Developing and Retaining the Next Generation of African Academics: Excellence, Retention and Sustainability

The APHRC and CARTA Experience on Excellence

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Outline

• Why we need excellence in PG training in Africa
• The CARTA experience and contribution
• Reflections
What we mean by excellence

• A universal concept…

• Therefore the question: What “excellence” means in an African context is a misnomer
  – African researchers/academics compete in a global context

• Ways excellence in postgraduate training can be attained in Africa under prevailing circumstances
Why Excellence in PG Training?

• Globally, sub-Saharan Africa has some of the worst health and development indicators.

• Excellence in research is key to understanding the drivers of, and potential solutions to the many challenges facing the region.

• Yet, the continent clearly lacks centers of research excellence that can generate the evidence base to address the region’s development and health problems.
Role of PG Training in Building Research Excellence

• Universities mandated to build the human resource capacity needed to drive high-quality research on the continent currently face challenges that make this difficult

• Yet, we can no longer afford overseas training
  – High and escalating costs
  – Low rates of return of overseas-trained PhDs
  – Those who return often drift away from teaching/research

• Some implications:
  – Africa employs up to 150,000 expatriate professionals at a cost of US$4B a year to fill the human resource gap created by brain drain (African Partnership Forum (2007):

  – The continent’s share of global scientific output fell from 0.5% in mid-1980s to 0.3% in the mid-1990s
Why CARTA?

• No individual African university or country has the human resource capacity to mount globally-competitive doctoral programmes

• Hence… CARTA!
CARTA Member-institutions

**Established Research Sites**
- APHRC
- Agincourt
- Ifakara
- Kemri

**Established African Universities**
- Dar es Salaam
- Ibadan
- Makerere
- OAU
- Wits

**Promising African Universities**
- Malawi
- Moi
- Rwanda

**Northern Partners**
- CCGHR
- Colorado
- Swiss Trop. Institute
- Monash
- Warwick
- WHO/TDR
- Uni. of Gothenburg

**Lead Institutions**
- APHRC
- Wits
Build and retain a vibrant African academy able to lead world-class multidisciplinary research that impacts positively on public & population health

**Key Elements of CARTA**

- Model doctoral training program
- Strong supervision and mentoring
- Joint Advanced Seminars

**BUILD THE NEXT GENERATION**

**DEVELOP INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY**

- Strengthen research infrastructure
- Faculty & staff training
- Development of vibrant research hubs
Elements of Students’ Training

• Strengthening doctoral training
  – Registration in other universities
  – Exemption from teaching responsibilities
  – Three supervisors – home, training, external
  – Joint Advanced Seminar Series
  – Strong online support – Learning portal
  – Participation in international conferences
  – Targeted sandwich/internship at a Northern/Southern univ.
  – Research grants for student-initiated projects
  – Library support to students
  – Monthly stipend to facilitate fulltime studentship
  – Post-doctoral components – currently unfunded
1. **Introduction to critical thinking and research**
   Build critical thinking, essential concepts and seminal literature, conceptualising research projects, research design, developing instruments, literature & data resources, research ethics

2. **Data management and analysis**
   Mixed-methods approaches, identifying appropriate analytical models, model assumptions, common errors in data analysis, from basic analysis to complex modelling

3. **Interpretation & presentation of research findings**
   Communicating research to policy makers, presentation skills, scientific writing, identifying appropriate journals

4. **Life beyond PhD**
   Proposal writing, budgeting, managing research grants and partnerships, research ethics, developing course outlines and teaching materials, research and policy linkages
Inter-JAS

• Implement research skills learned in previous JAS

• Keep students actively engaged with research process, mentors and peers

• Use CARTA website to complete tasks
  - Reading materials, links to online resources
  - Interactive - communication among fellows, enhance supervision and information exchange
  - Virtual list-serve, chat room, internet library links

• Regular assignments with feedback

• Online courses

• Promote on-time graduation

• Students & supervisors present research training seminars at home institutions for other graduate students
Institutional strengthening

• Training for administrators, Librarians, Bursars
  – Post-graduate training administration
  – Research management including grant reporting
  – E-resources, Retention strategies, etc.

• Training of faculty
  – Project management
  – Mentoring of PhD supervisors; enhancing of skills

• Development of University-wide systems
  – Coherent research agendas
  – Research policy including ethical reviews, etc.

• Research Infrastructure
  – Internet connectivity
  – Graduate seminar rooms
  – Computer labs, etc

• Other support
  – Access to JAS materials
  – Relief teaching support, etc
Current Funding

• Expected program cost:
  – About US$20M over initial 5-8 years

• Secured:
  – Wellcome Trust: $5.8m/5yrs
  – Carnegie Corporation of NY: $1m/18 months
  – Gates Foundation: $200K
  – Ford Foundation: $1m/2 years
  – British Council £105K/3years

• Potential
  – MacArthur Foundations: $1m/3years (submitted)
  – European Union €2m/5years (submitted)
  – Other Foundations, Bilateral funders
  – African governments and philanthropists
  – Individual philanthropists
Reflections...

• Retention
  – We must think outside the box!
    • Buy out time
    • Redefine parameters for salary negotiations
    • Apply limited research funds to productive faculty
  – Consider flexible appointments
    • Existing expertise outside the university
    • Research appointments (non/limited teaching)
    • If accounts/bursary is a problem, outsource!

• Sustainability
  – Excellence is sustainable anywhere in the world!
  – The only thing that is not sustainable is mediocrity
Thank you

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