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A Collaboration for the Search of Innovative Ideas - Monthly R-Hackathons/Hackfests at Ethiopian Universities as an Example

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Now-a-days, researchers have to be highly qualified professionals and innovators. On the one side researchers are requested to be on a permanent search for new ideas that could be monetised directly or indirectly in the market. On the other side funders of research projects start seeing the funds provided as investment and expect 'indirect' returns of payment - in the medium/long run - in order to guarantee the sustainability of the project.

Not only researchers feel the pressure through the prioritisation of innovations. Industry expects the same from its employees. This brings the challenge to the education system with the task to equip future employees and researchers with skills necessary to create innovative ideas. The different educational level will follow different approaches. The higher education and the TVET sector can provide conditions to systemise teaching innovation and innovation management within certain fields of expertise and reach out to different academic disciplines touched by the respective innovative idea.

Against this background, the Ethiopian 'The Carpentry Community' [<https://carpentries.org>] together with R-Ladies Addis Ababa [<https://r-ladies-addis.github.io/rladies-addis/>] have introduced monthly R-Hackathons/Hackfests for those who are R-literate and willing to contribute to the search for innovative ideas. Participants from all Ethiopian universities and from all faculties as well as from selected TVET colleges have been invited to participate in these R-Hackathons/Hackfests from remote. The first R-Hackathons/Hackfests have started in August 2018. This paper intends to evaluate the outcome of the Hackathons/Hackfests conducted since then.

The objective of this work is to show how the multi-disciplinary and multi-institutional approaches have been implemented. The information available will be scrutinised in order to find out whether best practices in collaboration for problem solving could be derived.

In brief, R-Hackathons/Hackfests are structured as team works for 6-hours. Data bases are provided in focus of a specific field, where innovative ideas should be created. The outcome of these 6-hours-Hackathons/Hackfests are problem statements and drafts for possible calls for proposals. The results are posted on a joint platform and could be presented to potential funders for an in-depth exploration and subsequently for opening a call for proposals.

The structure of this paper will

- introduce the general idea of the monthly R-Hackthons.
- present the methodology to analyse the R-Hackathons/Hackfests conducted in the past months.
- categorise the findings.
- evaluate the collaboration between the participating teams in terms of multi-disciplinary and multi-institutional approaches towards the search of innovative ideas.
- summarise the experience of the monthly R-Hackathons/Hackfests in Ethiopia and provide recommendations as best practices for R-Hackathons/Hackfests as an instrument for the collaborative search of innovative ideas.

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