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Communities of University Teachers as a basis for professional development

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This research project examines current staff development practices in Ethiopian universities and explores mechanisms to further enhance the quality of university staff. In this thesis, four empirical studies are reported. The first study concludes that traditional induction programs contribute positively to the development of beginning university teachers, but problems with the transfer of newly learned teaching skills were identified. Based on the outcomes of this study a community of women university teachers was established. The three remaining studies focus on the development of the community and learning within this Community of University Teachers.

The results of the three empirical studies indicate that the early phase of the development of a teacher community is the most demanding and frustrating. A courageous and passionate facilitator, a focus on members' prioritized problems, the experience and utilization of key incidents - that reveal the value of being in the community -, and domain flexibility are important factors to push the community development forward. Despite the many ups and downs, the teacher community supported the development of women university teachers by creating a safe learning environment that enables them to understand their shared identity and to engage them in joint activities that address various aspects of their life as academic women. The results of the research help us to understand the challenges as well as the rewards of establishing communities of practice within the context of teaching in higher education.