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International Health

Strengthening Health with Equitable International Partnerships: Key Learning and Best Practices



Canolfan Gydweithredol Sefydliad
Iechyd y Byd ar Fuddsoddi
ar gyfer Iechyd a Llesiant



World Health Organization
Collaborating Centre on Investment
for Health and Well-being

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Executive Summary

Background

This report provides a brief exploration of the potential international health partnerships offer to help protect, improve and promote population health in Wales and beyond. It is informed by a rapid scoping review commissioned by Public Health Wales (PHW) to better understand the components of effective international health partnerships.

This report stemmed from an interest in the concept of 'equitable healthcare exchange', which emphasises the reciprocal learning potential between high-income countries and low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) and recognises the benefits of context-specific innovations. Additionally, the paper sought to inform the development of 19 Hills Health and Wellbeing Centre in Newport, Wales, which is seeking to establish an international partnership.

Objective

The initial guiding research question for the scoping review and this subsequent discussion paper was:

How can Welsh and international communities' benefit from developing collaborative partnerships?

The objectives were:

- **To identify current knowledge:** Summarise what is currently known about international health partnerships in Wales.
- **To evaluate advantages:** Analyse the benefits associated with international health partnerships, focusing on improvements in health outcomes, resource sharing, capacity building, and cross-cultural collaboration.
- **To determine best practice:** Examine established best practices for setting up international health partnerships, with an emphasis on strategies that contribute to their success and sustainability.

Methods

This discussion paper provides an overview of the evidence identified from a scoping review on international health partnerships. This review was not aimed at providing a detailed evidence review, analysis or quality assurance and the searches undertaken were not exhaustive. With this aim, relevant databases such as Google scholar and Medline were searched for published and grey literature using both controlled vocabulary and keywords. Government and public sector websites were also explored for grey literature (see Appendix for full methodology). The search strategy was based on the snowball sampling technique, starting with initial sources retrieved from the database searches and using

their reference lists to identify additional relevant papers. Additionally, reference chaining, whereby the reference list of articles identified through the search, were examined for relevant sources. Particular attention was paid to articles that discussed health and wellbeing models in collaboration with other organisations or programmes, partnership and collaborative arrangements, health learning systems, and other relevant key words. Citation tracking tools were employed to find articles that have cited the studies initially identified.

Two reviewers independently screened the papers for relevance and extracted relevant data. The included papers were not critically appraised for their quality. Thematic analysis was used to identify themes that were coded and utilised to develop the paper.

Results

In all, 26 articles, policy documents, and reports were retrieved through the search and 22 papers were identified that addressed the research question. In total 22 articles were reviewed out of which 20 articles, journal and reports were selected because of their relevance to the subject matter under review. The literature primarily focussed on benefits for communities and individuals, including some insights on patient involvement in international health partnerships. The evidence in this discussion paper is presented in three sections:

- **Part 1:** Setting the scene - Welsh context and background
- **Part 2:** The value of international health partnerships
- **Part 3:** Key learning on best practice in supporting partnerships to thrive

Findings and key messages

This discussion paper advocates for collaborative, equitable global health partnerships, demonstrating their potential through successful case studies and outlining essential elements for sustainability. Several key themes emerged as being vital for effective international health partnerships including:

- the importance of community engagement;
- equitable partner collaboration with mutually agreed-upon goals;
- capacity building to promote long-term self-sufficiency;
- the need for partnerships to be conceived and implemented with a view towards enduring impact and sustainability.

By integrating these key elements, and acknowledging and addressing inherent challenges, the evidence suggests international health partnerships can achieve meaningful and lasting success, offering significant potential for improving global health outcomes.

The insights gained from this research will inform the development of an international exchange model for health improvement at 19 Hills Health and Wellbeing Centre in Newport, Wales, and provide valuable insights for other community-based health projects seeking to establish international health partnerships.

Part 1: Setting the scene – Welsh Context and Background

Our rapidly evolving world presents formidable global health challenges alongside transformative opportunities. In this complex and increasingly connected global landscape it is recognised that protecting, improving and promoting health and well-being for the people of Wales cannot be achieved in isolation; it requires strong international partnerships and global co-operation. Wales has a long history of international health partnerships which are facilitated by multiple organisations and underpinned by a supportive legislation and policy context. This section of the paper outlines the key legislation, policies, partnerships and programmes that underpin Wales's international health engagement.

Defining International Health Partnerships

International Health Partnerships (encompassing global health partnerships, networks, alliances, initiatives and health links) combine the resources of various organisations - public, private, non-governmental, philanthropic, and academic - to achieve shared health goals. They aim to raise awareness about unmet health needs, improve coordination, provide financial help to countries, and create a shared space for networking and collaboration. One of the primary advantages of working in a partnership arrangement is the chance to share information and expertise ([WHO Collaboration: Partnerships](#)).

In the **Welsh context**, an international health partnership is defined as a collaboration between a Wales-based entity and partners outside of Wales. These partnerships may be time-bound or ongoing and can involve communities, institutions, or organisations. Activities may include research, information sharing, project implementation, and professional exchanges. ([IHCC-Charter-for-IHP-Interactive-E.pdf](#)).

Legislation and policies supporting Wales's international health partnerships

Wales is in a unique position with an enabling legislative and policy context for health partnerships, including the ground-breaking 'Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015', Welsh Government's International Strategy, the pan-Wales International Health Coordination Centre (IHCC), and the Charter for International Health Partnerships in Wales:

■ Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

The Well-being of Future Generations Act is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. The legislation requires all public bodies to work together to set objectives for achieving seven wellbeing goals, based on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with one of the seven goals being to become 'a globally responsible Wales'. This has created an opportunity to build active and effective cross-sector, multi-disciplinary and cross-border collaborations that will benefit the Welsh people and our planet (Welsh Government, 2015).

■ International Strategy

In 2020 the Welsh Government published a new International Strategy, setting out its approach to international engagement and how it plans to increase Wales's profile and influence in the world over the next five years. The three core ambitions are to raise Wales's profile on the international stage, grow the economy by increasing exports and attracting inward investment, and establish Wales as a globally responsible nation (Welsh Government, 2020).

In 2021 Welsh Government also commissioned Global Health Partnerships to conduct two rapid reviews to examine Wales's international engagement on health and help guide efforts to maximise the potential of international health activity (Chalmers and Okeah 2021; Chalmers, 2021).

■ International Health Coordination Centre (IHCC)

The IHCC was set up in 2013 in response to the Welsh Government's 2012 'Health Within and Beyond Welsh Borders: An Enabling Framework for International Health Engagement', which provided recommendations to encourage, strengthen and mainstream international and global collaborations in Wales.

Part of Public Health Wales (PHW), it is a unique whole-of-Wales programme of work, bringing together all Health Boards and NHS Trusts, promoting and facilitating international health partnerships, and serving as a focal point for information sharing, knowledge exchange, and networking across the UK, Europe and the world. The IHCC aims to maximise potential gains for the people in Wales and beyond, promoting a culture of global citizenship and supporting a health system which is globally responsible as well as more equal, resilient, sustainable and prosperous (IHCC, 2025).

■ Charter for International Health Partnerships in Wales

The IHCC has facilitated the development of the [Charter for International Health Partnerships in Wales](#), a unique whole-of NHS commitment aiming to ensure that principles and values of the NHS are reflected in all international health activity. It strengthens Wales's reciprocal work to build evidence-based practice, and develop sustainable partnerships based on equity and in the pursuit of mutual tangible benefits and healthy prosperous lives for all, within and beyond Welsh borders. The Charter is based on Wales's history of accomplishment and learning in this area and outlines the four foundations of successful international health partnerships: organisational responsibilities; reciprocal partnership working; good practice; and sound governance (PHW, 2020).

■ International Health Strategy

PHW developed its International Health Strategy in 2017 and refreshed it in 2023 to better reflect the significant changes in the global landscape and to enable PHW's new Long-Term Strategy. The vision of 'Nationally Focused, Globally Responsible: Our International Health Strategy as an Enabler of Our Long-Term Strategy 2023 – 2035' is to be a globally connected and inspiring national public health organisation, working towards a healthier and fairer Wales to address worldwide challenges and shared goals.

The aims of the strategy are threefold: maximise benefits for the health and well-being of the people in Wales; develop globally responsible people and organisations; and respond to global health threats and benefit from international opportunities (PHW, 2023).

Examples of international health partnerships in Wales

Alongside an enabling legislative and policy context, Wales has a long history of international health partnerships that dates from the 1980s. This started with Wales and Lesotho launching the first country-to-country twinning initiative in 1985 (Dolen Cymru), followed by the Wales for Africa programme launched in 2006, and Wales became the first Fair Trade Nation in 2008. In the last decade Wales has developed a number of new international health partnerships with a variety of organisations including Hub Cymru, Global Health Partnerships Cymru, and the World Health Organization (WHO) Collaborating Centre on 'Investment for Health and Well-being':

■ Dolen Cymru

Dolen Cymru was formed in 1985 and has evolved from a friendship link into an international development organisation based on a strong partnership with the people of Lesotho. Dolen Cymru's work involves teacher mentoring, mental health training, support for a rugby academy, water sanitation and hygiene projects, and supporting dozens of school links between the two countries (Dolen Cymru, 2025).

■ Wales and Africa

The Wales and Africa programme was launched in 2006 to encourage more people in Wales to get involved in development work with Africa. The programme has supported hundreds of projects based on partnership working between groups and institutions in Wales and sub-Saharan Africa.

The vision of the 2020-2025 programme is to support Wales to be a globally responsible nation through building and growing sustainable partnerships in sub-Saharan Africa that support the delivery of the SDGs. The programme also supports and encourages people in Wales to become active global citizens and to support actions that other governments and organisations around the world can replicate (Welsh Government, 2023).

■ Hub Cymru Africa

Hub Cymru Africa is a civil society partnership formed in 2015 to bring together the work of Global Health Links Cymru, the Sub-Sahara Advisory Panel, the Welsh Centre for International Affairs and Fair Trade Wales. The Hub aims to strengthen the capabilities of Welsh international development organisations and support the sector to advance the UN SDGs through partnership projects between Wales and Africa (Hub Cymru Africa, 2025).

Hub Cymru Africa work with more than 200 organisations and individuals across Wales from a diverse sector including African-Diaspora led organisations, fair trade, faith-based groups, NHS partnerships and community links. Currently, there are 25 African nations involved in the partnership. Seventy-two of the 528 development projects supported by Hub Cymru Africa have been on health. Significantly, every Health Board in Wales now has a health link in Africa and a fifth of the UK's hospital links in Africa are Welsh.

In 2021, a **Manifesto for Global Solidarity** was launched by Hub Cymru Africa with 10 recommendations for the future of a sustainable global development model that approaches global development in partnership, acknowledging the mutuality of our issues, and develops policies that actively support a better future for generations to come (Hub Cymru Africa, 2021).

■ Global Health Partnerships Cymru

Wales held its first Africa Health Links conference in 2007 which resulted in the creation of Wales for Africa Health Links Network (WaAHLN), a voluntary organisation of individuals involved in international health work. Since its creation, this network has sought to support and advocate for international health partnerships and activities between Wales and Africa. Many Trustees are healthcare professionals, and it forms a link between the NHS and community-based organisations, focussing on reciprocal learning, capacity building, improving health outcomes, and community engagement.

In 2024, the UK charity organisation known as Global Health Partnerships merged with WaAHLN to create Global Health Partnerships Cymru. Its mission is to promote and protect good health in Africa and Wales in particular, but not exclusively, by establishing partnerships between health workers in Wales and Africa (GHP, 2025a; Chalmers and Okeah 2021).

■ **World Health Organization Collaborating Centre (WHO CC) on 'Investment for Health and Well-being'**

There has been a long-standing collaboration between Wales, PHW and the WHO, strengthening capacity and international cooperation for improving wellbeing and health equity, preventing and tackling threats to people and society, and achieving sustainable inclusive growth.

Strategic partnerships and achievements include:

- Achieving a designation as a WHO CC on 'Investment for Health and Well-being': the first centre in the world in this area of expertise, informing and supporting policy and practice which drives social, economic and environmental sustainability and prosperity for all in Wales and the European Region.
- Working in close collaboration with the [WHO Regional Office for Europe](#).
- Enabling and facilitating a Memorandum of Understanding between the WHO Regional Office for Europe and the Welsh Government, focusing on accelerating progress towards building a healthier, more equal and prosperous Wales and Europe.
- Being the WHO's global focal point for Violence and Injury Prevention for the UK; global focal point for research on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs); and focal point for the WHO European Regions for Health Network (RHN). Wales is one of the founding members of the RHN, hosting study visits and developing joint publications and events (IH, 2025).

Part 2: The value of international health partnerships

This section presents a synthesis of literature examining the benefits of international health partnerships. The literature predominantly highlights advantages for individuals, communities and health systems but some insights also emerged on patient involvement in international health partnerships. Further, a key conceptual framework identified in the literature was reverse innovation.

Reverse Innovation: Challenging Traditional Global Health Approaches

A key underlying rationale for International Health Partnerships is the concept of 'reverse innovation', an idea that significantly challenges traditional, often unidirectional approaches to global health (Crisp, 2014). The articles reviewed highlight how reverse innovation disrupts the conventional flow of knowledge and solutions, typically assumed to originate from high-income countries and disseminate to low-income countries.

Traditionally, global health initiatives have followed a top-down approach, with high-income countries perceived as the primary source of innovation and expertise. This model frequently overlooks the valuable knowledge and resourcefulness found in low-income settings. Reverse innovation flips this paradigm by recognising that innovations developed in low-income countries, often born out of necessity and resource constraints, can offer valuable lessons and solutions applicable to high-income contexts as well.

Reverse innovation challenges traditional approaches by:

- **Shifting the power dynamic:** Reverse innovation challenges the assumption that high-income countries are the sole providers of solutions. It promotes a more equitable exchange of knowledge and recognizes the valuable contributions of low-income countries. This fosters more balanced partnerships and mutual learning opportunities (Crisp, 2010; Harris, 2024).
- **Emphasising context-specific solutions:** Reverse innovation highlights the importance of considering the specific needs and challenges of different contexts. Solutions developed in low-income settings are often highly tailored to local circumstances and resource limitations, making them potentially cost-effective and adaptable to global contexts where resources are increasingly becoming limited (Harris, 2024).
- **Driving cost-effectiveness:** Innovations emerging from low-income settings frequently prioritise affordability and efficiency. These solutions can inspire high-income countries to develop more cost-effective healthcare approaches, particularly relevant in the face of rising healthcare costs (Ellis et al., 2014; Naylor et al., 2013).
- **Promoting sustainability:** Reverse innovation often prioritises sustainable solutions that rely on local resources and expertise. This focus on sustainability aligns with broader global health goals of building resilient healthcare systems (Syed et al., 2013)

- **Community Health Workers (CHWs)** are a successful example of reverse innovation. Originating in low-income countries to deliver healthcare services in rural and underserved areas, the model has been adopted by high-income countries to deliver care to underserved communities (Harris, 2024). CHWs are increasingly being adopted in European regions amongst underserved communities, where health inequalities are most common. A review noted that CHWs programmes were feasible, acceptable and reported positive effects including in mental health and diabetes-related outcomes (Van Iseghem et al., 2023). Additionally, they played a crucial role in health promotion with improved knowledge, attitude and improved nutrition recorded in some EU countries. As a result, calls for CHW model have been made for Wales where the use of CHWs was proposed in North Wales to address healthcare access and encourage a proactive, integrated, community-based model (Johnson et al., 2013).

By embracing reverse innovation, global health initiatives can move towards more equitable partnerships, contextually relevant solutions, and potentially more cost-effective and sustainable approaches to improving health outcomes worldwide.

The benefits of international health partnerships

The papers and reports reviewed describe a range of benefits associated with international health partnerships at the individual, community and healthcare system level.

1. Benefits for communities and health services

While focusing on broader partnership dynamics and outcomes, the current literature provides some valuable insights into the benefits that these collaborations bring to communities and health services, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs):

- **Improved access to healthcare:** One of the primary benefits highlighted is the expansion and enhancement of healthcare services in partner communities. International health partnerships often focus on strengthening health systems in LMICs, leading to improved infrastructure, increased availability of essential medicines, and better access to specialised care. For instance, the Indian Health Partnership, through its collaboration with Welsh General Practitioners, established five regional clinics and two mobile clinics, directly increasing access to care for residents in those areas (Venn, in PHW, 2020).
- **Enhanced quality of care:** Partnerships often prioritise capacity building for local healthcare workers, leading to a more skilled and knowledgeable workforce. This translates into improved quality of care for residents. The training of approximately 60 health workers through the Indian Health Partnership exemplifies this impact. Furthermore, partnerships can facilitate the transfer of knowledge, technology, and best practices, leading to the adoption of more effective treatments and interventions (Leather et al., 2010).
- **Community engagement and empowerment:** A recurring theme in the articles reviewed is the significance of actively engaging communities in health interventions. International health partnerships that prioritize community involvement are more likely to develop culturally sensitive and sustainable

solutions. This approach empowers residents by giving them a voice in identifying health priorities and shaping interventions that address their specific needs (South et al., 2013).

- **Economic benefits:** While not extensively discussed, the sources allude to potential economic benefits for communities. Improved health outcomes can lead to a healthier workforce, increased productivity, and reduced healthcare costs in the long run. Additionally, partnerships can create employment opportunities within the healthcare sector, as seen in the establishment of clinics and training of health workers through the Indian Health Partnership.
- **Strengthened health systems:** By focusing on long-term system-level changes, international health partnerships contribute to more resilient and sustainable health systems in LMICs. This benefits communities by ensuring that improvements in healthcare access and quality are not temporary but become integrated into the fabric of the local health infrastructure.
- **Addressing health inequities:** The articles acknowledge the existence of health disparities and emphasise the importance of equitable partnerships in global health. International health partnerships that prioritise equity aim to reduce these disparities by focusing on the needs of marginalised communities and ensuring that the benefits of improved healthcare reach those who need them most.

It is important to acknowledge that the literature reviewed focusses more on the overarching goals and principles of international health partnerships rather than providing detailed accounts of their impact on specific communities. However, the examples provided and the emphasis on community engagement, capacity building, and sustainable health system strengthening strongly suggest that these partnerships hold significant potential for improving the lives and well-being of residents in partner communities.

2. Benefits for individuals - staff engaged in international health partnerships

While the various reports do not explicitly focus on staff engagement in the context of international health partnerships, they do provide insights into the benefits these partnerships offer to individuals involved, which can be extrapolated to staff engagement:

- **Increased knowledge and skills:** Participating in international health partnerships exposes staff to diverse perspectives, healthcare systems, and approaches to health challenges. This can broaden their understanding of global health issues, enhance their clinical skills, and provide valuable learning experiences. For example, the sources mention that Welsh practitioners involved in the Indian Health Partnership gained a deeper understanding of primary care by working in a resource-constrained setting (GHP, 2019).
- **Professional development:** International health partnerships often involve training and knowledge-sharing activities, benefiting staff from both high-income and low-income countries. This can contribute to their professional growth, enhance their skills, and potentially open new career opportunities. The sources highlight the importance of capacity building as a key component of successful partnerships (South et al., 2013).

- **Cultural competence:** Working in international settings exposes staff to different cultures, communication styles, and ways of working. This fosters cross-cultural competence, which is increasingly valuable in a globalised world.
- **Personal growth and fulfilment:** Engaging in work that aims to improve health outcomes globally can be personally rewarding for staff. It offers opportunities to make a meaningful contribution, broaden their horizons, and gain a sense of fulfilment.
- **Enhanced motivation and job satisfaction:** The opportunity to participate in international partnerships and contribute to global health initiatives can enhance staff motivation, engagement, and job satisfaction. This can lead to increased productivity and a more positive work environment.

In addition to these individual benefits, engaged and motivated staff can contribute to the overall success of international health partnerships:

- **Improved collaboration:** Staff members with increased knowledge, skills, and cultural sensitivity are better equipped to collaborate effectively with partners from different backgrounds.
- **Innovation and knowledge transfer:** Engaged staff are more likely to share their expertise, learn from others, and contribute to innovation within the partnership.
- **Sustainable impact:** By investing in staff development and engagement, partnerships can build local capacity and create a lasting impact beyond the formal collaboration period.

While the sources focus on broader partnership outcomes, it is reasonable to suggest that engaged staff are essential for realising these benefits and contributing to the success of international health initiatives.

3. Patient involvement in international health partnerships - a nuanced perspective

While the literature tends to provide a helpful overview of international health partnerships, there is a gap in how patients themselves actively participate in shaping and driving these collaborations; the focus is primarily on partnerships between health organisations, professionals, and communities. However, we can derive some interesting insights from the articles to understand the potential pathways for patient involvement and their significance. These include:

3.1 Community engagement as a proxy for patient voice

The literature often emphasises the importance of community engagement as a core principle of successful partnerships. It is important to note that this is distinct from the idea of 'patient involvement' which is a deeper form of engagement. However, the concept of community engagement does suggest incorporating the perspectives and priorities of those who are intended to benefit from these collaborations, including patients. For example:

- South et al. (2013) advocate for a people-centred approach to public health, highlighting the need to involve the public in improving their health and well-being. This suggests that patients, as members of the community, should have a voice in shaping health interventions.

- Crisp (2008) stresses the importance of community engagement to ensure the cultural appropriateness and effectiveness of health programmes. This implies that understanding the specific needs and preferences of patients within those communities is crucial.
- Public Health Wales (2024), in its discussion of the Wales and Africa Health Links Network, emphasises community engagement as one of its key themes, highlighting the importance of long-term, culturally sensitive healthcare approaches.

These examples suggest that community engagement can serve as a mechanism for channelling patient perspectives and priorities into the design and implementation of international health partnerships.

3.2 Potential avenues for direct patient involvement

Drawing on the principles outlined in the sources, other potential avenues for more direct patient involvement in international health partnerships can be suggested:

- **Patient representation on steering committees:** Partnerships could establish steering committees or advisory boards that include patient representatives from both high-income and low-income countries. This would ensure that patient voices are heard in decision-making processes.
- **Patient-led needs assessments:** Partnerships could engage patients in conducting needs assessments to identify priority health concerns within the community. This would ensure that interventions are tailored to the specific needs of patients.
- **Patient feedback mechanisms:** Establishing regular channels for gathering patient feedback on the implementation and effectiveness of health interventions is crucial. This could involve surveys, focus groups, or community meetings where patients can share their experiences and suggest improvements.
- **Patient advocacy and education:** Partnerships could support the development of patient advocacy groups in LMICs to empower patients to advocate for their health needs and raise awareness about health issues.

3.3 Benefits of meaningful patient involvement

Actively involving patients in international health partnerships can yield significant benefits:

- **Increased relevance and effectiveness:** By incorporating patient perspectives, interventions are more likely to address the actual needs and preferences of the target population, leading to greater effectiveness and sustainability.
- **Enhanced equity and trust:** Meaningful patient involvement promotes equity by ensuring that the voices of those most affected by health disparities are heard. It also fosters trust between patients, healthcare providers, and the whole partnership.
- **Improved sustainability:** When patients are actively engaged in shaping health interventions, they are more likely to take ownership of those interventions, leading to increased adoption, adherence, and long-term sustainability.

While the available literature rarely goes into detail about how patients are involved in international health partnerships, the emphasis on community engagement provides a foundation for understanding the importance of patient perspectives. By incorporating the principles of patient-centred care and community empowerment, these partnerships can create more inclusive and effective approaches to improving health outcomes.

3.4 Evidence of improved patient outcomes through partnerships

The literature reviewed provided some evidence that suggest that partnerships, particularly in the context of international health initiatives, contribute to improved patient outcomes. This is demonstrated through specific examples as well as some of the key themes and underlying principles demonstrated in the articles reviewed:

3.4.1 Direct evidence of improved healthcare access and quality

Indian Health Partnership (PHW, 2020): This partnership, highlighting collaboration between Welsh General Practitioners and Indian Health Workers, directly resulted in:

- Improved care in India due to enhanced understanding of Primary Care practices.
- Increased access to affordable care through the establishment of 5 regional clinics and 2 mobile clinics.
- Training of approximately 60 Health Workers, contributing to a more skilled healthcare workforce.

This example demonstrates a tangible link between partnership efforts and positive changes in healthcare access, quality, and workforce capacity, ultimately benefiting patients.

3.4.2 Emphasis on strengthening health systems for sustainable impact

The reports reviewed consistently emphasise that effective partnerships focus on strengthening health systems in LMICs rather than providing temporary solutions. This systems-level approach, targeting long-term improvements in healthcare infrastructure, workforce capacity, and service delivery, suggests a positive impact on patient outcomes over time. Key points drawn from the scoping review include:

- Baxi (2017) underscores the need for UK partnerships to prioritise long-term health system development over discrete interventions.
- Crisp and Crisp (2008) highlight capacity building, innovation, and policy improvements as key components of sustainable health system strengthening through partnerships.
- Overall, the evidence reviewed here highlights how partnerships can lead to more resilient and sustainable health systems in LMICs, ensuring that improvements in healthcare access and quality endure beyond the formal collaboration period.

3.4.3 Acknowledging challenges and emphasising sustainability

The literature acknowledges the complexities of international health partnerships and highlights potential challenges in achieving sustainable improvements in patient outcomes. This recognition further strengthens the evidence base by demonstrating a nuanced understanding of the factors that contribute to success. For example:

- PHW (2024) discusses the challenges faced by the Wales and Africa Health Links Network, including financial, cultural, and logistical obstacles. This acknowledgment of potential barriers emphasises the need for careful planning, adaptation, and long-term commitment to ensure that partnerships translate into meaningful improvements for patients.
- Baxi et al. (2007) emphasises the importance of flexibility, scalability, and robust evaluation mechanisms in partnership initiatives. This focus on continuous learning and adaptation suggests a commitment to identifying what works best for improving patient outcomes in diverse contexts.

Examples of quantitative analysis of patient outcomes resulting from partnerships did not appear in the literature. However, the available evidence does suggest that these collaborations, when implemented with a focus on health system strengthening, community engagement, and long-term sustainability, have a positive impact on the lives and well-being of patients, particularly in LMICs.

3.4.4 The Importance of Evaluation and Impact Assessment

Evaluation and impact assessment are critical components of international health partnerships, ensuring that initiatives achieve their intended outcomes, promote mutual learning, and remain accountable to both donors and communities. Without rigorous evaluation, it is difficult to determine whether such partnerships are improving health outcomes, strengthening systems, or fostering equitable collaboration. Independent assessments help to identify best practices, adapt interventions to local contexts, and avoid duplication of efforts. For example, Global Health Partnerships (formerly Tropical Health and Education Trust (THET)) emphasises that systematic monitoring and evaluation (M&E) enhances the effectiveness and sustainability of health partnerships by enabling evidence-based decision-making and continuous improvement (THET, 2015). Furthermore, Rowe et al. (2019) argue that clear metrics and standardised evaluation frameworks are essential for understanding the long-term impact of global health collaborations, particularly in low- and middle-income countries where resource allocation must be efficient and targeted. Evaluation not only strengthens accountability but also builds a foundation for scale-up and policy influence, reinforcing the value and legitimacy of international health partnerships in the global health landscape.

Part 3: Key learning on best practice in supporting partnerships to thrive

This section of the paper examines established best practices for setting up international health partnerships. The literature highlights several key factors that contribute to the success of international health partnerships, as well as an acknowledgement of the associated challenges that need to be addressed to foster truly equitable and sustainable collaborations.

Challenges associated with international health partnerships

- **Cultural and contextual differences:** Navigating cultural and contextual differences between partner countries can pose challenges. This requires sensitivity, adaptability, and a willingness to learn from different perspectives (Baxi, 2017).
- **Ensuring equitable partnerships:** Power imbalances between partners can hinder the development of truly equitable partnerships. There is also the challenge of ensuring health staff and partnership brokers genuinely have the breadth of competencies to broker and elevate those partnerships, especially multi-sectoral partnerships (Partnership Brokers Association, 2025).
- **Logistical challenges:** Differences in language, infrastructure, and geographical distance can create logistical hurdles that need to be effectively managed (PHW, 2024).
- **Monitoring and evaluation:** Establishing effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the impact of partnerships and ensure accountability can be complex (Leather et al., 2010).
- **Sustainability:** Maintaining long-term commitment and securing sustainable funding can be challenging (PHW, 2020).

Factors contributing to successful international health partnerships

- **Building trust:** Establishing trust between partners and with local communities is essential. This involves transparency, open communication, and a willingness to listen and learn from each other (Estacio, 2017).
- **Shared goals:** Partnerships are more effective when participants share a common vision and clearly defined objectives. Aligning on health outcomes and priorities ensures everyone is working towards the same goals (PHW, 2024).
- **Community engagement:** Successful partnerships emphasise community engagement and participation. Actively involving local communities in decision-making processes is crucial for ensuring that interventions are culturally sensitive, address local needs, and have lasting impact (Estacio, 2017).
- **Capacity building:** Successful partnerships prioritise building the capacity of local healthcare systems and workforces. This involves providing training, sharing knowledge and skills, and supporting leadership development (Leather et al., 2010).
- **Equitable collaboration:** Partnerships should be based on mutual respect, equality, and a recognition of the valuable expertise and perspectives that each partner brings. Such partnerships facilitate the sharing of knowledge, skills, and resources between countries, leading to more effective and sustainable health outcomes (Crisp, 2010). It is likely to be crucial to establish clear guidelines for shared decision-making, transparency, and mutual benefit.
- **Resource mobilisation:** Effectively leveraging the resources and networks of all partners, including financial resources, expertise, and technology, is critical for maximising impact (Tyler et al., 2018).
- **Sound governance:** Transparent and effective governance structures with clear roles, responsibilities, and accountability mechanisms are essential for ensuring smooth operation and decision-making (PHW, 2024).
- **Long-term vision and sustainability:** The sources emphasise the importance of establishing long-term commitments and planning for sustainability from the outset. This involves building local capacity, securing ongoing funding, and developing exit strategies that ensure the partnership's benefits continue after formal collaboration ends (Crisp and Crisp, 2008).

These factors of successful partnerships highlighted in the literature align with many of the 'Principles of Partnership' developed by Global Health Partnerships, which can be used to support partnership development and assess the quality and effectiveness of what they do (GHP, 2025b).

By prioritising these factors, the evidence suggests international health partnerships can overcome challenges and foster equitable collaborations that can achieve meaningful and sustainable improvements in global health.

Key Messages and considerations

International health partnerships offer a wealth of reciprocal benefits for Wales and its global counterparts. For Wales, they have the potential to help Welsh healthcare staff gain new knowledge and skills by exposing them to different healthcare systems and challenges. This professional development, encompassing training and knowledge-sharing, enhances career opportunities. Furthermore, engaging in varied cultural settings strengthens cultural competence, directly contributing to the Future Generations Act's goal of a 'globally responsible Wales'. Beyond professional growth, these partnerships can be personally rewarding, boosting staff motivation and job satisfaction. Engaged and motivated individuals drive improved collaboration, innovation, and sustainable impact, benefiting both the individuals involved and the wider Welsh healthcare system.

These partnerships also have the potential to offer numerous benefits to our global partners. They can improve healthcare access and quality through local workforce training and community engagement, ensuring culturally appropriate and sustainable solutions. Additionally, these partnerships stimulate economic growth by generating employment and nurturing a healthier workforce, bolstering the resilience of health systems for the long term, and actively working to reduce health disparities by prioritising marginalised communities. Overall, they are instrumental in building stronger, more equitable healthcare systems worldwide, delivering considerable advantages to Wales.

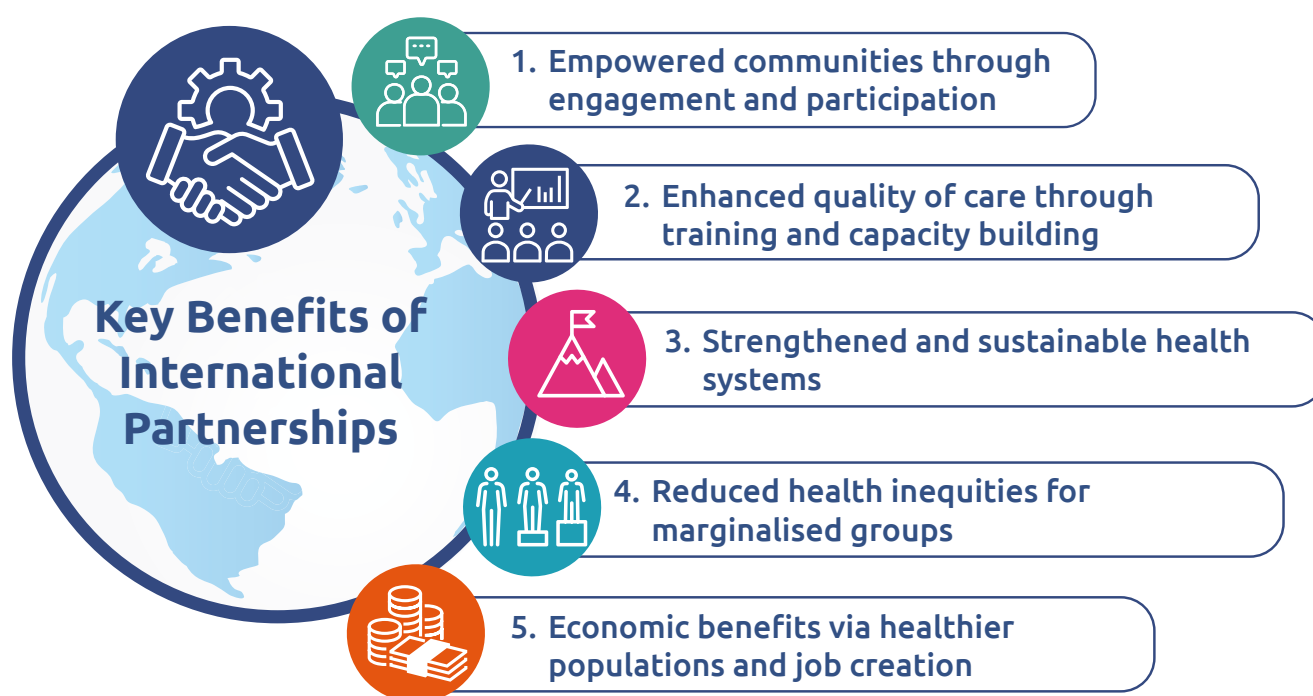


Figure 1: Key benefits of international health partnerships

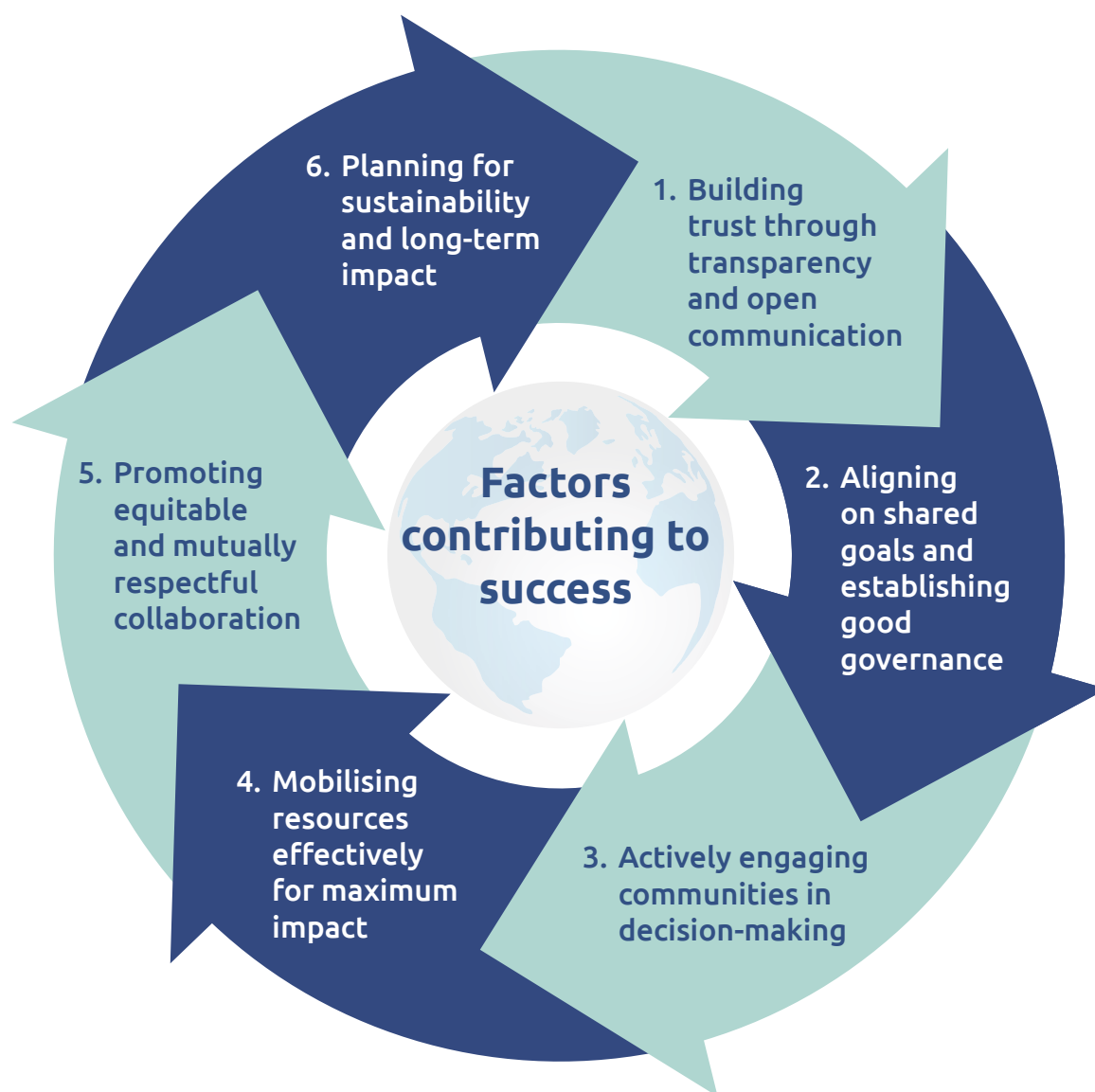


Figure 2: Factors contributing to success of international health partnerships

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