

PROFILES IN OPEN: KARIN LAPPING



KARIN LAPPING PhD, MPH, is the Program Director of Alive & Thrive, a global nutrition initiative. In this capacity, she oversees a diverse array of research projects touching on areas such as social behavior change; policy advocacy; and the delivery of quality maternal, infant, and young child nutrition (MIYCN) services. Dr. Lapping brings a unique perspective to open science, that of a project coordinator working with multidisciplinary research teams.

Tell us a bit about your professional interests.

Alive and Thrive (aliveandthrive.org) is an initiative founded in 2008, originally funded by the Gates Foundation and now supported by a coalition of funders, including the Gates Foundation, the government of Ireland and others. The goal is to save lives, prevent illness, and ensure healthy growth and development. How we do that and where we do it has evolved over time. The first five years were a proof of concept to show that in a range of geographic contexts (e.g., Vietnam, Ethiopia, and Bangladesh) with different health systems, economic situations and food insecurity issues, we could move the needle on malnutrition. From there, we were challenged by the Gates Foundation to glean replicable and adaptable solutions that would work in other contexts and geographies. We expanded into areas like maternal nutrition and agriculture. We currently focus on the provision of strategic technical assistance in addition to supporting implementation research as key strategies. Our present geographic focus includes Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, India, and Nigeria and regional work throughout Southeast Asia and West Africa. In each of our projects, we are looking to support the governments in nationwide improvements in nutrition outcomes.

What did your funder ask of you with respect making the research open?

The Gates Foundation has been an advocate of open access and open science since 2015. They are committed to information sharing and transparency. They have worked with us to ensure that we make our papers and our data quickly and widely available. This includes ensuring that our research articles are published in open access journals.

How did you feel about that?

The Alive & Thrive team has been excited to make our materials open. In public health, this is an equity issue. Closing information gaps can be a game-changer. With respect to practitioners and policy makers, having these materials open under generous reuse licenses makes it easier to adapt the technical research into formats more appropriate for a wider audience. Some researchers were initially reluctant to share their materials until they had the opportunity to publish, but overall this has been beneficial to the field.

How did you make the project's research outputs available?

Our research gets published in open access journals. We are also building a portal for our data as well.

How did making these research outputs available impact further exploration of this topic?

Sharing our results openly from the earliest stages of the project allowed us to explain to the wider community why we were evolving our work to focus on certain strategies, communities, and so forth. It helped keep the community engaged in why we found certain research directions so promising. For example, maternal nutrition as it relates to child nutrition outcomes has emerged as an important consideration in our work, in part because the research community was able to look at our early data and flag it as an issue that warranted further exploration. Making our materials available has also encouraged the next generation of researchers to explore issues of specific interest to them, which has taken the field in new directions (and launched many dissertation topics!).

Did making this work more open lead to subsequent analysis and debate about the project's findings? If so, how does this experience impact your attitude toward open sharing?

This is a high profile project, and making data available to a wider audience may mean that it reaches certain stakeholders, like politicians or members of the general public, that need a bit more context to understand the findings. This requires some additional work to properly frame our findings. That is a minimal price to pay for the many benefits of making our work open.

What advice would you give to researchers who are contemplating making their work more open?

My Alive & Thrive colleagues and I agree that open sharing is a process, with tremendous positives and

some possible negatives. Researchers should think at their project's outset about the tools and context necessary to support their research outputs. They should spend a bit of time contemplating how they can ensure that a diverse set of interested parties are able to understand and get the most out of it.

What would you like to tell funders who are thinking about embedding open science principles into their grants?

Do it! It's absolutely critical to the advancement of science. It is also the ethical thing to do. Data and research, particularly in a public health context, should not be held back. It can slow down how we effect change. Open policies should be the status quo among funders.

Additional Resources

Profiles in Open are a service of the Open Research Funders Group (ORFG). The ORFG is a partnership of funding organizations committed to the open sharing of research outputs. Visit our website (www.orfg.org) for more resources including:

- **"Open 101" Tip Sheets**, designed to help specific audiences understand the benefits of open science
- The **"HowOpenIsIt?" Guide to Research Funder Policies**, created to help philanthropic organizations develop open policies consistent with their values
- **The ORFG Curated Reading List**, containing a wealth of scholarly research and real-world case studies that demonstrate the myriad ways in which open access and open data benefit researchers and society alike