High speed Internet connection with an enabling hardware environment that is reliable and accessible is one of the enablers for doing high quality research. A good ICT platform is one of the basic requirements of a modern research institution of which Gulu University is one. Traditionally, faculty times have been concentrated on teaching with less time available for research and publication. With e-learning platform in place, more staff time for research and publications is created since students are engaged in self-directed directed learning and group work not necessarily involving lecturers. In addition, electronic materials are centralised in one place and access to research materials is made easy by collaborating researchers and students. E-learning environment can become one place where research findings are assembled and disseminated to targeted audience or faculty. Staff research and projects can form a very good platform for both graduate and undergraduate students’ research mentorship. In a nutshell, THRiVE’s initiative to support research excellence at the University resulted in laying the foundation for e-learning, which is an unanticipated positive consequence to Gulu University.

The Wellcome Trust-funded THRiVE project at Gulu aims to develop the University into a centre of research excellence in Northern Uganda through training and establishment of high quality research with heavily supported ICT infrastructure to deliver the goal. Through THRiVE project, the Faculty of Medicine received an IT infrastructure boost to support research. This equipment is meant to support health research in Gulu University Faculty of Medicine. Academic staffing at the faculty is thin and yet almost half are pursuing further studies at different institutions of learning, which leaves the staff on the ground with very heavy workload. The heavy workload has resulted in less staff time for research and few research outputs. However, to bridge this gap, it is envisaged that E-learning could be one of the factors that can boost teaching, research and research outputs.

To enable research and health sciences education to take root at the faculty, there was need for ICT infrastructure improvement. Under THRiVE project, Gulu University Faculty of Medicine was able to acquire and install 30 complete sets of new computers in the multimedia laboratory connected to the Internet. Although the primary goal is to support research, this has also provided the faculty with a good hardware platform for e-learning. For example, currently the faculty through other projects acquired over six thousand (6000) titles of medical e-books, which are made accessible to faculty and students through the e-learning platform.
The EPI Division/Lab (UVRI-EPI) at Uganda Virus Research Institute is a WHO Measles Regional Reference Laboratory serving seven countries: Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Comoros. In addition, it is an inter-country polio laboratory serving Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi. One of the major roles of UVRI-EPI is to provide laboratory-backed surveillance for measles and acute flaccid paralysis (AFP) in support of EPI programmes. In addition, UVRI-EPI carries out research on vaccine preventable diseases to inform Ministry of Health and WHO AFRO region on policy formulation on diagnosis and control of vaccine preventable diseases.

THRiVE has contributed greatly in enhancing physical infrastructure and human resource capacity for UVRI-EPI. First, the training of two scientists at UVRI-EPI Division, namely; Ms Prossy Namuwulya and Dr. Josephine Bwogi in research has been supported by THRiVE. Second; specialized molecular biology equipment has been bought and installed in EPI. By the time THRiVE fellowships were advertised, there was no UVRI-EPI laboratory staff with a PhD or undergoing training for a PhD. In 2011, I received a THRiVE Fellowship for my PhD studies and research under Makerere University. Since then, I have developed my research proposal entitled “Rotaviruses in Uganda, Molecular Epidemiology and potential of Zoonotic Transmission” and I started data collection. This has been under guidance of supervisors and, or Doctoral committee members: Prof. Charles Karamagi and Prof Sarah Kiguli (Makerere University), Dr. Miren Itturriza-Gomara(University of Liverpool), Dr. Ulrich Desselberger(University of Cambridge), Dr. Sam Malamba(CDC, Uganda, UVRI) and collaborator Dr. Denis Byarugaba (Makerere University). Under this fellowship, I have been able to attend some short courses that have strengthened my research capacity. These have included courses in Research methods, information competence and management, scholarly writing, advanced biostatistics, data analysis using STATA, financial management and rotavirus genotyping. It is hoped by the end of the PhD, training I will have built capacity to be able to mentor other scientists in research work especially in work related to rotaviruses.

Ms. Prossy Namuwulya, a staff in my division, has received a THRiVE Fellowship to partially support her MSc in Molecular Biology and Biotechnology Research work entitled “Genetic profiles of rubella viruses circulating in Uganda from 2010 to April 2012 surveillance period”. She has completed the research work.
Laboratory capacity in rotavirus genotyping has been built through THRiVE’s contribution of the reagents, supplies and equipment. Three people in UVRI-EPI were trained by Dr. Miren Iurriza-Gomara (University Of Liverpool) in rotavirus identification and genotyping using Real time PCR and conventional PCR methods respectively at UVRI for a week in Jan/Feb 2013. The capacity built will be used in carrying out more research on rotaviruses.

UVRI-EPI acquired a specialized PCR machine (gradient cycler) using a THRiVE equipment grant that I received. I am using it for my PhD research work, while Ms Prossy Namuwulya also used it for her research work. It is a valuable resource for PCR optimization that serves the entire campus community. For instance, one of the Makerere PhD Students: Martha Kaddumukasa hosted at UVRI used the machine to do her research work. The PCR machine is also used for the routine molecular surveillance work on measles and rubella providing information to the EPI programs in the various countries mentioned above served by UVRI-EPI Division.

We are grateful for THRiVE support, and feel it has made substantial contribution towards advancement of our operations at UVRI-EPI Division/Lab.

Research capacity at UVRI-EPI (Lab)

A Kilimanjaro Christian Medical College vision for the future taking shape under THRiVE

At Kilimanjaro Christian Medical College (KCMC) our participation in the THRIVE consortium has presented us with many interesting opportunities and it is particularly rewarding to see these expanding into an important new initiative. On joining the THRIVE Consortium, epidemiology and statistics were identified as the top priority for capacity building at KCMC as weaknesses in these areas was holding back the progress of teaching and research. The importance of epidemiology and statistics in KCMC has, if anything, increased over the last 3 years of our participation in the THRIVE consortium due to the expansion of the teaching and research agenda.

The new Epidemiology Department at KCMC is a product of the collaboration with London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) within the THRIVE consortium. Jim Todd (Reader in Epidemiology at LSHTM) with Seif Shekalaghe (a THRIVE postdoctoral award winner) have developed the MSc in Epidemiology, now in its third year, and there are a number of grant proposals in preparation in addition to small THRIVE grants. Our initial difficulties in recruiting lecturing staff in epidemiology underlined that the lack of capacity in epidemiology extends to the whole East African region. The gaps in staffing have been filled by recruiting 2 further LSHTM staff who are based at KCMC, Jenny Renju and Tara Mtuy. We are now successfully recruiting from among the brightest graduates to the KCMC MSc course.

Jim Todd and Rachel Manonge, departmental heads of Community Health and Epidemiology, have been working towards establishing a joint department. On reviewing our progress in the THRIVE consortium in June of 2012, Dr. Moshi Ntabaye, Director of KCMC and Professor Peter Piot, Director of LSHTM were strongly supportive of this and expanded the vision to the establishment of an ‘Institute of Public Health and Epidemiology’ at KCMC. Further discussions about this have been greeted with support throughout KCMC and its collaborating institutions. Although we still need core funding, a number of projects are prepared to contribute to a new building to house this institute, and this matches well with strengths in LSHTM to provide visiting lecturers and to develop joint proposals for new research.

During his visit Professor Peter Piot, Director of the London School, commented: “The London School has been collaborating with KCMC for many years, with successful joint research programmes on malaria, trachoma and other diseases of major public health importance. We have been working with our colleagues at KCMC to improve postgraduate
training in epidemiology and public health in the Region and Jim Todd, Reader in Epidemiology at the School, heads the new Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics at KCMC. Two other members of the School’s academic staff are based in the department. The establishment of an Institute of Public Health at KCMC is a logical next step and we at the London School look forward to working with our colleagues at KCMC on this exciting new venture.”

Dr. Ntabaye has now formed a KCMC Working Group for the development of the new institute. This includes himself as director, Professor Kessi, the Provost of KCMUC, Dr. Rachel Manonge, Jim Todd and Hugh Reyburn, both senior LSHTM staff based at KCMC. We continue to receive enthusiastic support for this initiative and Dr. Ntabaye has already identified a construction site. As we prepare proposals for external support we are drawing up specifications and costing. Through our collaboration with the University of Copenhagen we have received an offer of assistance from Jacob Knudsen, a well known Danish architect with an interest in designing buildings in Africa.

After our most recent meeting, Dr. Ntabaye commented: “The vision for a new institute of public health represents a major development in KCMC that will be an important resource for research nationally and regionally. It is testament to the benefits of our participation in the THRIVE consortium. KCMC in collaboration with LSHTM and others look forward to building the new institute and to playing an important role in a new phase of THRIVE.”

The new Public Health Institute will be located in the vacant space to the right of the KCMC Biotech laboratory, constructed in 2003 as part of the LSHTM-KCMC collaboration in the Gates Malaria Partnership.
Laboratory Information Management system (LIMS) investment at NIMR Mwanza has modernized specimen management in the laboratories

By John Changalucha

L a b o r a t o r y i n f o r m a t i o n m a n a g e m e n t system (LIMS) software is an excellent tool for managing laboratory data. LIMS facilitates tracking of specimens from reception in the laboratory to archiving. To achieve this, a Custom designed LIMS software was installed at the National Institute for Medical Research, Mwanza Centre laboratories in 2009 by preLink, South Africa and commissioned in November 2011. Before installation of the LIMS it was very time consuming to track samples at any stage of the analytical process from when they are received to the archiving stage. For example to locate a sample stored in a freezer, one would have to sieve through a file of sample storage templates to identify in which freezer, rack, cryobox and position in the cryobox the sample is stored. It was also not uncommon to find after several weeks or months that a certain batch of samples received in the laboratory had not been tested. However, following the installation of the LIMS, the specimen management procedures have been made simpler and efficient.

To facilitate this, the laboratory produces study-specific bar coded identification numbers which allows for scanning of specimens as they are received using bar code readers held in the specimen reception room. The laboratory identification number also includes the test to be performed and hence as they are scanned through the system, they are automatically queued for the respective tests. So it is now very unusual to find specimens which have not been tested because they were missed. Equally by a stroke of computer keys, you can quickly have information on in which freezer, rack and position in a cryobox a certain sample is kept. The system has therefore revolutionized handling of study specimens, processing, issuing of results and sample archiving, and compliance to Good Clinical and Laboratory Practice (GCLP) principles at NIMR laboratories.

However, this success story had cost implication for efficient utilization of LIMS. The system needed an IT trained person to trouble shoot system problems and would require support from preLink to sort out major issues. The institute had therefore to recruit an extra IT staff to provide the needed IT support to the Laboratory. This required financial resources to pay for the salary of the staff and annual fees for the technical support to be provided by preLink. To accommodate these new demands for resources, the Institute through the NIMR/MITU THRiVE Institutional Implementation Committee (IIC), allocated resources to cover these costs. The NIMR laboratories are maximizing the laboratory capacity through investment in this technology and efficiently discharging its responsibilities. We are therefore, grateful to the Wellcome Trust through THRiVE consortium for their generous support.

Printing Unit at NIMR Mwanza become a reality – Experience Sharing across THRiVE Institutions

By Florens Kayombo

During their visit to NIMR Mwanza, the THRiVE Secretariat members had a chance to see the ongoing establishment of a Central Printing Unit supported by THRiVE. This development is a result of the IT Manager’s visit to icipe facilities during the THRiVE AGM in June 2012 that was held at icipe Nairobi.

At the 2012 THRiVE AGM, the NIMR IT Manager had opportunity to share ideas and see the ICT infrastructure at ICiPE, and found that they had a centralised printing unit where all staff at the institution were connected to the Central printer through the network. This made this important resource available to all staff and minimised the overall printing costs for the institution as they needed only to maintain a single printer instead of several for individual staff.

Even though this idea was there at NIMR Mwanza before and was discussed, its implementation did not happen as it was not clear whether it would be feasible. After seeing it being implemented at icipe, back home in Mwanza, the idea was revived and the Centralised Printing Unit is becoming a reality at NIMR Mwanza as a result of knowledge sharing through THRiVE networking.

The challenges faced at icipe in the establishment of the printing unit have provided good lessons for NIMR. One of the challenges is the accessibility of the room by staff 24/7: This is overcome by installing a finger print door locking system for each staff to access anytime. A billing System is also going to be installed by assigning each staff a User ID and pass code.

The management and maintenance of the unit will then be eased.
The Qualitative Research Methods Pilot Course a Resounding Success

By Dr. Elialilia Okello

Between November and December 2012, Makerere University College of Health Sciences organized and piloted a qualitative research methodology course targeting PhD students involved in qualitative research. The course was organized after realizing that qualitative research methods are gaining importance in health sciences research, yet there are not many opportunities for PhD students to train.

The course attracted 38 participants from Makerere University, Kyambogo University, Kampala International University, Mbarara University of Science and Technology and Gulu University.

The course was financially supported by the Training Health Researchers into Vocational Excellence in East Africa (THRiVE) programme.

At the end of the training, participants reported increased knowledge and skills regarding various aspects of qualitative research, which they said would influence not only the way they do research but also how they will teach and supervise students.

“My approach to data collection, analysis and writing will be different. I understand that I am a tool”

“I am going to re-examine my study tools to see if I will be able to capture the information I need”

“I will pay a lot of attention to selection of data collection methods, data collection process, data analysis and data presentation”

“I will take time off to ensure that the qualitative part of my research studies is well designed to obtain a good result and conclusion”

“I am going to teach better, supervise research better and conduct research better”

“I am going to re-write my problem and to re-do my instruments for collecting data”

“I will write my papers and analyze my data differently”

“I will and actually I can now do qualitative analysis with more confidence”

However, participants also noted that given the importance of the subject matter, this kind of training needs more than one week. The short training period affected how much could be covered, they noted.

“There wasn’t adequate time for the hands-on exercises especially on software analysis. The course did not bring out clearly what advantages there are in using a computer rather than manual analysis”

“I needed more time on how to practically do the manual analysis and also using the software. So the time was not enough; we needed at least two weeks or an advanced course”

Given the challenges above, participants gave recommendation to improve the training in future and they included; increasing time for the course from 1 to 4 weeks, and offering it in phases. This should involve categorizing participants according to their needs to help individuals take full advantage of knowledge and skills offered by the course. It was also recommended that future courses should consider making one of the qualitative software available to learners for practice as part of skills enhancement.

Making the Qualitative Research Methodology a regular course in the College of Health Sciences was also proposed, with some participants arguing that the course should be offered to every PhD student before embarking on data collection. Others thought the course should be offered several times in an academic year to allow PhD students joining University at various points in an academic year access the course.

The participants perceived the pilot course as useful. The course left them with a better understanding of the various aspects of qualitative research. However, future planning of similar courses should consider the recommendations by the participants regarding the timing of the course and tailoring of the course according to needs of various students in different stages of their PhD projects.

The Education and Small Grants Committee (ESGC) is one of two subcommittees in THRiVE, the other being the PhD and Postdoctoral Training Committee. We have 10 members, consisting of one representative from each of the THRiVE partner institutions, and one for the secretariat. The chair is based at KCMC in Moshi, Tanzania. Members of the ESGC meet quarterly by teleconference, in addition to having a face to face meeting at the THRiVE AGMs. In between meetings, we keep in touch via email. The ESGC’s remit is to:

- Assess the educational needs of THRiVE partners and support or provide short training courses for our members.
- Evaluate and recommend to the THRiVE Steering Committee the award of:
  - Small research grants to staff (pump priming) and MSc students (thesis research)
  - Mini-sabbatical grants to research, clinical, teaching and senior administrative staff
  - Grants for purchasing equipment for research in the THRiVE institutions

Short Training Courses: At the onset of the THRiVE Programme, the ESGC undertook a needs assessment for short course training in all African THRiVE institutions. We identified a strong consensus for short courses to be organised in...
By Mathew Lukenge

Mid way July 2012, Uganda weather was extremely hot only to be surprised by the exact opposite upon arrival at the International Centre for Insect Physiology and Ecology (icipe) and thus my bedding package was not appropriate when I settled in Duduville Nairobi- the insect village. Habariyaasubuhi? Habari… I faintly responded to the security officer at the icipe main entrance with my half-baked Swahili. He asked for my National card and I handed him my passport and introduced myself as a visitor from Uganda and a guest to be hosted by Dr. Maniania. He then said to me “I suspected you are not Kenyan from the sound of your Swahili response, you are welcome though”.

I was linked to the Arthropod pathology unit deputy, Dr. Sunde who gave me a warm welcome to the department. I was introduced to the capacity building officer who gave me a formal introduction and tour around the different departments. First of all, my greatest astonishment was the strong emphasis on food security and health evident in the diversity of research on insect vectors like mosquitoes and tsetse flies to insect pests like locusts and aphids in all aspects of research from prevention and control to diagnostics. Secondly, was the vast number of partnering initiatives like THRiVE, African Regional Postgraduate Programme in Insect Science (ARPPIS) The World Academy of Sciences (TWAS) DAADS which put lots of efforts in capacity building especially with young scientist on postgraduate and post-doctoral programs engaged in sabbatical, mini-sabbatical training and fellowships. This approach should be adapted to all partnering institutions to encourage and motivate innovative and young scientists.

My mini sabbatical training was tailored towards building capacity in the isolation and identification of entomopathogens to malaria vectors. The exposure I got from Dr. Maniania and the Arthropod Pathology Unit (APU) team has gone a long way in improving my skills in this regard. Noteworthy is the hands-on experience to the advanced molecular and bio-informatics techniques in identification of microbes from the Molecular Biology and Biotechnology Unit headed by Dr. Masiga. My interaction with a big number of ICIPE-postgraduate students in most departments helped me a lot in improving my knowledge in many other aspects of vector and pest studies including arboviral studies and advances in the use of pheromones as an alternative in vector and pest control approach.

This training has greatly improved our approach towards mosquito biological control at Uganda Virus Research Institute which we wouldn’t have gotten hadn’t it been for the mini-sabbatical training. Currently, over 300 bacterial samples have been evaluated and at least 3 candidates have shown larvicidal potential against mosquito vectors and are yet to be identified and characterised.

I want to convey my gratitude to Dr. Maniania and Dr. Masiga for the continued support, guidance and maintenance of the technical link established between the two partner institutions. Special thanks go to the THRiVE secretariat especially Prof. Sewankambo for the rare and valuable opportunity they gave to me through funding my training. I greatly anticipate a wider inter-action with other institutions as we develop a malaria control larvicide, native to Uganda and east Africa.
The THRiVE Education and Small Grants Committee

research methods, biostatistics, and scientific writing. Each institution also had a more specific priority that varied widely, depending on the particular THRiVE partner’s interests. Therefore, despite the limited funds available for short courses, the ESGC has been able to support short courses in all the key topics requested. However, given our experience to date, we think the most sustainable approach for the future might be to make modules or sub-modules within existing MSc courses in each African THRiVE institution to be open to staff, PhD and postdoctoral researchers from the other African THRiVE institutions too, to attend as short courses. Other barriers encountered included the limited availability of local staff to teach these topics. This has been addressed to some extent through networking within the consortium and inviting in tutors from northern institutions. However, the latter approach is often costly, even where the northern tutors are able to waive the salary support.

Pump Priming Grants: The ESGC has now completed three rounds of calls for applications for ‘pump priming’ research grants. The purpose of these grants is to promote new collaborative research between partners. The aim is that these grants should jointly be between researchers in THRiVE partner institutions. Each grant offers a maximum of £10,000 for research by collaborators from at least two THRiVE partner institutions, and the expected outcome is that the initial research conducted will result in new grant applications being prepared, and additional research funds won from other sources. For the first call, the ESGC recommended 10 awards from 18 applications. The second call also generated 18 applications, and 12 were recommended by the ESGC for funding. Surprisingly 30 applications were received for the third call, and 14 awards were recommended. Interestingly, over 80% of recommended awards were to male investigators. Applicants’ institutions varied, including both North-South and South-South partnerships. The ESGC observed that Gulu and Makerere Universities, both in Uganda, tended to partner often. NIMR (Mwanza) and KCMC, both in Tanzania, also partnered for these applications, although to a lesser extent than the Ugandans. Both of these pairings suggest that intra-country partnerships are more likely than inter-country partnerships. While this is not surprising, due to difficulties in transport and having to comply with different research regulators in each country, it would be good to see cross-border research relationships becoming more common, particularly within THRiVE. Hopefully the development of the East African Community will encourage such partnerships, although it may be a while before common research guidelines are established across the region. The main challenge for pump priming grants has been that reviewing so many applications has been time consuming. The ESGC is therefore grateful for the time and effort put in by our reviewers. In the third round of applications, all reviewers were from African institutions.

MSc Research Grants: The ESGC has also completed two rounds of awards for MSc students to enrich the research they conduct for their theses, and by so doing, increase their chances of publishing their findings in national and international journals. In the first round, we received 44 applications and made 12 recommended awards balanced for students from Makerere University, KCMC and NUR. In the second round, there were 65 applications with 15 recommended awards and a similar institutional balance. In contrast to the pump priming grants, just over 50% of awards were to male applicants (hence just under 50% going to females). Although the awards are meant to boost the production of publications from theses, this is a challenging task, since many students’ ambitions to publish fade as they complete their courses and return to full time employment, etc.

Mini Sabbatical Grants: These grants are meant to promote intellectual interaction within the THRiVE Consortium and enable members to learn from each other, with a maximum award of £5,000 per application. However, three previous calls for grants to assist this process have been poorly subscribed, with only three awards being made so far. Therefore, a final call has just been announced for this grant application, and the ESGC is hopeful that there will be greater interest from African THRiVE members this time.

Equipment Grants: The ESGC has managed two rounds of applications for equipment to support research within our partner institutions, with a strong emphasis on supporting THRiVE PhD and postdoctoral fellows. The value of the each award (maximum of £10,000) has proven to be attractive to THRiVE researchers.

Next Steps: The ESGC has just published a final call for this grant, and will review applications after the deadline and make recommendations to the THRiVE Steering Committee. Also, we do not currently have comprehensive information regarding publication rates or new grant applications that have resulted from the pump priming and MSc research grants awarded so far. Therefore, the ESGC will focus on gathering this information in the coming months. As can be expected, research outputs are often viewed over a long time scale, and even our five-year grant may not be sufficient to obtain a comprehensive view of our achievements, particularly as some grants were (or are to be) awarded in years three and four of the THRiVE Programme.

Finally, we are grateful to the THRiVE Secretariat for all their support, and look forward to seeing the development of THRiVE and tangible proof of our achievements over the past (almost) four years.
By Pauline Essah

Prior to the inception of the THRiVE and MUII Programmes (both funded by the Wellcome Trust) at the University of Cambridge, there were many individual Cambridge academics engaging with African researchers through a range of independent projects. However, the arrival of THRiVE in 2009 provided an opportunity for a coordinated, cross-faculty partnership between the University of Cambridge and several East African universities/institutes, to support the training of African doctoral and post-doctoral researchers. This has been a great boost to promoting interest in Cambridge for strengthening Africa’s own capacity for a sustainable research and mentoring culture, by cultivating the talented individuals who will make this long-term goal a reality.

There is now an increased interest in travel to Africa to contribute to specialist teaching and research training courses. Furthermore, Cambridge researchers now, more than ever, welcome opportunities for mutually-beneficial collaborations with African researchers. All the positive changes resulting from the THRiVE and MUII Programmes in Cambridge, and the exciting case studies of Cambridge-Africa collaborations through THRiVE and MUII, have enabled us to lever new funding to expand THRiVE and the pre-existing programme in the Centre for African Studies, into the Cambridge in Africa (CiA) Programme.

The Cambridge in Africa Programme currently extends across the fields of health sciences (THRiVE and MUII initiatives), social sciences, humanities, engineering, biological science, research management and administration (CAPREx initiative). Cambridge’s capacity building partnerships in East Africa (THRiVE and MUII) have also now extended to West Africa - the University of Ghana, Legon, through the CAPREx initiative which is funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Isaac Newton Trust and the University of Cambridge. Excitingly, we have also now received generous financial support from The Alborada Trust, for setting up the Cambridge-Africa Alborada Research Fund. This fund, which has just recently been advertised in Cambridge and Africa, will provide grants to enable Cambridge researchers across all disciplines to initiate and/or strengthen collaborations with their partners in sub-Saharan African universities or research institutes. Funds can be requested for the purpose of:

- exchange visits between Cambridge and Africa
- research costs such as reagents, fieldwork and equipment
- research training activities such as setting up courses/workshops in Africa.

Importantly, fellows and mentors of the Cambridge in Africa Programme (i.e. MUII, THRiVE, and CAPREx) are also eligible to apply for joint funding for activities that will add value to their on-going projects. We see this as an excellent way of giving something back to our partners and supporters of the THRiVE and MUII initiatives, which were essential for levering the additional funds.

Riding on the present enthusiasm in Cambridge for engagement with Africa, the Cambridge in Africa Programme organised a Cambridge-Africa networking event in Cambridge on 16th January 2013, which was attended by 95 people (PhD and postdoctoral researchers, heads of groups, departments and schools) across a range of subject areas, and was a great success. We are now planning a ‘Cambridge-Africa Seminar Series’ and a ‘Cambridge-Africa (Research) Day’, to keep this momentum going.

In conclusion, the impact that the THRiVE Programme has had (and is continuing to have), with respect to Cambridge-Africa research interactions, cannot be underestimated. In addition, the fact that such interactions are beneficial to the researchers in both Cambridge and Africa goes without saying...........
Hannington Muyenje

One after another, they braved the morning drizzles to arrive for the innovations clinic. The theme for this month’s research to policy discourse was; “THE IMPACT OF BODA-BODA (MOTOR CYCLE TAXI) CRASHES ON THE BUDGET FOR CLINICAL SERVICES AT MULAGO HOSPITAL, KAMPALA.” The meeting was attended by officials from the Ministry of Health, World Bank, City Council, Boda Boda Association, Law Enforcement Traffic Police, National Road Authorities, members of parliament, the media, civil society, Mulago National Referral Hospital, Injury Control Center, Makerere University College of Health Sciences (MakCHS) among others.

Research findings by a team of researcher from Makerere University College of Health Sciences (MakCHS) and Mulago Hospital formed the background document for discussion. The report discussed how boda-bodas — a recent form of quick motorcycle transportation around Kampala’s crowded and narrow roads have become a major cause of trauma cases seen at Mulago – Uganda’s national referral and teaching hospital. Direct costs incurred by the hospital in managing these injuries and the impact of the corresponding costs on the overall hospital budget for clinical services and on the quality services at Mulago were presented to the assembled stakeholders. The participants learnt that many boda boda riders overload their vehicles, do not respect other road users, drive recklessly, do not use protective head helmets for themselves and likewise their passengers, and may not even have driving licences. In his remarks, the Principal of MakCHS noted that over 66% of research outputs from Makerere College of Health Sciences address the country’s priority health areas. He declared his administration’s commitment to ensuring that the high quality research from MakCHS is linked to policy and practice to improve people’s health.

Overloading and wreckless driving by boda boda cyclists is a major cause of accidents and deaths. Source: Internet photo

Innovations clinics like this one are some of the avenues the Innovations and Knowledge Translation (IKT) Office at MakCHS is positioning research outputs from MakCHS to influence policy and practice. This particular clinic was funded by THRiVE as part of one of their high-level objectives of “ensuring that health research findings and innovations are used to enhance evidence-based health care practices or policies in East Africa”. At the end of the day, news articles from seven leading TV stations, headlines, features and editorials from leading newspaper dailies and scores of radio programs published items on the study. As a result of this heavy publicity; MakCHS together with some civil society organizations and the parliamentary forum on road safety has been invited to present the study report and a petition to parliament to enforce the Traffic and Road Safety Act during the UN week for Road safety. What’s more, other events have resulted out the same innovations clinic. The Ministry of Health’s disabilities technical team has requested MakCHS to present the study findings to their senior management team. Finally, a media breakfast by MakCHS in collaboration with another stakeholder has been organized to share an earlier study report which the IKT office supported.

When life-saving research findings and innovations like the one discussed here are intentionally pushed to influence some practical actions, Institutions like Makerere become more relevant to the Ugandan citizenry as evidence transforms the quality of health services people receive. With THRiVE’s innovation-oriented leadership, the IKT office was set up at MakCHS to ensure routine and timely conversion of research findings into policies and practices that benefit the population.
On 2nd January 2013 and no sooner had the fireworks that ushered in the new year died down than a team from the THRiVE Secretariat together with the Wellcome Trust representative in Africa, Dr. Jane Kengeya-Kayondo and a representative from Gulu University partner institution embarked on evaluation and learning site visits to THRiVE partner institutions. This was in a bid to fulfill the recommendation made during the AGM held at icipe, Kenya in 2012 that a team from the Secretariat should visit all partner institutions in order to enrich the ongoing Evaluation and Learning exercise by collecting information first hand regarding the progress of THRiVE activities at institutional and network levels. Prior to the visits the institutions had to do their own internal evaluation and document the results of their deliberations. During each site visit, a researcher from a partner institution travelled with the THRiVE Secretariat staff. It was agreed that the visits will be used to comply with the instituional practice. This paved the way for other projects to open up sub accounts as well. The inability of NUR faculty to obtain the THRiVE PhD fellowships drove senior academics to proactively mentor junior staff in proposal and scientific writing which has enabled faculty to obtain funding from other funders for training more than 10 PhDs. In addition THRiVE has contributed significantly to computerization of the library and the training centre of the School of Public Health and increased band width thus resulting into enhanced internet access.

The National Institute of Medical Research (NIMR) in Tanzania provided an excellent example of how THRiVE funds have been used to contribute to support the Laboratory Information Management Systems (LIMS). LIMS uses software that facilitates NMR to efficiently manage laboratory data. THRiVE provided support for a technical person to manage the software and the required annual registration fees for using the software. The establishment of a central printing room, an idea that was emulated from ICIPE, during the THRiVE AGM was also another learning experience for the team. It provided lessons on how visits by faculty to other institutions can change the conduct of business at another institution in a positive way. At Gulu University, the visiting team was amazed about how the platform provided by THRiVE enabled the start of a very efficient e-learning system at the medical school. By providing support for the laying of the fibre optic cable between the institution and its service provider and the purchase and installation of forty computers, Gulu School of Medicine has been able to set up an online library resource with over 4000 electronic books uploaded which students can access offline or by using the campus Local Area Network. Simple as it appears; the institution has established a system of registration of all computers in the institution and has installed CCTV cameras to ensure that the equipment procured is safe. The e-learning system can be used to leapfrog research education through access to resources like courses offsite.

The Uganda Virus Research Institute (UVRI) provided evidence of THRiVE’s contribution to the improvement of the laboratory infrastructure at the institution through provision of high computing platforms for genetic sequencing studies, support to the core laboratory and specialized equipment which is utilized by non-THRiVE PhD and masters fellows. One of the salient lessons that emanated from icipe was the influence of THRiVE on strengthening research management systems. Through the various research administration and management trainings and interaction with research administrators from other institutions during the Association of Research Administrators in Africa annual meetings, research administrators at the institute have been able to establish guidelines...
One of the four main activities of the National University of Rwanda (NUR) is to conduct research teaching, carry out consultancies and provide services to the community. Research in Rwanda is faced with lack of qualified and committed researchers. Through THRiVE consortium, the National University of Rwanda (NUR) was given a budget to recruit a senior lecturer to strengthen research capacity at NUR School of Public Health (NURSPH) and Faculty of Medicine (NURFM).

Despite several advertisements, no suitable applicant with a PhD was available for the post. For the remaining timeline of THRiVE project, the NUR requested to instead recruit two lecturers who are MSc holders, but having demonstrated advanced skills in biostatistics, research methodology, and data management. The same budget will also support MBA training of one NUR administrative staff to be in charge of research administration. In addition to teaching activities, the two lecturers will also help in research protocol screening, coaching students (MSc, MPhil, PhD) and staff in biostatistics and data management.

We are certain that funding the two lecturers and a research administrator will be very helpful in boosting research and publications at NURSPH and NURFM.

As an institution in a post conflict environment, NUR was given, through THRiVE consortium, funds to train four staff at Master’s level as an effort towards institutional research capacity building. Thanks to the culture of rational use of resources that characterizes Rwanda in general and NUR in particular; money was saved from this Master’s training. THRiVE secretariat has allowed NUR to re-allocate this remaining funds to support data collection of other NUR MPhil and PhD students. Supporting data collection of these students will contribute to the ambitious aim of NUR to train a critical mass of researchers in the health sector. NUR is very grateful to THRiVE consortium for its invaluable contribution in terms of research strengthening at NUR and for having responded positively to reallocate the funds and use them in the manner described above.

THRiVE makes a difference in research capacity at National University of Rwanda

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A meeting between staff at National University of Rwanda and THRiVE Secretariat staff during a site visit