

Project Title	Health Research Capacity Strengthening Initiative (HRCSI) in Malawi
Client	DFID, Wellcome Trust, IDRC
Partners	LSTM, Calcon, DMA
Year	2008 - 2010

Context

The Government of Malawi (GoM) is committed to overcoming increasing disease burdens and impaired health service delivery, and recognises the importance of health and health research for socio-economic development. However Malawi faces major health challenges due to a persisting high burden of preventable and treatable disease. The political environment is favourable for health research; however Malawi does not have a national health research agenda or policy framework to guide research in the country. It is acknowledged that health research capacity needs to be strengthened to ensure high quality research and knowledge generation and to promote the utilisation of research for the improvement of health systems performance and the attainment of health targets.

The Health Research Capacity Strengthening Initiative (HRCSI) was developed in consultation with the Ministry of Health and the Government of Malawi and aims to strengthen the capacity for the generation of new health research knowledge within Malawi and improve its use in evidence based decision making, policy formulation and implementation.

Programme Objectives

A consortium led by LATH and comprising the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, Development Management Associates (DMA), a local management consulting firm, and Calcon a programme management consulting organisation, is managing a programme of work in support of the implementation of the HRCSI. Representatives from each of these organisations make up the Technical Support Team (TST). The TST sources and manages technical assistance (TA) expertise to develop the National Research Council of Malawi's (NRCM) capacity to manage an enhanced, transparent and efficient grant-making process. It is also providing 'incubation support' and management and local financial oversight of NRCM in the first 2 to 3 years *'to develop its capacity and financial systems to the point where the organisation can fully deliver the programme objectives alone'*.

Approach

The overall approach is to manage a range of technical inputs to existing health research structures and mechanisms to support the implementation of the HRCSI and strengthen health research capacity in Malawi. Local ownership, skills transfer and capacity building are core themes of the programme of support.

LATH is responsible for the overall management and coordination of the programme of support and provides support to the strategic management of the HRCSI. DMA is supporting the development of the financial and grant management functions and systems; Calcon provides technical and management support for the development of management information systems and monitoring and evaluation systems and processes. LSTM provides technical and management support to strengthen the management and quality of research programmes, improve mechanisms for the dissemination and utilisation of research findings and to improve the management of research knowledge and information and strengthen knowledge networks.

Expected Outcomes

Output 1: Enhance institutional capacity for high - quality multi-disciplinary health – related research studies

Output 2: National health policies and programmes formulated utilising research findings

Output 3: Scientific knowledge more effectively shared across international organisations and knowledge networks

Output 4: Improved regulation and coordination of the national research environment

Results to Date

To date 90 undergraduate grants have been awarded to students at Chancellor College, the College of Medicine, The Polytechnic, Mzuzu University, Kamuzu College of Nursing and Bunda College and it is planned to increase this number to over 200 in 2010. In the 1st RFA (Request for applications) HRCSI awarded two fellowships, and six research grants and to date the 2nd RFA the programme has received nearly 200 applications for training fellowships and 16 applications for research grants. The programme is also assisting the Ministry of Health in the development of a National Health Research agenda for the country. As well as holding a series of workshops on the topic, HRCSI have contracted local consultants to conduct gap analysis in nine thematic areas. Capacity assessments have been carried out at local institutions, a detailed M&E system developed and institutional datasets designed and commissioned. The 2nd RFA has to date received 180 requests for training fellowships, 20 requests for post graduate dissertation grants and 15 requests for research grants. The programme intends to work with applicants to identify suitable grantees and to work in partnership with them to achieve their goals.