

Indicators to support effective capacity strengthening monitoring and evaluation

In this bulletin, we present resources from the CCR for consideration when undertaking future monitoring and evaluation efforts. In our first resource, we examine the lack of impact indicators and demonstrate where priority focal areas have emerged. Secondly, we explore practical guidance for improving indicators and evaluations of research capacity strengthening programmes, and how “ripple benefits” of research capacity strengthening inevitably occur across the interfaces between individuals, institutions, and societies.

Measuring the outcome and impact of research capacity strengthening initiatives: A review of indicators used or described in the published and grey literature

- Development partners and research councils are increasingly **investing in research capacity strengthening initiatives** in low- and middle-income countries to support sustainable research systems.
- However, there are **few reported evaluations** of research capacity strengthening initiatives and **no agreed evaluation metrics**.
- To advance progress towards a **standardised set of outcome and impact indicators**, we conducted a structured review of research capacity strengthening indicators described in the published and grey literature.
- We identified a total of **668 indicators of which 40% measured output, 59.5% outcome and 0.5% impact** - only 1% of outcome and impact indicators met all four quality criteria applied.
- A majority of reported outcome indicators clustered in four focal areas: **research management and support**, the **attainment and application of new research skills and knowledge**, **research collaboration**, and **knowledge transfer**.
- The review identified **priority focal areas** in which outcome and impact indicators could be developed as well as a small **set of ‘candidate’ indicators** that could form the **basis of development efforts**.

Pulford J, Price N, Amegee Quach J and Bates I. Measuring the outcome and impact of research capacity strengthening initiatives: A review of indicators used or described in the published and grey literature. F1000Research 2020, 9:517 (<https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.24144.1>)

Practical guidance for improving evaluations of research capacity strengthening programmes

- CCR collated evidence to informed guidance about **how to improve evaluations of, and indicators for**, research capacity strengthening (RCS) programmes in low and middle-income countries.
- The exercise addressed the linked problems of the **lack of frameworks and robust indicators** to determine the **impact** of RCS programmes, and the **lack of a unifying, evidence-based approach** to underpin funders’ substantial investments in RCS efforts.
- An **RCS evaluation framework** was drafted with indicators generic to diverse types of RCS programmes were mapped, **guidance about how to design and conduct more rigorous RCS evaluations** was developed, **new RCS evaluation concepts** were created and next steps in the process of testing and validating the framework and indicators were outlined.
- Two new concepts emerged from the project:
 - i. the **over-arching theory of change** (which describes how the overall scheme will achieve impact) and the theories of change for **each funded RCS project** within a scheme, **should all align**; and
 - ii. funders of RCS programmes can **maximise evaluations of impact** by explicitly capturing the RCS **‘ripple benefits’** that inevitably occur across the **interfaces between individuals, institutions and societies**.
- The RCS evaluation recommendations and resulting guidance should enable **comparisons of RCS progress** among projects and schemes, to facilitate **real-time** learning and tracking along a trajectory to achieve RCS **impact**.

Anne M. Khisa , Evelyn Gitau , Justin Pulford and Imelda Bates (2019) [A Framework and Indicators to Improve Research Capacity Strengthening Evaluation Practice](#). Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine Centre for Capacity Research and African Population and Health Research Centre

DELTAS: Learning Research Programme

The Learning Research Programme (LRP), led by the Centre for Capacity Research, works alongside the DELTAS Africa consortia to produce research-based learning about how to train and develop world-class researchers, foster their careers and collaborations, and promote research uptake. For more information about the LRP research activities and to access the LRP resources (annual reports, in-depth newsletters and all our publications), please visit our DELTAS research page at: www.lstmed.ac.uk/projects/deltas---learning-research-programme

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Some of the LRP team at the DELTAS Africa AGM 2019

Equitable Career Pathways - This theme is framed within the context of a PhD project, led by Millicent Liani, titled: “Examining barriers and enablers to gender equitable scientific career pathways in African research institutions”. Millicent has employed a qualitative case study design, focusing on three DELTAS consortia, including: **IDeAL** (Initiative to Develop African Research Leaders); **MARCAD** (Malaria Research Capacity Development in West and Central Africa); and **SANTHE** (Sub-Saharan African Network for TB/HIV Research Excellence).

Research Training - Currently led by Abiola Aiyenigba, this theme explores the range and quality of professional development opportunities available to African-based researchers as well as the individual and institutional benefits – in terms of professional development – associated with DELTAS Africa membership. Research activities have included a mapping of health-related postgraduate training courses available in sub-Saharan Africa, an online survey of African researchers’ professional development needs, opportunities and barriers, and a qualitative case study exploring the extent, and process by which, researcher training in sub-Saharan Africa may be enhanced through consortia membership. Participating DELTAS Africa consortia include: **CARTA+** (Consortium for Advanced Research Training in Africa+); **MARCAD**; and **Afrique One-ASPIRE** (African Science Partnership for Intervention Research Excellence).

Knowledge Translation - Also framed within the context of a PhD project, led by Violet Murunga and titled: “Exploring the research uptake strategies being used by African researchers to promote evidence-informed decision making”. Phase one of Violet’s research is a qualitative case study of selected DELTAS Africa consortia: **AMARI** (African Mental Health Research Initiative); **THRIVE-2** (Training Health Researchers into Vocational Excellence in East Africa-2); and **WACCBIP** (West African Centre for Cell Biology of Infectious Pathogens).

Consortia Management - Framed within the context of a PhD project, led by Nadia Tagoe and titled: “Examining the process of establishing and managing health research capacity strengthening consortia”. Nadia is based at KEMRI-Wellcome Trust, Kilifi, Kenya, under the **IDeAL** programme and has employed a mixed methods research design. To date, Nadia has completed key informant interviews with almost all DELTAS Africa consortia Directors and Programme Managers as well as a focused case study in three selected DELTAS Africa consortia including: **CARTA+**; **THRIVE-2**; and **DELGEME** (Developing Excellence in Leadership and Genetic Training for Malaria Elimination in Sub-Saharan Africa).



Millicent Liani



Abiola Aiyenigba



Violet Murunga



Nadia Tagoe