Summer School on Decolonising Global Health with a Focus on Biomedical Sciences, Research and Education

Summary and first impressions

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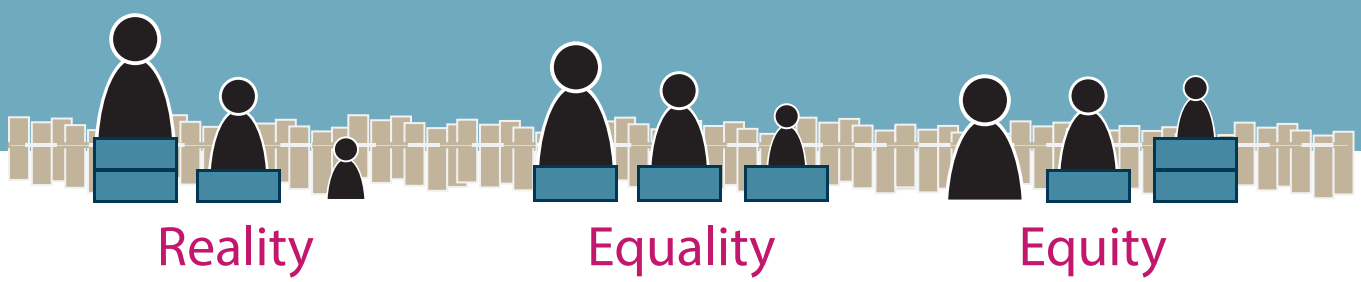
BIH QUEST Center hosted the Summer School on Decolonising Global Health focusing on Biomedical Sciences, Research, and Education from March 25-28, 2024. Funded by DAAD and EINSTEIN Foundation, the event attracted a diverse group of scholars, practitioners, and decolonisation experts, emphasizing responsible research principles to promote a more equitable and inclusive scientific community.



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The Summer School on Decolonising Global Health, focusing on Biomedical Sciences, Research, and Education, was hosted by **QUEST Center for Responsible Research at the Berlin Institute of Health** from March 25 to 28, 2024 in Berlin.

Receiving project funding from the German Academic Exchange Service and the Einstein Foundation, the Summer School was designed to engage alumni of the Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin's extra-occupational Master's Programme in International Health, as well as external researchers and practitioners, who are keen on exploring how decolonial approaches can transform global health education, research and practice.

The in-person event attracted a diverse group of scholars and practitioners from the Global South and North who came together to share experiences from their respective contexts and collectively develop strategies for the implementation of Responsible Research & Innovation principles on a global level to promote a more equitable and inclusive scientific and research community.

Discussions particularly emphasised the need to tackle mechanisms ans structures that specifically exclude researchers and practitioners from the Global South.

Participants came from a multiplicity of organisations of academia, public health, civil society and governance. They hold leading positions at e.g. the WHO, University of Ghana Legon, Asian Development Bank, Government of the Northwest Territories Canada, GIZ, Royal Free London NHS Foundation Trust, Ministry of Health Myanmar, CIHEB Kenya, Save the Children International, KfW Cameroon and Red Cross Central African Republic.

The Summer School was conducted by four consortium partners: The **BIH QUEST Center for Responsible Research,** the **Unit for Undergraduate Medical Education of the University of Witwatersrand**, the **Latin American research and teaching organization MetaDocencia**, the Master of Science Program International Health of the I**nstitute of International Health at Charité** – Universitätsmedizin Berlin committed to integrating decolonial practices into the health sciences, education, and research. Sarah Wendt, a Global Studies expert with rich experiences from Berlin to New Delhi, specializes in qualitative social research focusing on global power structures and Dr. Christiane Wetzel, a neuroscientist and science manager leading the Monitoring & Evaluation Unit at BIH QUEST Center organised the Summer School together with Dr. Hans-Friedemann Kinkel, who coordinates the International Health postgraduate program supported by adminstrative officer Nora Monzer.

The programme and design of the Summer School was co-creatively developed together with colleagues affiliated with research organisations in the Global South.

Dr. Mantoa Mokhachane, neonatologist and Director of Undergraduate Medical Education at the Witswatersrand University in Johannesburg, SA, utilizes decolonial methodologies in medical training. Dr. Mohammed Patel, an innovative educator in dentistry, and Dr. Ayesha Jacub, a medical doctor and anti-racism activist in public health, enrich the program with their extensive teaching experiences and commitment to decolonization.

Dr. Laura Ación, Co-directors of MetaDocencia, ARG focuses on making scientific knowledge accessible and equitable across Spanish-speaking communities. Dr. Jesica Formoso and Dr. Karina Formoso, brought in their perspective as experimental researchers in neuropsychology and molecular biology, respectively. Laura Ascenzi is a lecturer at the National University of Córdoba with a passion for community engagement.

In addition, the organizing consortium was joined by Muneera A. Rasheed, a Global Health researcher who has been involved in scholar activism related to Decolonising Global Health for several years. She supported the event as an external mentor, especially supervising participants' interest groups throughout the week.

The topics of the Summer School were centered around the interrelated concepts of **Responsible Research and Innovation** (RRI) and **Decolonisation**. These concepts challenge traditional practices and paradigms within biomedical research and education, advocating for a transformative approach that is ethically aligned with global justice and inclusivity.

The concept of ‚Responsible Research and Innovation' was initially developed to respond to the ethical challenges posed by technological advances. Originating from European Union initiatives, RRI emphasizes accountability in science, requiring that research outcomes be socially desirable and inclusive. This includes engaging diverse publics in the research process to ensure that the science produced is robust and reflective of societal needs and values. The refinement of RRI principles applied in the context of the Summer School, such as inclusion, anticipation, reflexivity, and responsiveness — and the proposed addition of sustainability and care — served as foundational elements for conducting research that respects diverse epistemologies, including traditional and indigenous knowledge systems. This shift towards a more globally inclusive approach addresses the disparities between researchers in the Global North and South, promoting a democratisation of scientific inquiry that aligns with principles of open science. The momentum behind the decolonisation movement, driven by scholars and activists from both the Majority World and their allies in the West, compels a re-evaluation of how knowledge is created and disseminated. Decolonisation uncovers contemporary colonial continuities, challenges the Eurocentric norms and practices prevalent in Western academic institutions and seeks to reframe research and education to better reflect and respect the multiplicity of global perspectives. The movement highlights the need for Western institutions to move beyond superficial commitments to equity, diversity, and inclusion, advocating instead for a radical redistribution of power and resources that facilitates genuine change.

Integrating the principles of RRI and Decolonisation, our Summer School aimed to foster an environment where biomedical research and education are critically examined and restructured to prioritize ethical standards and social justice. By aligning RRI's push for inclusive, anticipatory, and responsive research practices with decolonisation's focus on dismantling colonial legacies and recentering marginalized knowledge, the program established a dynamic theoretical base from which to explore new paradigms in global health.

Our framing ensured that the Summer School could serve as a transformative platform, engaging participants in critical dialogue and practical activities that strive to reshape global health education and research. The goal was to cultivate a cohort of researchers and educators who are not only skilled in their respective fields but are also deeply committed to fostering a more equitable and inclusive global scientific community. Through this dual focus, the Summer School opened up to creating pathways for the meaningful integration of diverse, often sidelined, perspectives into the mainstream of global health discourse and practice.

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To integrate the principles of RRI and decolonisation, the program provided a unique educational opportunity designed to transform global research and healthcare education paradigms. In addition, it served as a dynamic platform for advancing discussions on critically addressing global health research and education through decolonization.

The Keynotes set the central tone of the Summer School, shaping its epistemological framework. Panels were conducted as moderated discussions between selected panellists, and a subsequent Q&A session was held with participants.

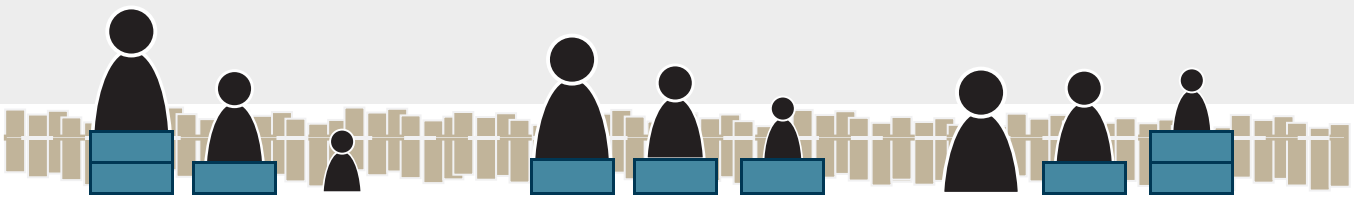
Presented by Laura Ación, Laurel Ascenzi, Jesica Formoso, and Karina Formoso of MetaDocencia, Argentina, the session ‚**Responsible Research & Decolonisation from a Latin American Perspective**' explored the impact of geopolitics on health management and research policies in Latin America. The speakers shared their lived experiences as researchers in the region, discussing the unique challenges and dynamics that influence health research and policies.

Chaired by Ayesha Jacub of Wits University, the keynote ‚**Global Health Decolonisation Movement in Africa**' featured Dr. Jabulani Ncayiyana and Dr. Samuel Oti. The session provided a platform for these scholars to share insights from their extensive work in public health and international development, focusing on the decolonisation of global health practices in Africa and discussing potential strategies for effecting change.

Led by Mantoa Mokhachane, Ayesha Jacub, and Mohammed Patel of Wits University, the session ‚**Decolonising the Mind, Decolonising Health and Epistemic Diversity'** delved into the theoretical foundations of colonization and its intersection with health. The discussion covered the decolonisation of health concepts, emphasizing epistemic diversity and practical applications, such as in Mantoa Mokhachane's doctoral research on professional identity formation through decolonial frameworks.

The interactive panel discussion ‚**Decolonising Spaces and Medical Education in South Africa**', led by Mantoa Mokhachane, Ayesha Jacub, and Mohammed Patel, focused on the decolonisation of physical and educational spaces in South African medical education. It highlighted the importance of space and iconography in decolonising efforts, with Mohammed Patel discussing pedagogical frameworks and methods for advancing decolonisation in medical education.

Karin Höhne of the Berlin Institute of Health at Charité presented the panel discussion ‚**Diversity in German Health Research - Structural Challenges & Transformation Needs**' on challenges on this topic within the German health research sector. The session reviewed data on participation in the German research system, identifying barriers and discrimination faced by marginalized groups. It concluded with a discussion on missing perspectives in health research and strategies to address these gaps.



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Further, a number of workshops further engaged participants in sharing and discussing experiences and perspectives, starting with the ‚**Framing Decolonisation**', presented by Sarah Wendt, Ayesha Jacub, Mohammed Patel and Mantoa Mokhachane, set the theoretical foundation for the Summer School. The session engaged participants in defining 'decolonisation' and related concepts. Participants reflected on their understandings of decolonisation, which were then integrated into the broader approaches introduced throughout the program. This workshop was pivotal in establishing the tone and approach to decolonisation that both organisers and participants would adhere to during the Summer School. Another workshop, ‚**Medical Health Care for All?**', hosted by Amina Hikari Fall, Dennis Sadiq Kirschbaum, and Nora Benariba from Glokal e.V., this workshop involved critical self-reflection on global health research and practice, particularly in the context of the Corona pandemic. The session explored the intersections of colonial and racist continuities in medicine and global healthcare, aiming to highlight action recommendations and the resistant perspectives of BIPOCs and allies.

Further, in the workshop series **‚What does decolonisation mean to us?',** Summer School participants were invited to organise and conduct workshops on their chosen topics, reflecting their diverse professional and personal contexts. The workshops were participant-led, with proposals submitted and selected during the application process, allowing for a rich exchange of ideas and experiences. Thus, the workshops facilitated a detailed exploration of decolonisation in global health, allowing participants to delve deeply into specialized topics and share their expertise and perspectives with the Summer School community. Insights were shared on various aspects of global health research and practice, with practical examples discussed to apply the lessons learned throughout the Summer School. Topics ranged from systems science approaches to decolonisation, multilingual public health communication strategies, and approaches to enhancing authorship diversity:

- Linguistic Inclusion in Global Public Health Material

by Paula S. Herrera-Espejel

- Unveiling Colonial Biases: Decolonizing Data in Global Health Research

by Eun Soo Chung

- How to rethink decolonialisation in Global Health - A system science approach

by Maximilia Josina Hogrebe

- Global Health Research Decolonization: what about the standard?

by Awsan Bahattab

- Decolonising Listening and Learning Practices

by Owasim Akram

- Decolonization Dialogue: Engaging perspectives and reflective practices

by Marcus Ilesanmi

- Positive Youth Development (PYD), foundations and main findings

by Pablo Alejandro Pérez Díaz

- Senses and connectedness - how to shape a Global Health 4.0

by Sophie Brödel

To enhance long-term engagement, the **'Ways Forward' sessions** aimed at the formation of interest-based working groups, which collectively develop action steps. To ensure the feasibility of these projects beyond the Summer School, participants pitched their projects to expert mentors who gave feedback from their experience in Decolonize Global Health Movements.

The interest group building and project development was facilitated by Laura Ación, Laurel Ascenzi, Jesica Formoso and Karina Formoso from MetaDocencia and focused on project development related to decolonising global health. The four sessions were structured to enhance collaboration, provide strategic tools, and culminate in project pitches aimed at fostering decolonial practices in various sectors of Global Health research and practice.

In session one, participants formed groups based on their interests, selecting topics to develop throughout the week. This initial session aimed to foster networking, establish working guidelines, and form project teams. In session two, groups outlined their projects using tools such as a project Canvas and problem tree analysis, with facilitation from the workshop leaders. In session three, participants refined their project pitches with the aid of tools and feedback obtained in the previous sessions. In session four, the focus was on identifying potential collaborators and funders. Batool Almarzouq introduced the EINSTEIN Award, a significant funding opportunity for promoting quality in research, as a potential resource. During the four days of the Summer School, the following projects were developed:

- **Micro Ethics Matters**
- **Best practices for decolonizing data collection**
- **Way to Say**
- **Decolonizing ethical committees of institutions**

Finally, Lioba Hirsch from the University of Edinburgh and Muneera A. Rasheed from the University of Bergen provided feedback and recommendations based on their extensive experience in scholarly activism related to Decolonising Global Health research and practice. They offered insights on maximizing the potential impact and sustainability of the projects.

Thus, this series of sessions facilitated the development of innovative projects and provided a practical framework for advancing decolonial practices in global health research and education.

Preliminary Reflections

Overall, the summer school was exceptionally well received by the participants, speakers, and collaborators due to its unique atmosphere, its open-minded and lively discussions, its high level of commitment to sharing personal experiences, and an extraordinary motivation to work co-creatively together on future strategies shaping the global dimension of (bio)medical education and research on health and well-being.

A s organizers, we are thrilled with such a fruitful event and also very grateful for the intensive learning process, which was made possible above all by our consortium partners. As a result of the summer school, dynamic networks and collaborative projects across the Global South and North have emerged, which we consider an impulse for future work towards decolonial transformation. On the one hand, the Summer School has shown that research institutions in the Global North have much to learn regarding ethical and responsible research and equitable collaboration and that the scientific system has a long way to go to liberate itself from its colonial constraints.

On the other hand, the event has demonstrated that re-centering marginalized knowledges and prioritizing equitable collaboration is not only possible but incredibly enriching. It requires resources, time, education, awareness and sensitivity. Decolonial approaches to biomedical research will contribute to research quality when appropriately implemented.

While decolonization remains a complex project, the Summer School represents a first small step towards bringing the topic to the BIH. With this, we are happy to share first impressions and reflections. However, we are still processing the results and materials from the Summer School. Updates will be posted soon.

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