

Editorial

“Research on” vs “Research with” Communities: A critique on the importance of multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary research teams with regard to uptake of innovations

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In this Issue of the African Journal of Rural Development (Vol. 2, Issue 3), 10 of the 12 articles published are authored by university-based research teams and for the other two articles, the authors are affiliated to National and International Research Institutions. All the articles, except for Nkunya (2017) and Nyongesa (2017) have a diverse representation in terms of authorship between and among departments at the same university/ institution engaged in knowledge co-creation with end-user communities as a strategy to enhance uptake and adoption. Although Nkunya (2017) and Nyongesa (2017) are single authored articles, there is emphasis on the importance of partnerships as a pre-requisite for research to enhance contribution to socio-economic development and accelerate attainment of the Sustainable Development

Goals (SDGs). Institutional engagement and representation in research implementation underpins the importance of multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary approaches in relation to promoting uptake of research outputs and innovations in rural development. The premise of this proclamation is based on the collaborative engagement limitations of the Linear Research and Development Model which makes the Integrated Research and Development Model, as discussed in Nkunya (2017), more superior on account of facilitating greater collaboration that recognises all partners as equal in the research implementation process.

The 12 articles in this Issue of the Journal address a diversity of issues as indicated in Table 1. The

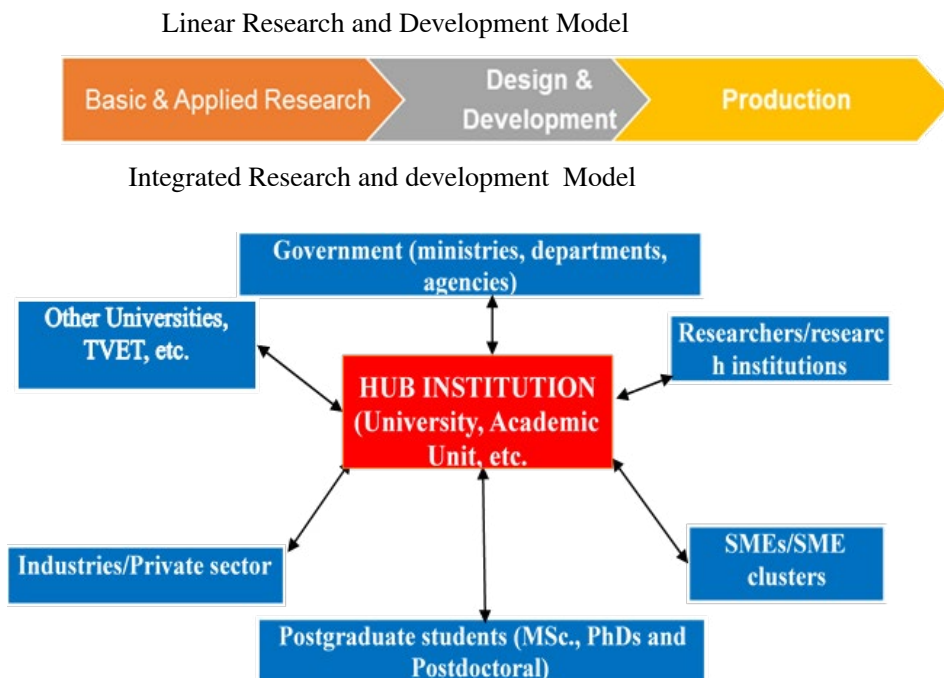


Figure 1. Schematic illustration of ability to accommodate and/ or attract collaboration in Linear Research and Development Model and Integrated Research and Development Model.

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key issues addressed are clearly very broad in scope and are associated with rural development processes that are characterised with complexity that can only be addressed with cooperation between expertise with diverse backgrounds both in natural and social sciences. This is one of the prime reasons why multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary approaches are very relevant in rural development contexts and their associated complexity (Farrell, 2011; Toomey *et al.*, 2015). Multi-disciplinarity draws on knowledge from different disciplines that stay within their boundaries; while inter-disciplinarity research analyses, synthesizes and harmonizes links between disciplines into coordinated and coherent whole. Indeed as observed in Choi and Pak (2006), Strengers (2012) and Torre (2014) inter-disciplinary research should not be viewed as research in two or more different disciplines but rather an integrated approach to generating solutions to complex challenges inherent in heterogeneous systems such as rural development. Context matters and in terms of rural development perspectives trans-disciplinary work moves beyond the bridging of divides within academe to engaging directly with the communities arrayed in production and use of knowledge outside of the academia.

With growing pressure to secure societal impact and

align efforts to milestones and targets as a means to demonstrate progress towards development frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), trans-disciplinarity continues to gain traction and has become a topical subject and approach in all research endeavours (Castree *et al.*, 2014). The consensus is that knowledge is and should be co-created between researchers and other stakeholders particularly the end-user communities. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize the fact that the process of knowledge co-creation is dependent on several facets that are habitually ignored in the implementation of both multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary research. For instance, research undertakings that entail knowledge co-creation among researchers and target beneficiaries should beseech relations that are reciprocal with high levels of trust between all involved. As recommended in Narzano *et al.* (2006) this involves both the design and implementation especially in trans-disciplinary research where care should be taken to ensure that the research questions and methods have been developed in collaboration with those social groups who are intended to be “impacted” by the work at hand. Meaningful involvement which is “research with communities” will yield the ultimate in empowerment of communities which is “citizenship control” (see Figure 2) as opposed

Table 1. Summary of core issues addressed in 12 articles published in the African Journal of Rural Development Volume 2 Issue 3

No. as per order of presentation in the Issue	Authors	The core messages addressed in the respective papers
Articles 1 and 2	Nkunya (2017); Mukhwana <i>et al.</i> , (2017)	Institutional arrangements and realignment of higher education institutions particularly universities for greater community engagement and rural development
Articles 3-7	Sebuliba <i>et al.</i> (2017a,b); Alio <i>et al.</i> (2017); Nyongesa (2017); Akello <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Policies and key drivers for translating research outputs into innovations for sustainable environment management and socio-economic growth and development
Articles 8 - 12	Dosso-Yovo <i>et al.</i> (2017); Khumalo <i>et al.</i> (2017); Mncube <i>et al.</i> (2017); Kawuki <i>et al.</i> (2017); Badji <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Strategies to overcome biotic factors in crop production

“research on communities” which does not equip end-users to make informed decisions thereby not promoting and/ or attaining intended uptake. This publication was made possible through Mastercard funding.

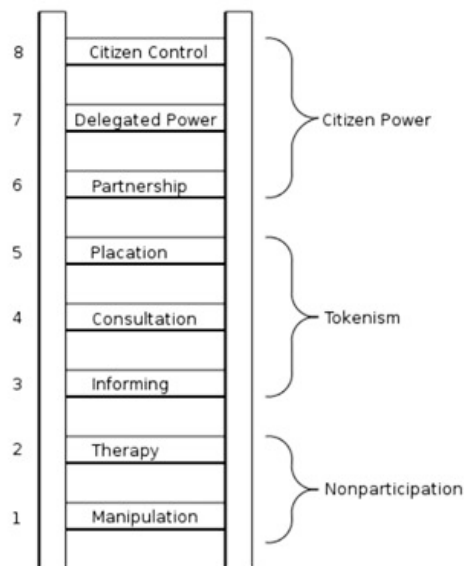


Figure 2. Ladder of citizen participation, Adopted from Arnstein (1969).

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