, commented that the research so far has been mostly fruitful with the older people researchers proving to have 'outstanding skills and commitment' to the project.

On the other hand, there were a few minor logistical constraints which caused problems during data collection. As the study was extensive and in-depth, REPOA was required to hire extra research assistants from outside of their organisation. The budget for the project was limited, meaning that there was little time to sufficiently train these research assistants prior to data collection. At first there were gaps in the data, e.g. demographic details of a few respondents. However, this issue was overcome through academic partners working

closely with research assistants. Dr Porter regularly checked data and supplied accurate and consistent feedback to the research assistants at REPOA.

The other issue was that some communities were at first resistant to the research because they had negative experiences with other projects in which information was extracted and yet they received little or no benefit from it. This issue was overcome through HelpAge and Good Samaritan Social Services Trust using its established links within these communities to gain the trust of participants. Mr Gorman stated, 'the Director of Good Samaritan Social Services Trust...has also played a hugely important role as a go-between with local authorities (local government officials and community leaders). His role has been pivotal in winning confidence and trust locally'. This case illustrates the importance of institutional networks between NGOs in overcoming logistical constraints which may have been otherwise insurmountable for an academic researcher.

### **Expected outcomes and lessons to be learnt**

As the project is still ongoing, it is difficult to analyse if the research collaboration has been as yet successful. The expected outcomes of the project are a one day dissemination workshop, in which policymakers will be invited, and a few articles reporting findings published by academic journals. Despite the difficulties in data collection earlier described, all the project partners are pleased with the direction of the research. The success of the collaboration has been attributed to a number of factors, the most important being the partners' extensive experience of conducting other similar projects. Dr Porter noted that conducting collaborative research was a 'learning process' as academics and NGO practitioners have very different styles of working. She commented that academics are often used to 'running the show by themselves and do not always fully appreciate the constraints under which NGOs may have to operate'. She has benefitted from being involved in previous research on NGOs (e.g. Alikhan et al. 2007) which has helped to give her some insights into how they operate, and from long-standing collaboration with another NGO, the International Forum for Rural Transport and Development. Another factor in the success of this research project was the close and cooperative nature of the partnership, in which all partners were willing to work together to overcome any logistical or ethical constraints that happened at any stage of the research. Mr Gorman attributed this to a strong commitment by all partners to complete the same objectives. He stated:

*'This collaboration has been successful so far because of the close alignment of purpose between all the partners. This expresses itself in a number of ways; one is the commitment to go beyond the research and seek to identify outcomes that can become future interventions for the benefit of older people in the study area. Another has been the commitment to undertake qualitative research of an excellent standard, and the attention to detail in data collection'.*

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## CASE STUDY 9: THE IMPACT OF COMMUNITY MANAGED MICRO-FINANCE IN MALAWI

**Research Project Title:** *The impact of community managed micro-finance in Malawi*  
**Lead NGO partner:** *DanChurchAid*<sup>30</sup>  
**Academic partners:** *University of Southern Denmark; Oxford University*  
**Other NGO partners:** *Rockwool Foundation*<sup>31</sup>; *Livingstonia Synod Development Department*<sup>32</sup>

### Background

Microfinance is understood to be the provision of financial services to small businesses, which would otherwise lack access to banking facilities due to high transactional costs associated with distribution of loans (de Soto 1989). The current form of microfinance commonly practised in developing countries was conceived in the mid-1970s with a focus on group lending, frequent loan monitoring and were targeted toward economically vulnerable groups, usually impoverished women. This model of microfinance was subsequently widely adopted in resource-poor settings, predicated on the 'microfinance promise' (Morduch 1990: 210) of poverty reduction and financial sustainability. In 2004 it was estimated that 120 million client accounts were with banking institutions that normally practised microfinance (Christen et al. 2004). Furthermore, around 27 million client accounts with these banking institutions were in Africa. By the end of 2009 an estimated 1,084 microfinance institutions were serving 74 million borrowers and 67 million savers (Microfinance Information Exchange 2009). As Christen et al () stated, 'savings accounts in alternative finance institutions outnumber loans by about four to one. This is a worldwide pattern that does not vary much by region' (p.5-6).

Nonetheless, recent research has highlighted that there is little evidence that microfinance schemes alleviate poverty (Banerjee et al. 2010, Duvendack et al. 2011, Khandker 2005). Westover (2008) found that most evidence for the effectiveness of microfinance programmes in poverty alleviation was based on anecdotal reports and case studies. Furthermore, very little research on this topic used rigorous quantitative methods, e.g. randomised control trials or surveys. Westover (2008) commented, 'Despite the popularization of microfinance in the mass media and the many positive findings that are reported in some feasibility and impact studies, there are also many studies that report some negative impacts of such programs and fail to find a direct link between microfinance program involvement and poverty reduction' (p.7).

The impact of community managed microfinance in Malawi research project builds on DanChurchAid's previous programmatic work on microfinance in developing countries. An evaluation report demonstrated that DanChurchAid was the largest Danish NGO implementing microfinance programmes in Africa (Projektrådgivningen 2007); however, the quality of these programmes was not consistently high. Hence, the principle objective of this

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<sup>30</sup> DanChurchAid is a Danish international NGO delivering services to impoverished sections of the population in developing countries (DanChurchAid 2012)

<sup>31</sup> The Rockwool Foundation was established in 1981 as a non-profit organization. The objectives of the organization are to support scientific, humanitarian, artistic and social endeavors (Rockwool Foundation 2012).

<sup>32</sup> Livingstonia Synod Development Department is a faith-based organization providing services to small-scale subsistence farmers living in Malawi (Agricultural extension and advisory services worldwide 2012).

project is to generate an evidence base through rigorous quantitative and qualitative research on the effectiveness of microfinance programmes in resource-poor settings in Malawi. Ole Rasmussen, who is the Microfinance adviser at DanChurchAid, stated, 'To be effective, DanChurchAid needs to have an understanding of what microfinance is and how it works'.

### **Research questions**

Based on current research, 'the impact of community managed micro-finance in Malawi' project aims to answer the following research questions:

- Does a cash flow management perspective on microfinance challenge the results of recent impact evaluations?
- What is the impact of microsavings on household welfare?
- What specific challenges and comparative advantages do international NGOs have in promoting microfinance?

### **Design and implementation of the project**

The impact of community managed micro-finance in Malawi evaluation project is being implemented through a complex partnership between two northern-based academic institutions, a northern research institute, an international NGO and a southern NGO. Ole Rasmussen, who has taken a joint role within the project as a doctoral researcher and employee of DanChurchAid, received funding from the Danish government's industrial PhD programme and the Rockwool Foundation to conduct a randomised control trial of microfinance interventions in Malawi.

According to the academic and NGO partners the project was stimulated through informal networks, mutual interest within both institutions on the research problem and a need from DanChurchAid to formulate well designed evidence-based microfinance interventions in the future. Nikolaj Malchow-Møller<sup>33</sup>, who is Ole Rasmussen's PhD supervisor at the University of Southern Denmark, commented that he had known his student's former employer through informal links. Ole Rasmussen was urged by his former employer to apply for a PhD as he believed that NGOs in Denmark needed stronger academic training to design and implement evidence-based interventions.

On the other hand, Ole Rasmussen argued that the main driver of the project was that DanChurchAid needed academic expertise from the University of Southern Denmark and financial resources provided by the Rockwool foundation to conduct a randomised control trial in Malawi. He stated:

*'From the researchers it was the ability to monitor the intervention. From the NGO it was the interest on the impact of the intervention and the idea that we could not do it alone. The project involves a household survey of 17000 households... DanChurchAid does not have the capacity to do that type of work.'*

The implementation of the impact of community managed micro-finance in Malawi evaluation project was evenly shared between the NGO and academic partners. The research project was a mixed methods study with a dominant quantitative component

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<sup>33</sup> Nikolaj Malchow-Møller is a professor in Business and Economics at the University of Southern Denmark

consisting of a randomised control trial of households participating in microfinance programmes delivered by DanChurchAid. Three rounds of surveys were conducted on 46 villages receiving financial assistance from DanChurchAid and Livingstonia Synod Development Department. Researchers from the Rockwool foundation managed a large part of the collection of data for the household survey, including training staff in Malawi for interviewing participants. Initially, half of these villages were randomly selected to partake in the microfinance programme but eventually it was initiated in all participating villages by the end of the project.

As yet, there have been few tensions in this form of collaborative research as the roles of each organisation have been clearly defined and strictly adhered to. On the other hand, there were a few minor logistical constraints which caused problems during data collection. Ole Rasmussen noted at the inception of the project that the quantitative component may not provide DanChurchAid with information on beneficiaries' perception of their services. This was because the purpose of the survey was to take a holistic scientific approach to evaluating the impact of microfinance programmes on poverty alleviation. Furthermore, it was possible that some beneficiaries may adapt their answers to survey questions if they believed that they were being queried by staff at DanChurchAid. In order to ameliorate this issue, a number of smaller qualitative projects were conducted to further elaborate on the survey results. These qualitative projects used a variety of methods including participant observation and individual interviews.

#### **Expected outcomes and lessons to be learnt**

As the project is still ongoing, it is difficult to analyse if the research collaboration has been as yet successful. The expected outcomes of the project are four academic papers focused around each research question, a series of articles targeted at NGOs and presentations on the findings. The project partners are pleased with the direction of the research as it has led to further collaborative projects between DanChurchAid and the University of Southern Denmark. The success of the collaboration has been attributed to a number of factors, the most important being each partners' ability to clarify expectations and ameliorate potential conflict through clear communication. Nikolaj Malchow-Møller believed that communication between the partners was strengthened by informal links pre-existent to the project. He stated:

*'(The project) has been a huge success. It is important for NGOs and universities to clarify expectations and meet regularly. Ole's old boss was a colleague of mine and the person from Rockwell foundation used to also be a colleague of mine'*

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