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Research for Health Africa

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SUPPORTING COUNTRY RESEARCH GOVERNANCE AND INNOVATION

# Strengthening Research and Innovation Systems for Health and Development in Africa

## Workshop Report

from  
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Cape Town

Organised by:

The COHRED Group



Supporting research and innovation systems for health, equity and development



A PROGRAMME OF THE AFRICAN UNION

NEPAD Planning and Coordinating Agency  
Agence de Planification et de Coordination du NEPAD

## Introduction

The Research for Health Africa (R4HA) programme aims to strengthen national governance of research and innovation in Africa and thereby improve health, equity and development across the continent. This aim also lies behind COHRED's work with the West African Health Organisation (WAHO). To look in more detail at strengthening research and innovation systems for health and Development in Africa, and to provide networking opportunities for global, regional and national partners – existing and new - a workshop was held in Cape Town, South Africa as part of Forum 2012 ([www.forum2012.org](http://www.forum2012.org)).

The workshop opened with presentations from COHRED's Director, Carel IJsselmuiden on the benefits of establishing a strong research and innovation system for health and development, followed by an overview of the R4HA Programme by Programme Director, Sylvia de Haan. NEPAD's Bruno Kubata explained how the partnership between COHRED and NEPAD supports both the R4HA programme and NEPAD's objective to enhance Africa's growth, development and participation in the global economy. Partnership was also the theme of the presentation from WAHO's (West African Health Organisation) Issiaka Sombie on how countries in West Africa can share resources and learning for a regional approach to strengthening their national health research systems.

## Becoming self-sufficient – finding new innovative ways for funding

In line with the theme of Forum 2012 - Beyond Aid - the opening presentations initiated a discussion around the steps institutions must take to make themselves sustainable – for instance, selling services. An example given was The Ifakara Health Institute (a Tanzanian NGO) which internally generates 80% of its own resources, using the resources to cover salaries, among other things. New projects have to contribute to the core overheads of the NGO.

However in general, there appears to be a disparity in how much people are paid, with government supported research institutions sometimes seeing higher salaries than other institutions, such as universities. The sustainability of continuing to pay these higher salaries was questioned.

## Developing a research and innovation system

For countries facing the task of developing a research and innovation system, COHRED's Debbie Marais presented a framework to tackle this issue. To assist with this approach, a series of guides will shortly be available from [www.cohred.org/tools-approaches/](http://www.cohred.org/tools-approaches/). To focus on real-life examples, participants highlighted five key issues related to developing a research and innovation system for further discussion using an 'open-space' workshop ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open-space\\_meeting](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open-space_meeting)), the results of which are summarised below.

### 1. Indicators (and Conditions) for Research Funding

It is important for countries to have a mechanism in place to assess the level of country/public funding towards health research (honouring the commitment of 2% national health expenditure) and to measure its impact. When entering into negotiations for funding, it should be ethical for both parties, whereby countries respect the donor conditions, and funders address the priorities of the country and contribute to its sustainability. Countries, therefore, need to have documented priorities to negotiate with funders. It should also be identified how information and results of research will be shared and communicated.

## 2. Coordinating Research for Health Beyond the Health Sector

Research for health goes beyond the health sector and in many instances there is not a co-ordinated effort across sectors – resources are fragmented and there is a duplication of efforts. It was suggested that by establishing a body specifically mandated to coordinate research, such as COSTECH in Tanzania, countries can encourage experience-sharing and learning across sectors, define country priorities and foster dialogue among funders to align to these priorities. With new communication methods such as Twitter, co-ordination and harmonisation becomes more achievable.

## 3. Engaging the Public, including Vulnerable Groups, in Research

It was suggested that to make equity a common goal, academia, policy makers and the community, through civil society organisations should be included in the priority setting process. It was important that marginalised and vulnerable groups were represented and funding/processes developed to ensure their inclusion.

## 4. Strengthen Managerial Capacity at the Government Level

The difference between the management of health research and health research systems needs to be defined, with the Terms of Reference clearly specified. Tracking all the issues related to system performance will help identify the profile of the work entailed.

## 5. Evaluating the work of Regional Partnerships e.g. WAHO

It was stated that WAHO is well established as a facilitator and co-ordinator for countries in West Africa. They have successfully helped countries with their research for health policy needs, but have found that coordination between big institutions and other research institutions to be a problem. WAHO is using four countries as trial countries and if successful, will expand to other countries in the region. Recommendations for the future included WAHO widening its remit to cover research for health (rather than health research) to include sectors such as agriculture, and also to continue to strengthen their alliance with ECOWAS to benefit from its political strength and reach.

## Research Ethics Management

COHRED's Boitumelo Mokgatla-Moipolai gave a presentation outlining the necessity of a research ethics review to protect the rights of research participants, such as children or vulnerable groups. Past research studies that violated research participant rights were highlighted, as was the need to continue exploring ways to harmonise the research review process, both within and across countries. A web-based tool designed to oversee the research ethics review process - RHInno (Research for Health and Innovation Organiser) was presented by David Abreu, also from COHRED. More information can be found at [www.rhinno.net](http://www.rhinno.net)

The ensuing discussion focused on the dilemma of processing backlogs of reviews whilst maintaining consistency and the frequent problems in protocols, for example the difficulty in completing an informed consent form for people who are illiterate. It was suggested that examples such as these should be shared and one way to do this would be via the social networking element of [www.researchethicsweb.org](http://www.researchethicsweb.org) Two key areas of ethics were selected to enable a more in-depth discussion using the world café meeting format ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knowledge\\_Cafe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knowledge_Cafe)). The first was **National Ethics Review Committees** and in question was whether all proposals should be referred to the committee or if there should be differing levels, for example could institutions be left to deal with all student proposals. It was felt that a degree of change is needed within national ethics review committees. Currently, there is a poor attendance at

committee meetings, but also a resistance to change as many prefer to continue with the meeting approach rather than a move to take action. The length of term for an ethics committee member was discussed and agreed that this should not be too short, as it may result in the loss of institutional memory. The debate of payment was raised, and it was questioned if time and travel costs should be covered for reviewers or whether this may pose a conflict of interest.

The second topic looked at Ethics **Review Capacity** where it was deemed important to build capacity at institutional, regional and national levels. It is important to have adequate human resources, finance, infrastructure, access to relevant training and there is a need for the committees to be independent. Communication between committees is an important element and approaches such as on-line discussion platforms could be adopted. To raise awareness of ethical issues, research ethics should be embedded in the curriculum for all research related training.

### **What are the Benefits of the Research for Health Africa and West Africa Programmes**

An opportunity was given to existing partners to share some aspect of their experience, learning and overall thoughts on the work carried out in conjunction with R4HA/West African programmes.

- Previously COSTECH, Tanzania had a paper-based system for reviewing and granting funding to research proposals and paperwork was often mislaid. Now with the introduction of a customised version of the [HRWeb](#) research information management platform (**CRWeb**), all data is electronically stored and with just a few clicks, they have access to the information they require.
- As a result of the R4HA programme, Senegal has its first website for health research. Before, there were no regular meetings between the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Science and Technology, now an institutional group has been established and a focal point identified in each institute. If information is required, enquiries are directed to the relevant focal point.
- R4HA has supported Mozambique to move forward with their plans to develop a National Research Agenda, taking into consideration Mozambique's requirements. COHRED offers different solutions that can be applied to each country's own setting. The sharing of experiences has been beneficial – learning about Tanzania's progress has given a good insight to other countries.
- In West Africa, Mali has found the collaboration and exchange of information between countries with the same language indispensable. Although Mali already has a research for health plan/policy, the programme has helped them move forward to taking concrete action. They have found collaboration between countries essential – first providing a sub-regional focus that can be expanded to regional and national level. If the programme did not exist, it would have to be created.

***COHRED and NEPAD would like to thank all the participants of the workshop for sharing their experiences and providing insightful feedback, as it is an invaluable contribution to the improvement of current and future programmes.***

***A copy of all presentations can be found at***

***<http://www.forum2012.org/presentations/monday-april-23/>***

## Annex 1: Attendees

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