

Collaboration ENSP-ITM: 25 years of working towards the same goals

The collaboration between the two institutions started in February 1989 when the technical director of the Moroccan Ministry of Health (MOH) and the Head of the Public Health Research and Training unit from the Antwerp Institute of Tropical Medicine (ITM), set up the National Institute of Health Administration (INAS). ITM literally exported its International Course in Health Development (ICHHD), thus expediting the creation of a Master in Public Health (MPH) training course and giving INAS access to its extensive experience in Health Systems Research (HSR). The MOH opted for a partnership with ITM because it respects the same values and pursues common objectives: the improvement of the health system from the bottom by training future leaders of change (health facility managers), and the development of better tools and attitudes.

These early years were exciting and ITM put in a lot of effort; adapting its MPH curriculum to a Moroccan context, teaching, involving INAS in several international research projects and undertaking a number of key HRS studies in Morocco. The impact of this academic collaboration quickly became clear. Moroccan managers adopted the Antwerp public health jargon and shared the ITM's vision of health systems. As a result, INAS graduates exerted considerable influence on local health systems while pursuing their career.

The research local specialists carried out in Morocco during that period, i.e. on unmet obstetric needs, had important international repercussions. Twenty five years later, its methodology is still used globally. The results identified the hospital as the weak link in response to obstetric needs and helped put these facilities on the political agenda. ITM benefitted from exchanges with both Moroccan health professionals and academics from Canada, Belgium and France, all regular visitors to INAS.

INAS and ITM developed an exchange programme whereby managers from INAS came to teach and share their experience in Antwerp.

Over the years, the teaching assignments gradually diminished and ITM became an international research partner. It would have been the perfect opportunity for INAS executives to undertake a PhD. Due to diverging priorities, the challenge was not taken up. In 1998, the institutional collaboration was formally re-launched thanks to the framework agreement between ITM and the Belgian Development Cooperation. It responded to a call for help from INAS to organize a follow-up of its graduates (action research on continued training - "matching training to employment"), assess the impact of training on and the changes within the Ministry. At the same time, an international research on clinical audits strengthened relations and got INAS involved with other research networks. This is the only research so far to measure the frequency and type of severe acute maternal complications.

Between 2002 and 2005, exchanges were rather low key with the exception of the ITM Maghreb alumni meeting, with a focus on family medicine, held at INAS in 2003. In 2005, INAS called on ITM to help put the vision of its new director into action by establishing an e-learning platform to maximize learning, starting a doctoral training programme for its managers and creating new learning channels. These objectives are all listed in the last two institutional collaboration agreements (2008-2016).

In 2013, INAS became ENSP: l'École Nationale de Santé Publique. Its new director redefined the collaboration in 2014 and plans to make of ENSP a training and research hub between Europe, the Maghreb and West Africa.