One Health: Connecting Humans, Animals and the Environment
Video Transcript

Eye opener stories once we have crossed to the other side

[Esther Schelling]: Constanze and Karin, thank you very much for joining me for this discussion on mixed methods. I'm a trained veterinarian who soon went into epidemiology after my studies. It was easy for me to acknowledge that human and veterinary medicine are, in principle, the same, with some different patient care, of course. Medical sciences largely use textbooks. And actually, the largest textbooks I had served me well as a pillow during my field studies.

My field study was among mobile pastoralists. Pastoralists have since a long time very good experiences with vaccinations, particularly of livestock vaccine. But they request more information on vaccination of children and women. We first have to convince them that only three doses fully protect a child. And this we have shown with this fully set up tent that fully protect. This was really an eye opener for me to realise that a lot of health problem solutions are from outside of medicine. Our biomedical approaches do not explain everything. And particularly, they do not help us always how to best approach a health problem. So Constanze, how do you perceive this from your perspective as a medical anthropologist?

[Constanze Pfeiffer]: Thanks a lot, Esther, well, as you said, I'm a medical anthropologist. And as medical anthropologists, we mainly work with qualitative methods, meaning working with in-depth interviews, focus group discussions or observations. And we also work in very context-specific environments because we really want to learn about the context. And we realise that we are, at the moment, needed more than ever in order to complement quantitative study designs. Quantitative study designs mainly rely on surveys and they generate numbers. But we want to move beyond numbers in order to learn what people really think, how they experience their daily realities. And in order to do so, qualitative approaches are key.

[Karin Hediger]: Well, I'm a psychologist. Medical sciences have always been close. But we were also trained in both qualitative and quantitative methods to just observe and to talk to the patients and doctors. And I assume also veterinarians are not efficiently trained to acknowledge the human behaviour in illness, and that sometimes context matters. And well both methods are like different lenses which will look at the same subject of a study. And the boundaries between qualitative and quantitative methods are sometimes not that cut short as it seems. And during my interdisciplinary collaborations, I have learned that different perspectives are an enormous enrichment, and that inputs from different perspectives can sometimes lead to the next step or even a solution of a problem.

[Esther Schelling]: Indeed. Once I have learned more social sciences, I became amazed that in natural sciences the self reflectiveness and this interviewer or observer effect is often dually neglected, if not totally ignored. Social scientists do a much better job here. Already the pure presence of a researcher changes attitudes of a community of people and can also lead to unexpected outcomes, such as overall increased security of a community. What do you think?

[Constanze Pfeiffer]: I fully agree with you, Esther. And I think that's why it's important that different disciplines join forces. And we all need to be prepared that if we join forces, it is a very time consuming process. Because in order to appreciate what one discipline can contribute and also how other disciplines can come in, this takes time. But it's a also very rewarding process. And when I speak of disciplines, I do

not refer to neighbouring disciplines, such as sociology and anthropology. I refer more to disciplines that are not so close, such as if entomologists collaborate with sociologists.

[Karin Hediger]: Yes, and I think there is hardly any blueprints or books that say on how we should work together. And I think it is important to accept that it takes a long breath, and thus all need to be insured that it is worthwhile working together. And this can be done best by using good examples and good practise that show that we have greater conclusions than what just one discipline could have done alone.

[Esther Schelling]: Yes. It seems we all agree that today's health problems cannot be solved by one discipline alone, not even by a similar group of disciplines. We really need to foster this interdisciplinary collaborations, and particularly between social and natural sciences. But I also think it's important that each discipline keeps its roots. As our former director used to say: 'No roots, no fruits.'

[Constanze Pfeiffer]: Very true. But I also have to say, we are very happy that we can closely collaborate with the One Health team at the Institute, because the One Health Group very much appreciates and acknowledges the importance of considering social and cultural factors in public health research. And we just started initiating a joint project together that is implemented in Guatemala. And we basically bring together Maya healers, community representatives, as well as government representatives and different scientists with different disciplinary backgrounds. And we will tackle zoonotic disease with this combination of different people and with a mixed methods approach. And I think that's a very interesting way of doing research, and I'm looking forward to that.

[Karin Hediger]: Well, I think we all agree that it is not a question of either/or, but rather when/which. The fourth week of this One Health course will give you more insights on how qualitative studies contribute to our understanding of disease, and of ill and good health at the interfaces of human, animal, and environmental health, also that potential control measures need to be adapted to a context. And moreover, you will learn that not only academia contributes to the solution finding.

[Esther Schelling]: Constanze and Karin, thank you so much that we could introduce this week together. Thanks. Thank you