Health Research Capacity Strengthening (HRCS) Initiative in Kenya and Malawi: a collaborative model

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1. Background
- The need to enhance capacity for health research for development is increasingly being acknowledged
- Sustainable systems for generating and utilising health research have proved difficult to establish and there are few proven models of system-wide interventions
- The Wellcome Trust, UK Department for International Development (DFID) and International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canada, have established a £21 million partnership to strengthen capacity for the generation of health research knowledge and improve its use in evidence-based decision making, policy formulation and implementation, over the next five years

2. Planning
- National Task Forces were established in Kenya and Malawi to develop operational plans
- Task Forces were selected by groups of ‘Elders’ in each country to ensure representation across stakeholders in health research
- The Task Forces harnessed wide support and worked in a highly cooperative and collaborative manner, in conjunction with a Steering Group of representatives of the funder organisations
- Proposals from the Task Forces for the first five years of the initiative have been approved for funding and the programmes are being implemented

3. Support Structure

4. Kenya
- Consortium for National Health Research
  - A new non-governmental national health research body, known as the Consortium for National Health Research (CNHR) has been registered as an NGO in Kenya
  - The Director of the CNHR will be Professor Gilbert Kokwaro
  - The CNHR has already sent out the first ‘call for proposals’ starting with research internships
  - Incubation support will be provided by IDRC staff based in Nairobi
  - The incubation arrangement will be reviewed annually

5. Malawi
- National Research Council of Malawi
  - The national health research body will be the existing National Research Council of Malawi (NRCM)
  - Incubation support will be provided by Liverpool Associates in Tropical Medicine (LATH), a subsidiary of the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine
  - A Project Management Board will provide governance and direction
  - Technical Assistants will be recruited to support development of NRCM into a grant-giving body
  - A Multidisciplinary Research Committee will provide additional technical expertise to support implementation of programme activities
  - LATH will hand over full responsibility to NRCM within three years

6. HRCS Learning
- In parallel to capacity strengthening activities, a monitoring and evaluation project (known as HRCS Learning) will be carried out
- The objective of HRCS Learning is to elicit, document, synthesise and disseminate learning relevant to health research capacity development, and the HRCS in particular
- Sharing learning from, and between, HRCS Kenya and HRCS Malawi will support this objective, but the intended impact of HRCS Learning is much broader than evaluation of the initiative alone
- Through HRCS Learning we hope we can all learn lessons for good practice in future efforts to strengthen research capacity for health

7. Conclusions
- The HRCS initiative represents an experiment and a learning experience for the funders, the Task Forces and the national Governments involved
- It has taken time to develop processes for the management of this initiative, to ensure it is nationally-led and embedded in local institutions, yet reconciles the aims and objectives of both DFID and the Wellcome Trust