

# Promoting sustainable research partnerships: a case study of a UK-Africa capacity strengthening award scheme

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## Introduction

- Research capacity strengthening is critical to ensure that low or middle income countries (LMICs) can conduct high-quality research relevant for their context.
- Research partnerships between institutions in higher income countries (HICs) and LMICs are a common model for implementing research capacity strengthening activities<sup>1,2</sup>.
- Numerous guiding principles for effective research partnerships exist but few include the perspective of the LMIC partner<sup>3</sup>.
- Through the evaluation of a research capacity strengthening UK-Africa Partnership Award scheme, we sought to draw out lessons for establishing and maintaining successful research collaborations from the perspective of the LMIC partners and other stakeholders.

## Materials and Methods

Using retrospective evaluation methods and tools derived from published literature, we:

- administered a cross-sectional survey to all UK and African Award holders focusing on partnership outputs and continuation.
- purposively selected 50 individuals to participate in semi-structured interviews or focus group discussions, from 12 institutions involved in the Award.

Our methods explored key elements of research partnerships such as research outputs, partnership formation, and potential sustainability of the partnerships.

Quantitative data was analysed descriptively and qualitative data was analysed using an iterative framework approach.

## Results

Most UK Award holders (77.8%, n=7) and African Award holders (78.6%, n=11) wanted to pursue future collaborations together.

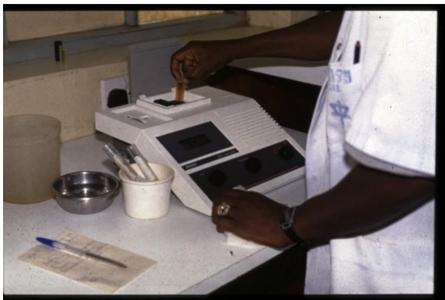
Aspects within partnerships that **influenced potential sustainability** were:

- Perceived benefits at both the individual and institutional level
- ability to influence 'research culture' and instigate critical thinking among mid-career researchers
- previous working relationships
- equity within partnerships
- previous experience of the UK partner of working with/in LMICs



Some factors **hindering development of long term partnerships** were identified as:

- inequities in financial control.
- differing expectations of partners.



## Conclusions

We have provided evidence of factors that may promote research partnerships for capacity strengthening to continue past Award tenure.

We provide practical examples to extend existing partnership models that incorporate the views of all stakeholders and can contribute to successful research partnerships including:

- establishment of mentorship schemes
- explicit identification of benefits to LMIC and HIC partners
- strengthening of financial systems and encouraging equity between partners.
- promotion of collaborative research outputs.



## Further Information

Please go to:

<http://www.lstmed.ac.uk/research/centres-and-units/capacity-research-unit>

## References

- <sup>1</sup>Cole D, Boyd A, Aslanyan G, Bates I. Indicators for tracking programmes to strengthen health research capacity in lower and middle income countries: a qualitative synthesis. *Health Research Policy and Systems*. 2014; 12: 13.  
<sup>2</sup>Mayhew S, Doherty J, Pitayarangsanit S. Developing health systems research capacities through north-south partnership: An evaluation of collaboration with South Africa and Thailand. *Health Research Policy and Systems*. 2008; 6:8.  
<sup>3</sup>Njelesani J, Stevens M, Cleaver S, Mwambwa L, Nixon S. International research partnerships in occupational therapy: A Canadian-Zambian case study. *Occupational Therapy International*. 2013; 20 (2): 78-87.

