



Building Health Research Capacity in East Africa: Strengthening Equity and Global Collaboration

Event Host: British Medical Journal
26th April 2021

Summary of Proceedings

On the 26th of April 2021, BMJ hosted the event “Building Health Research Capacity in East Africa: Strengthening Equity and Global Collaboration” to explore challenges, opportunities and the way forward to democratise the process of research and capacity building in the East African region, through equitable collaborations. Speakers included representatives of the governments of Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda, directors of academia and research institutes, as well funding and publishing organisations. The event was held virtually and hosted over 100 participants from the wider African continent, Europe and North America.

In session one- *East Africa Health Research: an overview, the potential, and why this matters*- representatives from the governments of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda reiterated the importance of clinical and global health research, not only to reduce morbidity and mortality in countries, but also to achieve socio-economic transformation particularly as countries are transitioning in development stage. Four main points were raised in this session:

- Challenges continue to remain with regard to implementing clinical and global health research in the region, due to the lack of national funding (on average 0.03% of the national GDP), perpetuating the dependency on international funding and making the future of research unstable (i.e. when cuts in international funding for research are being implemented).
- A related issue raised by speakers is the importance of greater involvement of African researchers and bodies in setting the research agenda and research priorities in a mutually inclusive and beneficial manner.
- Equitable approaches are sought in managing research outputs, co-produced information and data, so that they benefit the professional growth of both international and ‘local’ researchers.
- Whilst “North-South” academic collaborations are fundamental for the East African research community, regional (“South- South”) led consortia with african institutions

leading research agenda and priorities should take place. Building capacity of young researchers was also mentioned as a priority.

In Session 2 -***Enabling environment for health research capacity building***- representatives from Wellcome Trust, the Fogarty International Center at the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the British Medical Journal (BMJ) provided an overview of the efforts made to build research capacity and resilience, to support research programmes and publishing and to shifting the center of gravity to African countries. Some of the efforts mentioned were:

- H3AFRICA, in collaboration with NIH, Wellcome Trust and the African Academy of Sciences, to empower African researchers to become empowered in genome research
- EPI and AfriHealth research fundings to African institutions funded by the NIH.
- The joint support by Wellcome Trust, BMGF, UKFCDO and other funders of the DELTAS ReMPro, Mobility schemes and other programmes and initiatives led by AESA at AAS, developed in response to the critical gaps that were identified in building the continent's research and development ecosystems that support a vibrant research culture and scientific leadership.
- BMJ Research to Publication, an online learning programme for doctors and for early career healthcare researchers on how to design, conduct and analyse research and publish articles.
- BMJ Global Health annual grant programme to encourage African researchers to publish scientific articles as first authors.

The final Session- ***Existing efforts: showcasing and ideas for building research and capacities in East Africa***- reiterated some of the operational challenges faced by researchers in the region, showcased some of the innovative efforts in the region, and highlighted opportunities for action. Example of these were:

- The Tanzanian Data Lab's data science programme, which include pioneering technology (AI) and skills, predicting outbreak and suggesting treatment
- Global collaboration needs better data sharing with the Region and with the North.
- The COVID-19 crisis and the lack of R&D for vaccines in Africa, highlighted the need of a local production agenda for pharmaceuticals.

To conclude, the following themes, which emerged from the event, will require further awareness raising across the wider research community, to foster strategic thinking for aligned actions.

- Greater participation of East African researchers in setting research agendas and priorities, which benefit the East African Region and impact their policy.
- Increase government's funding around infrastructure and create a supporting and enabling environment for building local/regional capacities to lead global research.
- Foster international and regional research collaborations and partnerships based on principles of trust and equity, particularly in relation to data ownership and publishing.

List of speakers

Speakers	Title, Organisation
Mr Moses Mulimira	Global Health Consultant, Health Education England
Dr Ashley McKimm	Director of Partnerships, BMJ
Prof Nelson Sewankamo	Former Dean of Makerere University Medical School, Uganda, a past Principal Makerere University College of Health Sciences and a Professor of internal medicine.
Hon Susan Mochache	Principal Secretary, Ministry of Health Kenya
Dr Diana Atwine	Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Health Uganda
Prof Gibson Kibiki	CEO, East African Health Research Commission
Prof Abel Mukibi	Permanent Secretary Ministry of Health, Tanzania
Ms Lesley-Anne Long	CEO, GBC Health
Dr Peter Kilmarx	Deputy Director, The Fogarty International Center at the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH)
Dr Branwen Hennig	Senior Portfolio Lead, Wellcome Trust
Mr Henry Spielberg	Associate Publisher BMJ Global Health
Prof Isaac Kibwage	Vice Chancellor, Egerton University of Kenya
Mr Stephen Chacha	Executive Director, Tanzania Data Lab
Dr Moses Bockarie	Director of International Cooperation (Africa) and Head of Africa Office -European & Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership (EDCTP)
Dr Rory Horner	Senior Lecturer in Globalisation, University of Manchester
Ms Mitali Wroczynski	Director of Global Health, BMJ
Ms Lalitha Bhagavatheeswaran	Engagement and Knowledge Manager, BMJ
Dr Elisa Roma	Senior Programmes and Partnerships Manager, BMJ