

INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION AT THE INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

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INTRODUCTION

Working in the health area, an institution may not be able to properly develop/thrive without collaborating with international organizations or institutions. The institution needs knowledge, know-how, and technology from outside the country in pursuing the process of its development. This is in addition to locally available knowledge and know-how. Health is basically a local issue, but its development, especially in developing countries, needs international backup support. Nowadays, working with international outreach is therefore necessary for successful progress of an institution that deals with health and health-related areas.

International collaboration may take place at global, regional, or national levels. Several countries or institutions may work together at global and regional levels (multilateral), while two countries or two institutions in different countries may collaborate with each other (bilateral). Developing countries usually need support from international organizations/agencies to make effective collaboration possible. It therefore becomes a tripartite effort of three parties. Platforms provided by these organizations are necessary for catalyzing the collaboration and facilitating consideration of various issues involved.

To effect collaboration at regional and global scales also needs, among other capabilities, negotiation skill, because collaboration at these levels will also involve political and diplomatic dimensions. This is also applicable to collaboration at the institutional level which involves two or more countries. All these issues should be kept in mind while pursuing international collaboration, in spite of the fact that the primary purpose of the

collaboration may be technical/academic.

It should also be mentioned that international collaboration may lead to the development of networks in various specific areas of mutual concern and interest.

Prerequisites for international collaboration

a) There has to be elaboration of clear roles and functions of the institution within its organization/system.

b) The institution's policy, strategy and plan in pursuing its role and functions must be explicitly described.

c) Needs of the institution for international collaboration must be specifically identified.

d) A list of international organizations/agencies working in health and health-related fields, especially those of specific interest, is developed. In the process of this development, it is necessary to underscore their roles, functions, policies and plans, in order to properly match the institution's needs with what they may be able to offer. It is also essential to understand their requirements in international collaboration.

e) Even without any international collaboration, the institution has to always demonstrate efficiency and effectiveness in the implementation of its workplan/operational plan.

f) It is very important that the institution must always be able to show high quality in its work products, the products of its work, as well as in the management of its working process.

g) The institution must have, and be able to demonstrate, its capacity to work efficiently with the international community. As part of this, it must have adequate staff that is able to work internationally.

Some specific requirements

a) The institution's capacity in the use of ICT

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must be demonstrable, as well as its ability to efficiently communicate internationally through the internet.

b) Institution's website must be developed as an important tool for communication with international organizations/institutions.

c) Profiles of those international organizations with their lists of experts/specialists must be compiled for use in collaboration. At the same time, the institution's profile, which includes a list of its experts/specialists, has to be prepared.

d) The institution should have a special unit/section to deal with international organizations, to coordinate international activities, and to act as an information clearing house in matters relating to international affairs.

e) Even with this special unit, it has to be kept in mind that dealing with international organizations and managing international activities are the responsibilities of all individual units/sections within the institution.

f) That special unit/section dealing with the overall coordination with international organizations should have an appropriate title specifically assigned, such as International Relations Unit/Section.

g) The institution should organize orientation sessions relating to international collaboration, in such specific areas as international relations/affairs, and management of international activities, for all of its staff members.

h) This International Relations Unit must be capable in planning, communication, and coordination, both within and outside the institution.

International organizations for collaboration

Within health and health-related areas, there are several groups of international organizations/agencies.

- Within the UN system, these groups include (but are not limited to):

- WHO
- UNICEF
- UNFPA
- UNDP
- UNAIDS
- FAO

- Outside the UN system, these groups include (but are not limited to):

- Philanthropies/Charitable Foundations
 - The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
 - The Buffett Foundation
- Inter-governmental organizations
 - BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa)
 - ASEAN
 - EU

- Non-profit Voluntary NGOs
 - The Save the Children Fund
 - Medicine Sans Frontiers
- Special Funds
 - Global Fund
 - GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance

Traditionally, international organizations' roles could be classified into the following three groups;

- Technical/specialized agencies, like WHO, FAO;
- Funding agencies, like UNAIDS, UNDP, UNICEF; and
- Operations agencies, especially NGOs.

However, today the situation has changed. Even though most international organizations continue to consider themselves as technical, funding, or operations agencies, it is increasingly difficult to find agencies providing funds or grants, either within or outside UN system. They tend to go further into technical and operations roles.

Technical agencies render technical support/expert advice, while funding agencies provide funds or grants for development activities. Formerly, these two aspects could be conducted in parallel. Some agencies would provide technical advice, while others would provide funds for carrying out development activities. This situation might not be the case today. Collaboration today is usually in the form of project approach, whereby the institution and an international agency agree to jointly undertake a development activity (this activity may also be in a specific area of research). Normally, the institution is supposed to formulate a proposal for getting support from the international agency which may provide both funds and technical advice for project implementation.

An institution might desire to collaborate with another institution in another country with technical and financial support from an international agency. This is often possible through a formal networking at international level.

One important requirement for effective international collaboration is that the institution have staff members who are capable of formulating/developing project proposal. Also, the institution should be able to manage the implementation of the project when funds are available. There should be formal training, orientation and coaching of the staff on project formulation and management in both theory and practice.

Multilateral and bilateral international collaboration

This is another aspect of international

collaboration. The preceding material relates mostly to the multilateral type of collaboration, whereby an institution in one country works with its counterpart(s) in other country(ies) with support of an international agency. This type of collaboration usually takes place within the UN system or inter-governmental organizational settings.

An institution in one country working directly with another institution in another country is a bilateral collaboration. It usually takes place in the academic area. The institutions help each other in project development and management in education and training, exchange of staff, exchange of students, exchange of experts/specialists, etc. This type of collaboration is popularly practiced today through a joint agreement such as MoU, and with or without support from international agencies.

Both types of collaboration, to be effective, need to play on an international platform convened by an international organization.

Bilateral international agencies

In addition to playing their roles in multilateral collaboration, developed and better off countries have also moved towards international collaboration through their respective international development agencies, such as JICA, USAID, SIDA, CIDA, and TICA. These bilateral agencies need to be approached through their respective governments. Also, support from multilateral agencies, like WHO, UNICEF, or UNFPA, is to be provided with the agreement and commitment of the receiving institutions. It is worth noting that to work with bilateral international agencies, political and diplomatic considerations are essential prerequisites.

CONCLUSIONS

- Work with international organizations/agencies/institutions is an important requisite for the progress of institutional development.

- There is wide understanding of the needs for collaboration with international organizations.

- There is wide understanding of the policy and strategy of the international organizations.

- Institutional policy, strategy and planning must be readily available for sharing.

- Competence and capacity of the institution to work internationally is intact.

- There is a clear evidence of institutional capability and capacity in planning, communication and coordination.

- Local and international leadership by the institution must be demonstrable.

- There must be regular assessment of the efficiency and effectiveness of the institution's international collaboration, especially in terms of inputs from outside and the end products.

Finally, this is a concept paper written mostly from the author's experience. It is intended to facilitate further considerations and discussions.