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“Global food security and food safety:
The role of universities”

Pains and Gains of International Research Collaboration with Academia – Perspectives from an Extramural Research Institute

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Abstract

The International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) is an international, independent, non-profit organisation with the aim to improve food and nutritional security and to reduce poverty in developing countries through research for efficient, safe and sustainable use of livestock. Collaboration with academia has long been an integral part of ILRI's work as it leads to shared learning, sharing of resources, synergies, complementation and shaping of a new generation of scientists and potentially, decision makers.

The BMZ/GIZ-funded Safe Food, Fair Food project (2008–2016) collaborated with eight universities in Africa, two in Germany and one in Japan on food safety research in informal markets in sub-Saharan Africa. We use this project to illustrate examples of collaborative activities including joint research and research outputs, short term trainings to or from the academic partner(s), and models of co-supervision of students. We want to track project fellows and see where they operate today and if they have indeed become ‘champions’ for food safety policy making.

At the first glance, benefits of international collaboration seem to be more obvious to the academic partners in the South. These include short to long term technical capacity building, increased numbers of research outputs as well as access to research funding, technology and international networks. At the second look, exposure of students and researchers of the North to the environment and context of disease in low income countries will foster mutual understanding and future collaboration on global health research. In their later professional and personal lives, students and junior researchers of both the South and the North will then be prepared to make informed decisions in the event of global public health events and to consider, appreciate and judge global changes in their local, and regional context.

Keywords: Academia, capacity building, collaboration, food safety, global health, research for development