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A Living Lab for Optimising the Health, Socio-economic and Environmental Situation in El Salvador

Melanie Platz¹, Marlien Herselman², Jörg Rapp¹

¹ University of Koblenz-Landau, Landau, Germany

² University of South Africa & CSIR, Pretoria, South Africa

E-mail: platz@uni-landau.de ; mherselman@csir.co.za ; rapp@uni-landau.de

Abstract

In order to address chronic renal failure as a critical health problem in El Salvador (Central America) a Living Lab (LL) methodology was applied to assist El Salvador to carry out research on low-cost techniques to mitigate exposure to pesticides and other chemicals in the environment, to improve the production processes and to improve the care of kidney patients in rural areas. This paper discusses and outlines the elements of LLs, and how these were applied to establish a LL in El Salvador to assist with creating risk awareness for risk mitigation to optimise the socio-economic, environmental and health situation in that country. The methodology applied in this paper is a qualitative approach with interpretation as theoretical underpinning and case study as the strategy. A successful LL context incorporates a clear focus/vision, strong leadership, self-sustainability, a strong sense of community-own challenges and the potential for sustainable community development. The multi-stakeholder inter-disciplinary partnerships on which LLs are based can provide the necessary foundation for addressing some of these challenges, but only when communities are fully engaged. This can allow for co-creation with all stakeholders and to drive innovation as it is from this perspective that LLs can support open innovation in any situation. The newly established LL in El Salvador will support collaborations and innovation between communities, industry, academia and government entities. In the present paper, the elements of LLs, and how these have played a role in the establishment of a LL in El Salvador to assist with creating risk awareness for risk mitigation to optimise the socio-economic, the health situation and the environmental situation will be outlined and discussed based on experiences with LLs in Southern Africa.