

Accompaniment in Human-Centered Design: From Digital Interventions to Community and Dialogue

In this talk, I will describe how the idea of accompaniment, which emerges from liberation theology and global health, can strengthen human-centered design (HCD) practices in the Information and Communication Technology and Development (ICTD) field. Drawing on my research in Kenya, I will present two projects that show how accompaniment offers another way of approaching design, one that prioritizes listening, mutual understanding, and long-term impact over problem solving and the development of novel technologies. The first project uses an HCD approach to develop an intervention that supports Kenyan youth with Type 1 diabetes in managing their condition. Although our original goal was to create a mobile health (mHealth) application, by relinquishing control of this intention we made space for unexpected outcomes to emerge, including a paper-based logbook and stronger community connections among participants. The second project is a Michigan State University course that connects students with peers at Kenya's Egerton University to collaborate on design projects. The course activities turn the gaze on us; that is, MSU students became participants of inquiry themselves, reflecting on their own assumptions rather than designing interventions to address perceived problems in Kenya. I conclude by emphasizing the importance of adopting design processes that acknowledge both the possibilities and limits of design, and that support more reciprocal and just collaborations between the Global North and South.