

Enabling Research Capacity Strengthening within a Consortia Context

Within the frame of the DELTAS LRP ‘research training’ theme, we are currently exploring factors that enable stronger research capacity strengthening (RCS) outcomes for both individuals and institutions belonging to DELTAS Africa consortia. This qualitative study, drawing on semi-structured interviews conducted with 69 staff and fellows from three DELTAS consortia, is at an advanced stage of analysis. Here we describe the four primary enablers of both individual- and institutional-level RCS that have emerged thus far.

Many of the reported and apparent RCS benefits of consortia membership, from either an individual- or institutional-perspective, would not have been realised (or realised to the same extent and/or within the same time frames) without access to the **financial resourcing** that consortia membership conferred; financial resources that are not **readily accessible** to sub-Saharan Africa-based fellows or institutions from other sources. However, reliance on consortia funding also represents a **major barrier** to sustaining and/or building upon RCS achieved within consortia lifespans and there was **limited evidence of innovation** in terms of resolving this dilemma.

Funding

Leadership structures and practices were central to both individual- and institutional-level RCS. The **more engaged institutional leaders** were in consortia oversight and decision-making structures, the **greater the apparent impact** of institutional RCS as well as the potential for sustained change over time. Enabling consortia leadership practices included appropriate **delegation of responsibilities** and respectful inter-personal interactions, and the potential for **‘good’ leadership practices** to filter down was evident (i.e. fellows adopted good leadership practices demonstrated within the consortia context).

Leadership

Interaction

Interaction was a multi-dimensional theme, inclusive of supportive interactions across: the often authoritarian **academic hierarchy** in sub-Saharan Africa; institutions belonging to the **same consortia**; consortia and non-consortia staff within the **same institutions**; sub-Saharan Africa regions, including both **Anglophone and Francophone**; **Southern and Northern** researchers and research institutions; academic **disciplines** and research and **research support services**; and across sectors. Whilst funding was essential to enabling many (but not all) of these interactions, each consortium – and the broader DELTAS Africa initiative – was also deliberately **constructed to facilitate interaction opportunities**.

Consortia/Institution Interface

The interface between consortia and member institutions emerged as a prominent, sensitive and often **highly problematic form of interaction** warranting careful consideration in its own right. Indeed, issues with the interface between consortia and institutional processes directly contributed to a wide variety of reported challenges. Consortia experience (especially in terms of dealing with complex **institutional bureaucracies** and developing effective inter-personal relationships with key institutional staff), **staffing structures** (which promote integration within institutions) and **governance models** (that empower institutions), as well as effective **communication** practices, served to mitigate challenges to individual-level RCS that arose from the consortia-member institution interface and were a **powerful conduit to facilitating institutional RCS**.

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

For more information about the LRP please contact justin.pulford@lstmed.ac.uk



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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