



Ethical Global Health Research

Reading: Building Research Capacity in Africa: Equity and Global Health Collaborations, Chu et al.

Discussion Guide

Goal: Grasp the importance of transferring skills and building local capacity when conducting research in low-income countries.

Suggested Discussion Questions:

1. Discuss as a group how you feel about approaching research through an equity lens—relying on locals to set agendas, be primary authors, etc. What are barriers to promoting ethical research?
2. What activities led by high-income countries (HICs) in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) other than research could benefit from following the guidelines for ethical research detailed in this article?
3. We all know it is important to conduct ethical research, but why? What consequences might arise from conducting research without collaboration from (or better, being led by) local institutions?

Key Quotes:

“Collaboration with HIC colleagues and institutions has enormous promise to bring expertise, funding, and resources to Africa. However, there is great potential for a power imbalance in these relationships. Much of the research carried out in Africa is led, funded, and published by HIC researchers without equal collaboration from LMIC colleagues” (2).

“HIC academics work for universities that typically measure the success of their faculty by research funding and publications. Even if HIC scientists genuinely want to advance African research agendas, building the research capacity of African collaborators may not be an important objective to their institutions” (2).

“Challenges arise, however, because some African hosts may be enthusiastic about twinning with ‘prestigious’ US universities, which consequently creates a power dynamic that can be inherently unequal and make African institutions reluctant to say ‘no’ to research requests and risk offending their new colleagues” (3).

Lesson Plan

Goal: Grasp the importance of transferring skills and building local capacity when conducting research in low-income countries.

Warm Up: As a group, discuss some of the key components of effective research. Then, list some of the skills required to successfully conduct effective research.

Diagnostic: Sift through the list of skills required to successfully conduct effective research. For each skill, discuss how one acquires this skill. Consider the institutions, programs, or specific trainings required.

Teaching Bit: The article states that effective research has four pre-requisites:

1. Individual research skills and ability
2. Appropriate infrastructure
3. Relevance to national policies
4. The ability to contribute to global research and policy needs

These pre-requisites, while accessible in most high-income countries (HICs), are harder to come by in low-and middle-income countries (LMICs). For this reason, combined with the accessibility of funding, institutions from HICs often lead research projects in LMICs. The article offers guidelines for how HICs can conduct ethical research in LMICs:

- **Always focus on the transfer of skills** from HICs to LMICs
- **Adhere to priorities and agendas set by locals**, assisting in developing agenda setting skills where possible
- **Form regional partnerships and long-term relationships** that cultivate trust, promoting mutual learning and transparent communication about goal setting, progress, and discoveries
- **Rely on local coordination and supervision** to prevent research duplication and to ensure that studies remain in line with local policies and priorities
- **Require authorship and dissemination of results by LMIC counterparts** in order to encourage ownership of scientific knowledge, clinical care, evidence-based research, and public policy locally
- **Think innovatively about ways to build partnerships** that will aid in the transfer of clinical, teaching, and research skills

Guided Practice: Research has great potential to contribute to meaningful health outcomes. However, research is often a metric by which faculty at academic medical institutions are evaluated-- it has the potential to secure funding for a specific project or could offer opportunities for career advancement.

Discuss as a group how you feel about approaching research through an equity lens—relying on locals to set agendas, be primary authors, etc. Then, answer the question: what are primary barriers to promoting ethical research?

Independent Practice: This article discusses ethics in relation to research; however, one could consider the same argument about many other activities that HICs lead in LMICs.

With a partner, first think of one example of an activity (other than research—e.g. medical brigades, teaching, etc.) that is normally led by a HIC in a LMIC. Then, have pairs answer the following three questions. Come back together and share with the larger group.

- Is this activity normally carried out in a way that transfers skills to build local capacity?
- How does this activity benefit the local community?
- How could this activity be altered to better transfer skills and be led by local needs and desires?

Assessment: Bring the discussion back to research—we know it is important to conduct ethical research, but why? As a group, discuss some examples of unethical research. What consequences might arise from conducting research without collaboration from (or better, being led by) local institutions?

Closer: Before leaving, ask if anyone is comfortable sharing research or another project that they have either been part of or heard of in a LMIC that may not have adhered to ethical research guidelines. Discuss how this project could have been designed and carried out in a more equitable manner.