

PARES Case Study of Engagement & Involvement for Resilience

Case Study Title/ID: Ethiopia, Covid19, Universities as enablers

Country/location: Ethiopia: Jimma city, Seka Chekorsa, & Gomma districts, Jimma Zone

Crisis/challenge type: COVID-19

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PARES Domain illustrated by this case study:

Learning and Capabilities: universities as enablers of community engagement for crisis-response

Recommended Actions

For Communities: Use information and support from universities to take action when disease outbreaks/other crises occur.

For Governments: Support universities to regularly engage with communities as part of their routine activities (to build trust)

Work with community-engaged universities to mobilise local engagement in crisis response and risk communication.

For NGOs & health program implementers: Partner with local university stakeholders to mobilise local engagement in crisis response and risk communication.

For Funders: Provide funding for universities to regularly engage with communities as part of their routine activities (to build trust) and to work with local stakeholders to mobilise local engagement in crisis response and risk communication.

Data for this case analysis

Primary data collected between March-May 2024 from stakeholders at zone, district and community levels: key informant interviews, 9 focus group discussions, and 23 in-depth interviews.

Key Message

When universities regularly engage with communities, their information is trusted and they can mobilise multiple stakeholders for local crisis response.

Jimma University (JU) has longstanding presence in communities of Jimma zone through its Community Based Education approach which sees regular interaction between JU staff and students and community members in matters of research. During the Covid-19 outbreak, it was therefore regarded as a trusted source of health information and messages and was able to mobilise a wide range of stakeholders to support community engagement and involvement in response planning and actions.

Case study summary

Jimma University has a strong commitment to community service. Besides a medical centre, all university programmes have incorporated community-based learning activities, bringing students to surrounding villages for several periods during their training. For this reason, the university was a central actor in the response to Covid-19. The university headquartered the Jimma Emergency Response Center (JEOC), together with the Jimma Zone and Jimma Town Health Office. The community service of the students was turned into dissemination of knowledge and action for Covid prevention and diagnostics. Volunteer groups included returned university students, who actively promoted hygiene practices and establishing WASH facilities. They also supported law enforcement efforts, working with community police to encourage adherence to the recommended preventive measures. Moreover, Jimma University Community Radio was utilized to provide continuous information by inviting health professionals to inform the community about the virus and prevention methods. This radio station broadcasts in the local language and reaches over one million listeners in Jimma Town and the surrounding areas, covering a 120 km radius.

Detailed explanation of engagement mechanisms

Context that provides the conditions in which the observed actions work

Jimma University (JU) has a long-standing presence in Jimma zone districts and villages thanks to its Community Based Education approach which sees regular interaction between JU staff and students and community members in matters of research. Besides a medical centre, all university programmes have incorporated community-based learning activities, bringing students to surrounding villages for several periods during their training.

The actions (mechanisms) that were observed to lead to resilience outcomes

Due to its long-standing commitment to local action and community engagement, Jimma University is trusted as a source of information, particularly health information. For this reason, the university was a central actor in the response to Covid-19.

The university headquartered the Jimma Emergency Response Center (JEOC), together with the Jimma Zone and Jimma Town Health Office. The JEOC led risk communication, surveillance, and case management efforts in collaboration with the zonal health department and community task forces. They jointly organized awareness-raising campaigns using local community structures, religious leaders, and community volunteers appointed to raise awareness and encourage preventive measures practices.

University staff and students led by example. The community service of the students was turned into dissemination of knowledge and action for Covid prevention and diagnostics. Volunteer groups included returned university students, who actively promoted hygiene practices and establishing WASH facilities. They also supported law enforcement efforts, working with community police to encourage adherence to the recommended preventive measures. University staff donated a proportion of their salaries to the local crisis-response, which supported provision of food to quarantined and vulnerable households, and other emergency-response needs. Moreover, Jimma University Community Radio was utilized to provide continuous information by inviting health professionals to inform the community about the virus and prevention methods. This radio station broadcasts in the local language and reaches over one million listeners in Jimma Town and the surrounding areas, covering a 120 km radius.

Observed outcomes

The key outcome achieved in response to the Covid-19 pandemic was improved communities' understanding of the pandemic and its prevention methods, which led to the adoption of the recommended preventive measures, specifically wearing of facemasks, physical distancing, and hygiene practices, leading to fewer infections and deaths over time.

The actions of the University also supported vulnerable community members

through their engagement and resource mobilisation efforts which ensured access to food and materials needed to prevent the spread of the virus. The JU-led structured support arrangements minimised the risk of virus exposure and duplication of efforts by ensuring fair and equitable resource distribution.

Case Evidence

Vignettes #1 #2, #5 in Ethiopia – Covid19 – Supporting Evidence document.

Related case studies

Operational systems

Ethiopia – Covid19 – Resource Mobilization and Management

Ethiopia – Covid19 – Multi-sectoral Collaboration

Other relevant case studies

Ethiopia

Ethiopia – Drought – Trusted Leaders and Communication

Ethiopia – Drought – Knowledge Integration

Ethiopia – Drought – Social Capital and Collective Action

Ethiopia – Drought – Embedded and Equitable Partnerships

Universities as Enablers

Sierra Leone – Malaria-Science Shop – Universities as Enablers

Infectious Diseases

Sierra Leone – Lassa – Trusted Leaders

Sierra Leone – Lassa – Knowledge Systems Alignment

Sierra Leone – Lassa – Communication & Information Systems

Sierra Leone – Lassa – Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration

Sierra Leone – Lassa – Institutional Learning

Sierra Leone – Lassa – Social Learning