

DCR Knowledge Network Briefing Paper July 2011

Introduction

The Dutch Consortium for Rehabilitation (DCR) is committed to knowledge networking in order to improve the program quality. The consortium's Knowledge Network (KN) was established in September 2011 and actually consists of 80 persons. The KN is an action network¹ intended to fine-tune DCR's multi-sector intervention models, strengthen the capacity of local civil society actors, and empower local communities. The Knowledge Network is coordinated by HealthNet TPO Amsterdam (<http://www.healthnettpo.org>), with 5-year funding from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Themes of focus 2012-13

The KN currently focuses on knowledge generation around 6 themes: Economic Development, Inclusion of the Poorest, Adult Literacy & Livelihoods, Partnership, Conflict Sensitivity and Local Governance.

Collaboration

The KN is a North-South and South-South collaboration between the 4 member organisations of the consortium (ZOA, CARE Netherlands, and Save the Children Netherlands) and their partners in 7 countries (DR Congo, Liberia, Uganda, South Sudan, Sudan, Burundi and the Netherlands). During the first quarter of 2012, the KN engaged in a fruitful cooperation with two universities: Massey University in New Zealand, and the University of Amsterdam in the Netherlands. The cooperation with Massey University has resulted in the engagement of students in literature research related to the themes of focus of KN. The cooperation with the University of Amsterdam resulted in the engagement of students in field research and internships in the countries where the consortium is implementing its programme. Building bridges between the NGO sector and the academic world is mutually beneficial in giving students an opportunity to learn about the reality of working in Africa, and giving the consortium more access to the academic world.

Online platform

In the philosophy of online Communities of Practice (a common tool for knowledge sharing), a platform has been created on *Dgroups* (<http://next.dgroups.org/groups/dcr-kn>) for communication and information sharing. Each of the 6 themes is addressed by a "sub-community" of around 6 to 10 individuals.

Research

Agreement on a context-specific theory of change is the starting point for the formulation of research questions. A theory of change provides the theoretical and conceptual framework for understanding how the intervention is intended to work by identifying the assumptions underpinning the intervention and how the planned strategies are linked to the expected impacts and outcomes.

¹ ACTION NETWORKS are groups of organizations and/or individuals that coordinate in order to achieve a strategic goal—be it the scale-up of learning, provision of services, or advocacy around a policy issue. They often include diverse groups of organizations and/or individuals (Nelson, M. and Tejasvi, A. (2009), Partnering for Progress, available at: <http://elibrary.worldbank.org/content/article/1020-797x-11-1-21-24>).

Context-specific theories of change are formulated by field staff members of the consortium and the assumptions and knowledge gaps are translated into specific research questions. These questions are addressed at the level of communities by means of a combination of quantitative and qualitative research, aiming to contribute to local empowerment while fine-tuning intervention models. Examples of such research questions are: How can we foster active community participation after prolonged period of emergency intervention? How can community participation influence the accountability of decision makers on basic services? Does community governance increase the voices of the poorest? Research methodologies include interviews, surveys, life histories, focus group discussions, observations. Use is also made of participatory action research and scorecards. The expectation is that new actionable knowledge will be created that can be used for programme quality improvement from 2013 onwards.

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