

Welcome to the 6th edition of the DELTA Learning Research Programme newsletter

I hope all is progressing well with your respective DELTA Africa activities and you enjoy the latest update from the Learning and Research Programme.
Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Justin Pulford

Deputy PI, DELTA Learning Research Programme

justin.pulford@lstm.ac.uk

The professional development opportunities, needs and barriers of African researchers: Online survey launched

The Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, in partnership with the African Academy of Sciences, the KEMRI-Wellcome Trust Research Programme and the Institut Pasteur, have launched a brief (5-10 minute), anonymous online survey exploring the professional development opportunities, needs and barriers faced by African researchers.

The survey is being conducted within the context of the DELTA LRP 'researcher training' theme and is designed to obtain the information necessary for ensuring effective, needs-based and context appropriate professional development support for African researchers.

If you are an African researcher, based within an African research institution, then we would greatly appreciate your support. To access the survey (and study information sheet), please click on the following link:

<https://lstm.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/african-researchers-professional-development-opportunities>

A French language version of the same survey is presented below :

Nous vous avons récemment invité à remplir un court questionnaire en ligne (5 à 10 minutes) portant sur les opportunités de développement professionnel, les besoins et barrières auxquels sont confrontés les chercheurs africains basés en Afrique. Cette étude est conduite par la Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, en partenariat avec l'African Academy of Sciences, Institut Pasteur et le KEMRI-Wellcome Trust Research Programme.

Vous avez été identifié(e) comme une personne susceptible d'apporter une contribution précieuse à ce projet de recherche. Nous espérons que vous serez disposé à y participer.

En acceptant de participer à cette étude, vous fournirez des informations essentielles permettant de concevoir un appui plus efficace et un soutien plus ciblé en matière d'opportunités de développement professionnel qui prennent mieux en compte les besoins et le contexte spécifique dans lequel travaillent les chercheurs africains.

Pour remplir le questionnaire (ainsi que lire la fiche d'information du participant), veuillez cliquer sur le lien suivant :

<https://lstm.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/defis-barrieres-et-opportunités-de-developpement-professi>

Managing health research capacity strengthening consortia:
A systematized review of the published literature

Congratulations to Ms Nadia Tagoe who has published a manuscript in theme four of the DELTAS LRP, consortium management, titled **“Managing health research capacity strengthening consortia: A systematized review of the published literature”** in the *BMJ Global Health*. Below is her abstract and the full article can be accessed [here](#).

Manuscript Abstract:

Locally relevant research is considered critical for advancing health and development in low and middle-income countries. Accordingly, health research capacity strengthening efforts have intensified, increasingly through consortia. Yet the knowledge base for managing such consortia is not well-defined. This review aimed to ascertain the scope and quality of published literature on health research capacity strengthening consortium management processes, management-related factors influencing consortium operations and outcomes, and the knowledge gaps.

Given the paucity of published health research capacity strengthening literature, a ‘systematized review’ as outlined by Grant and Booth was conducted, modelling the systematic review process without restriction to research-based publications. A systematic search in PubMed and Scopus was carried out coupled with a manual search for papers using reference checking and citation searching. A quality appraisal of eligible articles using the Mixed Method Appraisal Tool was undertaken. Thematic synthesis was used to analyse the extracted data.

The search identified 55 papers, made up of 18 empirical papers and 37 commentaries focusing on consortium-based health research capacity strengthening initiatives involving low- and middle-income countries and reporting management-related data. The review indicates increasing efforts being made in the health research capacity strengthening field in reporting consortia outcomes. However, it highlights the dearth of high-quality empirical research on health research capacity strengthening consortium management and the nascent nature of the field with most papers published after 2010. The available literature highlights the importance of relational management factors such as equity and power relations in influencing consortium success, though these factors were not explored in depth. Operational management processes and their role in the capacity strengthening pathway were rarely examined.

In conclusion, findings indicate a weak evidence base for health research capacity strengthening consortium management both in terms of quantity and conceptual depth, demonstrating the need for an expanded research effort to inform health research capacity strengthening practice.

3rd Annual DELTAS LRP Learning Report

The latest DELTAS annual learning report has now been released and can be accessed [here](#). We will now be working with the AAS M&E team to support further dissemination and uptake of the reported findings.

Selected highlights from LRP Theme One, Equitable Careers, are presented below. We strongly encourage all DELTAS directors, programme managers, support staff and fellows to review the report content in full as it is full of practical suggestions (like those below) that may be useful to apply in your respective consortia and/or work programmes.

Facilitators of Scientific Career Progression

- 1) **Family and spousal support** as critical for scientific career progression through provision of child care and emotional support.
- 2) **Good mentorship** was viewed as crucial for career progression, especially at early research career stage.
- 3) Support by PIs through **allocation of research assistants to help female fellows/researchers with data collection** where they have family demands because of young children.
- 4) **Support for childcare (subsidy for childcare) when traveling abroad**, as mainly reported by female mid-career and senior scientists.
- 5) **Flexible working arrangements** agreed upon with supervisors/line managers, who were consequently referred to as 'pro-family research leaders'.
- 6) **Work-life discussion panels** between junior research fellows and senior scientists within the workplace, which are helpful in understanding the career progression issues faced by juniors and seniors, who may be able to provide support - e.g. with time management skills.
- 7) Presence of a **well-being department that supports the work-life balance of researchers/staff** through encouraging them to undertake physical exercise and avoid working over the weekends. Some institutions have deployed occupational therapists and counsellors who help with the psychological issues experienced by researchers.
- 8) Encouraging fellows, as well as facilitating them financially, to **pursue English courses** at the British Councils in their respective countries.
- 9) Provision of **fellowships to researchers to visit their collaborators abroad** to enable them gain scientific and English speaking and writing skills. Some fellows (from Francophone countries) have applied for AESA's mobility fund to visit Anglophone countries during the analysis and writing phase to improve on their English language.
- 10) **Bridge funds by research institutions which support salaries for researchers** who are still struggling with research funding, as well as transition of PhD fellows upon their successful completion of fellowship. IDEAL programme, for instance, offers a one-year bridge fund to PhD fellows, commonly known as 'Career Development Year' which aids them to start thinking about their future career pathways through undertaking grant and paper writing and establishing research collaborations, although it is not guaranteed for all PhD fellows.
- 11) **Institutional support for networking and collaborations** i.e. through annual retreats for fellows where senior researchers and mentors are invited to share their career experience.
- 12) Some PIs are **providing supervisory opportunities to doctoral and post-doctoral fellows** to co-supervise their juniors which is useful for co-authorship in publications, and in gaining leadership, teaching and supervision skills early in their careers

Theme 1: Equitable Career Pathways

Millicent Liani has completed 90% of the data collection activities for her PhD study. The purpose of her qualitative study is to examine the opportunities and challenges faced by female and male research fellows in their scientific career progression within the DELTAS funded African research institutions. The selected consortia include: *Initiative to Develop African Research Leaders (IDeAL)*; *Malaria Research Capacity Development in West and Central Africa (MARCAD)*; and *Sub-Saharan African Network for TB/HIV Research Excellence (SANTHE)*. Fifty-eight in-depth interviews with DELTAS supported trainees and research scientists have been completed as the main method of data collection, along with 22 key informant interviews with consortia research leaders/directors, programme managers/coordinators, monitoring and evaluation officers, human resources managers, and supervisors (co-principle investigators).

Theme 2: Research Training

Recent activities for this theme include a soon to be launched online survey of sub-Saharan African researchers' professional development opportunities, needs, 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. The purpose of the case study is to learn and understand to what extent membership of the DELTAS Africa network influences the research training programmes designed and implemented by research institutions across the DELTAS-sponsored consortia. Case studies will be carried out among purposively selected DELTAS consortia including: *Consortium for Advanced Research Training in Africa+ (CARTA+)*; *Malaria Research Capacity Development in West and Central Africa (MARCAD)*; and one further consortium yet to be selected.

Theme 3: Research Uptake

Violet Murunga has completed 25 in-depth interviews as the first phase of the empirical component of her PhD. Employing a sequential exploratory mixed methods design, Violet will collect data in two discrete phases. Phase one is a qualitative case study entailing in-depth interviews with representative research and research support staff from three purposively selected DELTAS Africa consortia: *African Mental Health Research Initiative (AMARI)*; *Training Health Researchers into Vocational Excellence in East Africa-2 (THRIVE-2)*; and *West African Centre for Cell Biology of Infectious Pathogens (WACCBIP)*. Phase two will use the qualitative study findings to inform a survey to be administered to all DELTAS Africa fellows and research support staff in late 2019/early 2020.

Theme 4: Consortium Management

Nadia Tagoe has completed the first phase of the empirical component of her study which focuses on identifying management processes adopted by the DELTAS consortia and the experiences of consortium leaders in implementing these processes, through 23 key informant interviews and 32 in-depth interviews. Nadia selected three consortia for the case studies, aiming to include a wide variation of consortium characteristics and contexts: *Consortium for Advanced Research Training in Africa+ (CARTA+)*; *Training Health Researchers into Vocational Excellence in East Africa-2 (THRIVE 2)*; and *Developing Excellence in Leadership and Genetic Training for Malaria Elimination in Sub-Saharan Africa (DELGEME)*. In the coming months, data collection for the second phase will be completed and data analysis will commence. The preliminary findings will inform a final phase of the study in which Nadia will explore if emerging findings are applicable across the wider group of DELTAS consortia as well as in other low- and middle-income country-led health research capacity strengthening consortia.

LSTM Seminar



Professor Sally Theobald, Dr Rachel Tolhurst and Millicent Liani on "How gender analyses of the health workforce and science can deepen understanding and harness change"

Millicent Liani joined [Prof Sally Theobald](#) and [Dr Rachel Tolhurst](#), both based at the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, via video link to present a seminar titled "How gender analyses of the health workforce and science can deepen understanding and harness change". The seminar discussed the efforts to mainstream gender in health, which build on feminist theory and action, to improve women's health over many decades, and to apply learning to

approaches that address gender inequities in both health systems and processes of scientific production. Millicent's research on examining barriers and enablers to gender equitable scientific career pathways in African research institutions was the key case study presented. The seminar can be viewed [here](#).

New Appointments

In April, [Abiola Aiyenigba](#) joined the Centre for Capacity Research as the Research Assistant on the research training theme of DELTAS. She has just completed her PhD at the University of Liverpool on interventions to reduce psychological morbidities associated with infertility in Nigeria.

[Pierre Abomo](#), who previously undertook this research theme, is the newly appointed Post-Doctoral Research Assistant at the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine's tsetse fly control programme. He will work towards [strengthening the capacity of the national \(Uganda and DRC\) tsetse control programmes](#) through the planning and management of the tsetse control operations at full country scale.

I am sure you will join me in wishing them both the best of luck in their new appointments.