



'EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES THROUGH UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS IN PUBLIC HEALTH: A PILOT PROJECT IN NEPAL AND THE PHILIPPINES'

In many parts of the world, communities have had little voice in national public health initiatives. Health providers often take a top-down approach, 'preaching' to families about how they should live more healthy lives and ignoring their everyday realities.

Partnering with universities in Nepal and the Philippines, Prof. Anna Robinson-Pant, Dr. Laura Burke, Dr. Kamal Raj Devkota and Prof. Ma. Teresa Tricia Guison-Bautista, MD., along with a team of ten other international researchers, began a project to look at new ways of engaging with communities in public health. Taking an interdisciplinary approach, the project brings together two educational research centres and two institutes of medicine. The educational researchers contribute their expertise in adult learning, ethnography and participatory action research (PAR), and the medical researchers offer understanding of public health policy initiatives, training and education curricula within these contrasting country contexts.

The project grew out of two earlier research studies on intergenerational and indigenous learning implemented by the University of East Anglia UNESCO Chair (see <https://healthliteracy.ust.edu.ph>). Funded by the UK Medical Research Council PHIND (Public Health Intervention Development), the project is a collaboration between the University of Sussex (CORTH), the University of Santo Tomas in the Philippines and Tribhuvan University in Nepal. The aim is to pilot a more democratic model of partnership in public health between medical institutions and local communities.

How best can universities engage communities in a mutually respectful and equal partnership to advance public health education?

At the project launch, the team discussed the two 'interventions' within the proposed research. They explored what an intervention could look like in the two medical schools and considered how health courses might change to educate students differently and conduct student placements within communities in different ways, contributing directly to transforming attitudes towards marginalised communities. The project also sets out to implement an intervention in two selected communities drawing on participatory and ethnographic methods to share beliefs and co-construct knowledge around food and nutrition.

Recognising that public health initiatives often take a 'top-down' approach, ignoring everyday realities and using 'schooled literacy' to educate communities on health and training students in biomedical, western knowledge, the project seeks to create a more democratic



community partnership. By engaging with and validating local health knowledge and beliefs, the project aims to build on the existing community health assessments conducted by medical students and faculty within their courses. PAR and ethnographic methods have been key factors for success: Introducing students and faculty to these methodological approaches offers the opportunity to sit and listen and pay attention to what's going on around them in the communities where they work.

For more information on the project, its partners, and research team, you can visit <https://www.uea.ac.uk/about/school-of-education-and-lifelong-learning/research/international-education-and-social-change/unesco-chair-programme>. You can follow the project on social media @empcommunities

Prof. Anna Robinson-Pant and Dr. Laura Burke recently started at the University of Sussex and they joined us for their first CORTH Conversation seminar, which took place on the 21st November in the Jubilee Building. They were accompanied online by Dr. Kamal Raj Devkota of Tribhuvan University, Nepal, and Prof. Ma. Teresa Tricia Guison-Bautista, MD. of the University of Santo Tomas in the Philippines.



Prof. Anna Robinson-Pant is the PI on the Empowering Communities project in CORTH at the University of Sussex. She holds the UNESCO Chair in Adult Literacy and Learning for Social Transformation at the University of East Anglia, a collaborative research, training and policy-focused partnership with partners in Nepal, Ethiopia, Malawi and the Philippines. Her ethnographic research in Nepal - *Why eat green cucumber at the time of dying? Exploring the link between women's literacy and development* - received the UNESCO International Award for Literacy Research in 2001 and marked the start of her ongoing collaboration with UNESCO on adult literacy.



Dr. Laura Burke is a Post-doctoral Research Assistant with CORTH, University of Sussex and Lecturer in Global Public Health Wolfson Institute of Population Health, Queen Mary University London. Laura is a medical anthropologist with special interest in reproduction, environment, and conflict. Her doctoral research including over 18 months ethnographic fieldwork in Timor-Leste and investigated how communities rebuild and 'reproduced' life after conflict and crisis. This project examined the frictions between reproductive health and development programs, community practices and environment, and conflicting visions for prosperity in the context of Timor-Leste's post war population boom.

As the postdoctoral research assistant on the Empowering Communities project in CORTH, Laura brings a strong background in ethnography, PAR methods as well as anthropology and global health. She also currently lectures in anthropology and global health at Queen Mary University London.



Dr. Ma. Teresa Tricia Guison-Bautista is Chairperson, Department of Preventive, Family and Community Medicine at the University of Santo Tomas of the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery. Tricia is Co-Investigator in the Philippines on the Empowering Communities project. In the realm of community engagements,

Tricia is a hands-on planner and implementer of national and local primary care projects for more than 20 years. These include community-based health promotion programs and home care for palliative and aged care. She is capped with several publications, presentations, and key accomplishments in clinical and community medicine.



Dr. Kamal Raj Devkota is Assistant Professor, Faculty of Education & Research Centre for Educational Innovation and Development (CERID), Tribhuvan University, Nepal. Kamal is Co-I in Nepal on the Empowering Communities project. In the realm of community engagement, Kamal is engaged in several research projects including family literacy and intergenerational learning, which was conducted in collaboration with UEA UNESCO Chair in Nepal, Malawi, Ethiopia and the Philippines. He has worked as Co-I in Nepal on the use of language and technologies in marginalized communities in Nepal, a project run in Nepal, Bangladesh, Senegal and South Sudan, led by the Open University, UK. He has also been working as the PI for Disbursement Linked Indicators (DLIs) evaluation and verification research under School Sector Development Plan (SSDP) for the Government of Nepal. He has published in the area of (school/tertiary) education, language policies and practices and indigenous knowledge systems