

## Consortium Management – Challenges and Good Practice

Drawing from the experiences of DELTAS consortia directors and managers, in this month’s bulletin we present five key consortium management challenges as well as corresponding good practices and helpful recommendations. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list, but aims to serve as factors to consider when dealing with such situations.

Challenge	Good practice and recommendations
Differences in partner capacities, interests, priorities and expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be aware of different partner contexts e.g. each partner’s situation and perspectives</li> <li>• Identify and leverage the strengths of each partner</li> <li>• Tailor roles and activities to partners’ strengths, needs and interests</li> <li>• Take into account and balance different partner needs when making consortium decisions</li> <li>• Coach less-capacitated partners to enable moving forward as a team</li> <li>• Learn from other partners by sharing knowledge and experiences</li> </ul>
Low level of participation and engagement by partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify individual partner interests, needs and challenges; partners may be hindered by multiple factors</li> <li>• Make deliberate efforts to build partner relationships e.g. organise face-to-face meetings and getting to know each other sessions where possible</li> <li>• Promote participatory decision-making and consensus-building to promote buy-in and ownership e.g. actively encourage participation by all</li> <li>• Ensure each partner identifies and contributes their strengths to promote a sense of inclusion</li> </ul>
Poor communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure the free flow of information among partners through creating and consistently encouraging such a culture and setting good examples</li> <li>• Make deliberate efforts to build partner relationships e.g. organising face-to-face meetings and getting to know each other sessions where possible</li> <li>• Ensure each partner is heard and ‘draw out’ silent partners</li> <li>• Make use of various forms of communication (e.g. formal and informal, group and one-on-one, planned and random)</li> </ul>
Non-adherence to consortium processes and requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote inclusive and participatory decision-making and consensus-building to promote ownership of requirements</li> <li>• Have clear and well-documented consortium policies, guidelines and processes</li> <li>• Be transparent and open at all times</li> <li>• Be flexible where necessary e.g. identify individual challenges and provide tailored support</li> <li>• Ensure consistency e.g. the same rules for all partners at all times</li> </ul>
Restrictive host institutional processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make an effort to know partners’ institutional contexts and challenges</li> <li>• Get institutional buy-in at all levels e.g. actively engage relevant institutional actors and be open to their inputs</li> <li>• Ensure regular communication and continuous engagement with institutional actors e.g. provide regular updates on consortium activities</li> <li>• Promote institutional ownership of consortium activities</li> </ul>

# 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](http://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 qualitative 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