

Non-Standard Research Outputs

Collaborative Research: A Pathway for Research to All

Under Original Creative Works Theme

1. Research Background

The University of South Pacific's (USP) Emalus Campus (EC) in Vanuatu has been a Law based campus and thus not much science courses being offered. This has obviously never encouraged having a science lab that would facilitate any scientific study to be conducted at EC by any staff or researcher visiting Vanuatu. Added, at times it was understood that the mood of the nation is against in favoring science courses at schools and colleges. May be the lack of qualified teachers might be the sole reason which led to lack of interest towards science communication.

Taking this typical and challenging atmosphere as an opportunity, I decided to think creatively to build from scratch. A systematic approach was planned to incorporate slow and steady science communication in the campus and at the schools. Added tireless efforts were made to reach to various ministries and departments to have first-hand information on possible research and capacity building opportunities.

2. Collaborative Research – A Creative Way forward:

After a yearlong review of the contacts, opportunities, platforms and stakeholder meetings, it was understood that individual research at the campus wouldn't be feasible due to lack of facilities or staff to support. It was also learnt during the review that there are multiple research studies being underway in the country from various universities and organizations in various fields. These include conventional research studies, field visits by Masters and PhD students, feasibility studies etc.

The brainstorm has led to move forward in a creative way. It was decided to float "Collaborative Research" idea to facilitate and fill the gap of research in science streams at the campus. In moving forward, extensive work was made in communications and visits to all stakeholders to utilize the campus as a flat-form to carry out their research studies in the

country. In spite of best efforts, the result was disappointing as no one has turned to take the opportunity.

After further brainstorm, the same exercise was repeated with a promise of logistic and non-financial support from USP. This idea has hit the target on the bull's eye. Enquires has poured from all over the world in knowing further details. Based on the requirements, reports were tailor made for specific requirement with feasibility and approximate budgets. This has led to the confidence in submission of proposals to various funding agencies for their execution in Vanuatu. Multiple visits, interactions, field studies were part of the assessments done by various universities and national research centers in foreseeing the possible research areas to collaborate. The key success in this regard was liaising with the appropriate contact persons in the ministry/department to feed the collaborator with necessary background of the problem and possible data sets to work with the drafting. This has in turn created a wide network with contacts all over the world.

3. Collaborative Research Impact:

The creative idea of collaborative research at Emalus campus has brought a sea of change in research outlook both at the campus and in the country. The idea has now led to wide spread awareness of possible avenues for staff and students to reach for funding with collaborative support from external researchers. The government has been actively pursuing this mode in enhancing further research capacity building in the country.

Following are some of the impacts that were generated from this collaborative approach.

- USP's Emalus Campus has now being popularized all over the world as an active research hub facilitating various research studies.
- Students and staff are now being part of multiple research studies being under way in the country.
- Memorandums of Understanding's have been signed with: Oxford University, Griffith University, Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas) (UK's National Research Center), Environmental Science Research Centre (New Zealand's National Research Center). Collaborative research and student and staff exchange were part of these agreements and currently honored by both parties.

- A Letter of Agreement was signed with Ocean Foundation, USA to undertake Ocean Acidification studies in Vanuatu.
- A consultancy agreement was signed with Oxford University to facilitate their studies.
- Collaborative research studies were on going with University of New South Wales, University of Auckland, University of Technology Sydney, Queensland University, University of Bern, PNG Unitech and University of Tsukuba at the campus.
- An estimated FJ\$ 200,000 worth of equipment has come under the property of USP due to the kind donations from various collaborators.
- Cefas – UK, has now started to establish a micro plastics lab which would be a hub for the whole Pacific region. Once completed and start operating from November 2018, it would bring some of the best researchers working on marine plastic litter. Masters and PhD students of USP are going to be attached for their research works.
- The Ministry of Trade have come forward to establish a lab for analysis of food and meat commodities and thus to negate the dependence on Australia and New Zealand. This would not develop the research skills of students and staff, but would facilitate as an excellent avenue for trainings for various stakeholders.
- Romar Asia Pacific Ltd., has come forward to establish a research center for medicinal cannabis and negotiations were under way in this regard.

Conclusion:

In spite of being away from colleagues and without any facilities to do research at the campus, I had chosen to challenge those constraints through a creative way – the way of collaborative research. Now from scratch, the creative ideas of mine have built an international research base for world renowned universities and national research institutes in doing cutting edge research. In turn, these had not only brought revenue but greatly benefiting the research needs of students and staff of USP. It is hoped that the campus would transform as a South Pacific research hub and forefront in facilitating all regional research needs. It can be concluded that collaborative research would relinquish better opportunities for South Pacific researchers as it would outshine limitations of expertise and infrastructure and enhance better research skills.
