



African Population and
Health Research Center



STRATEGIC PLAN

2017-2021

INTRODUCTION

The 2017-2021 Strategic Plan is a dynamic blueprint that sets the course for APHRC for the next five years and beyond. It is a roadmap for broader and deeper engagement in our signature areas of interest as we continue in our second decade as a premier research institution and think tank in Africa.

Our goals, supporting our vision and mission and illustrating the organizational values that sustain and drive us, are to:

- Become a continental model for robust, policy-oriented, rigorous multidisciplinary research that emphasizes synergy and collaboration.
- Significantly strengthen and grow the base of research leaders that assure development of the next generation of researchers and academics on the continent.
- Become a leading independent research institution, with signature areas of interest, providing open access to quantitative and qualitative data for setting targets and tracking progress toward national and global development goals.
- Be a leader in clarifying the complex challenges Africa faces in its development and developing effective solutions for these.
- Gain prominence as a thought-leader and influencer in providing solutions to the challenges impeding development in the region.

A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

It is with immense satisfaction and no small amount of nostalgia that I present this strategic plan for 2017-2021: my last as the executive director of the African Population and Health Research Center.

The satisfaction comes from bearing witness and contributing to the evolution, maturation and unyielding commitment to excellence of the Center over the course of our 15 years of independent existence. Each successive strategic plan has shown that there is no ambition too lofty, no goal that is unattainable for a committed, diverse, multi-disciplinary and multifaceted team of African professionals who strive to develop African solutions to the challenges that inhibit equitable and sustainable development across the continent.

This plan was developed – as so much of APHRC's work is – through an inclusive, participatory and extensive process of discussion and deliberation. Each unit developed a retrospective analysis of how it fared in achieving its programmatic and operational goals.

We also, for the first time, conducted a policy impact analysis to gauge and fine-tune both the way we approach knowledge translation and how we measure it, to ensure our policy orientation and commitment to supporting evidence-informed decision-making is effective, systematic and strategic.

Our look back is helping us move forward, with each of our programmatic divisions confidently leading large-scale, multi-country projects that will contribute to Africa's shaping of its own future.



That future may be unpredictable but it is far from uncertain. Ours is a continent with great potential. Realizing this potential and achieving the multiple development agendas we have endorsed and committed to is predicated on harnessing the enormous potential within our young people to understand the opportunities that are available to them, and to manage the challenges to sustainable development in Africa, irrespective of where they are born or where they live.

APHRC has predicated its five-year strategy on our own confidence that the policy-relevant research we are generating, the models of development we are advocating, and the interventions we are implementing will contribute to the knowledge base to drive solutions to the continent's development challenges. This is the singular focus of our plan, embodied in our new vision and mission.

We want to go beyond traditional academic "outputs" of the numbers of grants obtained or papers published in measuring our success. Our success needs to be assessed by "outcomes" and "impacts": how well the evidence we generate, and the research leaders we nurture, contributes to change in policies, programs and practices that will ultimately transform lives in Africa.

As APHRC pursues the noble vision of transforming lives in Africa in this new strategic period, it is with great confidence that I leave the stewardship of the Center in the hands of an effective and engaged Board and a staff cadre of highly committed professionals - the best I have had the pleasure of working with for nearly two decades.

Dr. Alex Ezeh

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Alex Ezeh".

WHO WE ARE

APHRC is committed to generating an Africa-led and Africa-owned body of evidence to inform decision making for an effective and sustainable response to the most critical challenges facing the continent.



Our mandate is to generate and support the use of evidence for meaningful action to improve the lives of all Africans through three integrated programmatic divisions: research, that emphasizes health and wellbeing; research capacity strengthening to deepen the skills of African scholars working on the continent; and policy engagement and communications to support greater influence of evidence in policy - and decision-making across sub-Saharan Africa.

APHRC has been an independent, 501(c)3 registered institution since 2001, emerging from a fellowship program of the Population Council started in 1995. Since its inception, the Center has grown from a handful of staff to more than 130 scholars and professionals representing more than a dozen countries across Africa, and increasing our annual operating budget from under US\$1 million at inception to over US\$10 million since 2012.

We have a deeply ingrained conviction that prudent financial management and strong internal control systems provide a solid foundation for original, creative, innovative and sustained engagement in research and policy advocacy.

WHAT WE DO

APHRC's research spans the spectrum of issues contributing to Africa's development. Our output is prodigious, and our research is consistently and reputably published.

APHRC's relationships with key decision-making bodies at national, regional and global levels are expanding, to encompass engagements with government and non-government entities, as well as academic, advocacy and research institutions: all in service to our agenda of ensuring contextual, relevant and localized knowledge as a driver of change.

Through our specialized technical assistance, we run workshops and trainings to enhance the skills of African scholars and professionals, and offer a range of fellowships and internships. Since 2003 we have run our Nairobi Urban Health and Demographic Surveillance System (NUHDSS): one of just two such longitudinal data systems in Africa and one of a handful globally.

We believe that knowledge is valuable when it is contextual, relevant and useful – not just for researchers and policymakers, but for individuals themselves who are trying to make the best possible choices for themselves, their families and communities. We work to ensure that scientific knowledge is available, intuitive and accessible to all who would benefit from it.

Over the 2012-2016 period, we implemented more than 70 projects in 30 countries across sub-Saharan Africa, and published dozens of open source technical reports as well as hundreds of peer-reviewed articles. Our research has interrogated questions on health and health systems; population dynamics and sexual and reproductive health and rights; education; aging and development; and urbanization and wellbeing. We supported the training of more than 370 PhDs and 50 postdoctoral fellows, and hosted more than 100 student interns.



VISION

**TRANSFORMING LIVES IN
AFRICA THROUGH RESEARCH**

MISSION

**GENERATING EVIDENCE, STRENGTHENING
RESEARCH CAPACITY, AND ENGAGING POLICY TO
INFORM ACTION ON POPULATION HEALTH AND
WELLBEING**

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

The APHRC 2017-2021 Strategic Plan outlines a bold agenda predicated on four strategic objectives, and supported by four cross-cutting guiding principles that aim to maximize our impact. They reflect our ambition to be more deliberate and considered in how we position ourselves as a truly African voice, creating pathways for sharing our approach to change as a best practice, all supported by the right systems and processes.

Strategic Objectives

- Generate scientific knowledge aligned to local and global development agendas on population health and wellbeing.
- Develop and nurture the next generation of African research leaders.
- Engage with decision-makers using evidence to drive optimal development and implementation of policies that will have a transformative impact on lives in Africa.
- Create operational efficiencies in systems and processes for maximum programmatic impact.

Guiding Principles

We can only contribute to the transformation of Africa if we do more of what we do, and better, working together to expand our footprint and encourage sustainable change.

In the 2017-2021 plan period, we will be:

- Collaborative – working with partners to achieve our objectives
- Innovation-driven – always finding better ways to work
- Truly African in reach – both programmatically and in our physical presence
- Impact-oriented in all our engagements and activities

VALUES



FAIRNESS

We are impartial and committed to equity



INTEGRITY

We are transparent and accountable



EXCELLENCE

We deliver quality, consistently

OUR STRATEGY

Overview

The Plan guides the operationalization of the Center's vision to be a transformative force on the continent, building on 15 years of experience in evidence generation and the promotion of its use to guide decision-making.

For Africa's development APHRC will maintain its commitment to developing strong cohorts of African research leaders.

Our strategy will seek to achieve three programmatic objectives:

- Generate and synthesize scientific knowledge.
- Strengthen individual and institutional research capacity across sub-Saharan Africa
- Engage at all levels of decision-making to ensure optimal uptake of evidence

In sharpening our focus on our particular areas of interest, we have expanded our research units from five to six, each of which has a specific policy orientation in order to optimize the influence of the evidence we generate. To better understand how to nurture the next generation of African research leaders, we are interrogating what works to strengthen research skills at the individual and institutional levels, through partnerships that will translate into bold and ambitious, and sustainable higher education systems across the continent.

Another critical component of our new strategy is the expansion of our presence in the continent, in order to do more of what we do – and better. To that end we are exploring ways to open a sub-regional office in francophone West Africa, an office in another African country and a development office in the USA. We will complement this institutional expansion with renewed ties with our alumni network across the continent in order to seek and actualize partnerships that will yield greater impact.



RESEARCH

Over the last 15 years, the Center has generated knowledge with local, national, regional and global relevance. The Research strategy is informed by a retrospective analysis of the Center's contribution to knowledge, our understanding of the gaps in the knowledge necessary to achieve the region's development goals, and a prospective assessment of the development challenges that will face sub-Saharan Africa in coming decades.

OUR APPROACH

Our research strategy will be characterized by:

Continuity

Building on the successes of the last 15 years, our research will fill evidence gaps, answer new questions, and respond to critical global, regional and national agendas with relevance to the Center's focus on population health and wellbeing. We will continue our work in the broader areas of urbanization and wellbeing; education; population dynamics, sexual and reproductive health and rights; health and health systems; and aging.

Policy Orientation

By taking a programmatic approach to research and having a long-term perspective to policy change, we will generate evidence consistently and systematically towards defined policy aims.

Consolidation

We will consolidate our place as a premier African institution by deepening our focus in niche areas where we have established a strong track record. We aim to provide thought leadership on these issues and to focus our policy outreach efforts here.

Multi-disciplinarity

We will tackle research questions from different disciplinary perspectives to enrich the quality of the evidence generated, broaden the researchers' horizons and promote synergy across research units. Programs of work amenable to a multi-disciplinary approach have been defined in each of our broad areas of research.

Positioning

Our research will respond to key issues in the national, regional and global development agendas including the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the New Africa Urban Agenda; the Countdown to 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals; the UN Decade of Nutrition; and a better understanding of the interplay between human and environmental health underpinning Planetary Health. We will work to support African countries in their quest to achieve the Demographic Dividend.

Synergy

Our research will align with the Center's policy outreach and research capacity strengthening goals. We aim to bring our scientists together from across their areas of expertise and strengthen their capacity for using research evidence to influence policies and decisions through cross-cutting, issue-based platforms.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Six research units comprise the Division's strategic position at the forefront of Africa's indigenous generation and dissemination of a regional, high-impact body of evidence:

- Aging and Development
- Education and Youth Empowerment
- Health and Systems for Health
- Population Dynamics and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
- Urbanization and Wellbeing in Africa
- Maternal and Child Wellbeing

A reconfigured Data and Measurement Unit will take the place of the Statistics and Surveys Unit, to drive the Center's contributions to the Data Revolution in Africa. The Unit will work to invigorate the Center's data collection and sharing platforms for greater impact while developing new methodologies and systems to advance the field of measurement.

Aging and Development



The Center's Aging and Development research unit has for the last three years focused on clarifying links between issues affecting older populations and core development objectives in Africa. It has offered direction and support to national and regional research and policy agendas on aging, and introduced African perspectives into global conversations on aging.

Three programmatic areas are united under an overarching goal to clarify the needs, economic rationales, conceptual frames and options for action on the rights and wellbeing of older populations.

The signature issue for the Aging and Development Unit is **long-term care**. We aim to illuminate current realities and experiences of informal and formal long-term care (LTC) provision and receipt; understand the broader development implications of LTC; and to identify and assess emerging models and approaches to forging long-term care systems for Africa within the broader framework of the care economy.

The second program of work will examine **later-life wellbeing and inequity** by investigating older people's conceptions, priority concerns and service needs related to their current and future wellbeing; old age-based and within-older population inequities in wellbeing and service access; and identify programmatic approaches to address such disparities.

The Unit will contribute to the Center's research on the Demographic Dividend through a program of work that seeks to understand **where and how older populations are relevant to national and regional efforts to achieve a demographic dividend**, elucidating their influence and impacts on the lives of young people and their contributions to the transformation and revitalization of sectors including agriculture.

Education and Youth Empowerment



The Center, as one of a handful of institutions conducting research on education in sub-Saharan Africa, has made substantive contributions to the understanding barriers to schooling, quality in teaching, and measurement of learning outcomes – especially among poor and marginalized populations in both urban and rural East Africa. Intervention models piloted during the last strategic period looked to improve retention of adolescent girls and boys in school and to encourage transition to secondary school among some of the populations most vulnerable to discontinued schooling: residents of urban slums.

There are, however, huge gaps that remain in understanding the role of quality education in meeting the development challenges confronting sub-Saharan Africa, and the extent to which education, vocational training and skills-building can contribute to substantive and quality human capital to deliver on the promise of a demographic dividend. We need better understanding

of what is needed to build the necessary human capital in order to fully harness the potential of Africa's young people to meet development goals. This calls for a broadening of the research agenda beyond basic formal education to other forms of training aimed to build the skills of young people as they prepare for the world of work.

The overarching goal of this Unit is to generate evidence that will promote stronger, more inclusive education systems across Africa, in three programmatic areas:

The signature issue for this Unit is **understanding how to make Africa's education systems more inclusive and equitable**. We will seek to consolidate evidence on access to schooling and quality of learning among marginalized populations and explore the influences of management and administrative practices in schools. This includes developing and evaluating interventions and instructional approaches for improving quality and learning outcomes.

The unit will also aim to **understand pathways to productive human capital in Africa** by examining structural enablers in the transition from education and training to the world of work for youth, and the match (or mismatch) between skills required in the labor market and skills output from existing education systems.

The third program of work will examine the **alignment of education policies to national development goals**. This will entail an analysis of education policies in sub-Saharan African countries for concurrence, contradictions, duplications and overlaps, and relevance to national and global development goals. Working with the Research Capacity Strengthening division, this program will also examine the role and contribution of higher education to national development in Africa.

Health and Systems for Health



The Center has been at the forefront of research on the emerging epidemics of non-communicable disease (NCD) and injuries across Africa even in the face of a continuing high burden of infectious diseases. We have generated evidence that has led to stronger and more responsive health systems, able to address the specific needs of vulnerable populations. The Center has developed and tested models of service delivery to reduce leakages across the NCD risk reduction continuum, and to improve quality and access to private sector-provided primary health care among slum residents. Gaps in evidence remain, however, related to mainstreaming chronic disease management, attracting and retaining NCD patients in care, and strengthening skills among low-cost private providers. There is yet to be an increase in research on the epidemiology of, or mitigating strategies for, the rising burden of injury.

The need for evidence on what works to improve awareness of NCD risk factors, linkages to and retention in NCD care programs, and how to integrate NCD care into existing platforms for chronic infectious disease management

is acute”. So is the need to understand the systems that generate and sustain health at the community, health system and societal levels, and to test models for strengthening systems to make them responsive to current epidemiological trends.

Generating evidence to drive stronger and more resilient systems for improved health is the overarching goal of this Unit in three programmatic areas:

The signature issue for this Unit will be **chronic disease management**. We will aim to understand the magnitude, burden and impacts of non-communicable diseases and other chronic conditions (mental health problems and injuries), and the interactions and intersections between infectious and NCDs in order to inform integrated and efficient health system responses to major public health problems. The program will also identify and assess the impact of patient-centered and technology-based approaches to improve integrated management of chronic diseases.

The Unit will also continue its current initiatives in NCD epidemiology research, expanding the scope to children, adolescents and older people. Interventions to mitigate risk of common NCDs will be developed and tested. A new area of work will develop and test approaches to enhance and/or maintain intrinsic physical and cognitive capacity at older age.

The third program of work will aim to **understand and characterize health system needs to end the big epidemics** and respond to new global health threats. It will contribute to improved knowledge by understanding the differentiated health needs of vulnerable populations. We will aim to understand the needs of long-term users of antiretroviral treatment and how care for people with HIV/AIDS is integrated into service delivery, including SRHR for young people and NCDs for older adults. The program will also conduct research on health system approaches for integrated care of infectious diseases and NCDs.

Maternal and Child Wellbeing



The Center has documented shockingly high levels of childhood malnutrition among poor urban populations, largely driven by poor feeding practices in the first year of life. We have also generated evidence on how to improve feeding practices for infants, specifically by promoting breastfeeding at household, community and workplace levels, as well as in health facilities. We must go deeper, however, to improve understanding of the contextual and relevant influences on mothers regarding child nutrition, especially in the first 1,000 days of life, and how to promote and sustain good breastfeeding practices.

The Center has also initiated research to develop and test models of service delivery for maternal, newborn and child health within urban slum populations. These models have not yet been tested at scale and their utility in other marginalized communities is unknown. The overarching goal of this Unit is to understand the social and physical determinants of maternal

health and child survival and potential to thrive, in order to develop effective intervention strategies for their promotion as part of the global push for improved maternal and child health outcomes. Three programmatic areas will define this agenda:

The signature issue for this Unit will be **breastfeeding optimization**. Situated within a broader **Maternal, Infant and Young Child Nutrition** research agenda, this program aims to understand multiple influences of, and strategies to optimize, early nutrition, including but not limited to the magnitude of visible and hidden maternal and child malnutrition, and the impacts of preconception nutrition and nutrition during the first 1,000 days of life on long-term health and human capital trajectories. The program will continue its work on developing and assessing interventions to optimize nutrition, specifically breastfeeding. At the macro level, the program will aim to characterize the nutrition transition in the African context and its influence on maternal and child nutrition and health.

The second program of work will be **Early Childhood Development (ECD)**, to understand and promote contextual strategies to optimize early childhood development and understand the factors, interactions and pathways that shape child health, development and early learning.

The Unit will also contribute to broader **Maternal, Newborn and Child Health** issues by monitoring MNCH health outcomes and influences in different contexts, including obstacles to access for MNCH services for vulnerable populations.

Population Dynamics and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights



The Center has developed a robust and multifaceted evidence base about sexual and reproductive health (SRH) issues, with special attention to young people. Our research has also provided understanding of what works to increase uptake of modern contraceptives within high-fertility communities, and has informed debate around unintended pregnancies and unsafe abortion.

The Center has also generated evidence on drivers of sexual violence and contributed to innovations in how to address sexual violence among refugee populations. Our work is exploring how poor men express their masculinity as breadwinners with few options for employment, and how they might become champions in the global struggle for gender equality.

A deeper understanding of contexts, drivers, experiences and preferences for family planning remains. Understanding SRHR throughout the lifecourse is critical to many health and development pathways, as is improved understanding of population dynamics and their implications for sustainable development: specifically, the realization of the demographic dividend.

There are four areas of inquiry in this Unit, aiming to promote sustainable population growth and improved sexual and reproductive health and rights across the life course:

The signature issue for the Unit will be **young people's sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)**. We will focus in particular on early adolescents (10-14 years) and those from marginalized communities, and the magnitude and impact of adverse SRH events on adolescent health and wellbeing. We will aim to clarify the contexts for comprehensive sexuality education, including SRHR/FP counseling for adolescents. This program will also generate evidence about what works to reach youth with safe, respectful and comprehensive SRHR information and services.

The second **signature issue** for this Unit will be **unsafe abortion**. We will aim to understand the contexts and dynamics of unsafe abortion, family planning, and contraceptive behaviors; deepen our understanding of the mortality and morbidity associated with unsafe abortion; and assess the impact of unsafe abortion prevention programs and barriers to quality post-abortion care. We will contribute to knowledge on drivers, experiences and preferences among populations for the array of options for family planning, and illuminate pathways for optimizing the provision and sustainability of services, including financing and delivery options.

The third program of work will address **gender and sexuality-related vulnerabilities**. Assessing the magnitude and perceptions of gender-based violence will drive this programmatic area, including identification of where men and boys might engage in promoting women's SRHR. The program will also seek to clarify the origins and implications of gender ideologies and practices, including masculinity.

The Unit will spearhead efforts to contribute to the discourse around the **Demographic Dividend**. We will seek to understand population dynamics, including regional and intra-regional fertility, mortality and migration trends, and their implications for sustainable development and how to position Africa to achieve the demographic dividend.

Urbanization and Wellbeing in Africa



The Center's research has over the last 15 years provided a window into the plight of the nearly one billion urban slum dwellers, the extent of intra-urban inequities and the gradual erosion of the urban advantage in health in Africa. We have also demonstrated the positive impact of increased attention and investment by governments and development partners in improving the living condition of slum residents. Emerging challenges such as security could, however, continue to threaten gains made in improving slum living conditions. Slum growth seems to be an inevitability for sub-Saharan Africa's rapidly growing cities, and poor health outcomes among slum dwellers will increasingly influence overall urban and national health indicators. The dearth of evidence as to what works for slum communities demands a sharper focus on systems that can -and should- generate health and improve wellbeing.

With an overarching goal to characterize and understand the state and future of Africa's urbanization, this Unit will work in three programmatic areas:

The signature issue for this Unit will be understanding and developing **slum systems for health and wellbeing**. We aim to clarify the role of slums as a feature of Africa's urban spaces and determinant of overall urban well-being. This program will seek to map and track slum growth in Africa's new and small towns, and deepen our understanding of slum-based and intra-slum inequalities in health, education and socio-economic status, and the impact of slum residence on health and socio-economic trajectories over the life course. The program will also aim to characterize service delivery systems, and develop and assess service delivery models that are responsive to the slum context.

Through a program of work on **environmental impacts on health and wellbeing in urban contexts**, we will expand the scope of our existing research on air pollution and solid waste management to other environmental risks. We will aim to understand how key environmental risks affect health and wellbeing; investigate strategies to mitigate key environmental challenges facing urban populations; and understand the contribution of the urban built environment to physical and mental health and wellbeing. The program will also advance knowledge on how complex urban systems interact to create environments that promote or harm health and wellbeing.

The third program of work will be on **the causes, course and consequences of rapid urbanization**. This program represents an extension of our existing research into the pace and drivers of urbanization across Africa. We aim to further explore urban growth in small towns, examine regional perspectives of migration and linkages to urbanization, and contribute to the better definition of urban typologies in Africa. We are also seeking improved understanding of the direct and indirect impacts of rural-urban migration on urban support systems.

Data and Measurement



Our establishment of a Statistics and Surveys Unit was compelled by the need to establish robust data systems for the Center's work, including the Nairobi Urban Health and Demographic Surveillance System (NUHDSS); and offer technical assistance to external partners in data collection, processing and analysis, including impact evaluation.

We are now positioned as a source of high quality data with expertise in data collection, documentation and analysis. The Unit is leading efforts to enhance data discoverability and promote responsible data sharing, and coordinates our participation in the iSHARE data-sharing portal initiative led by the INDEPTH Network. Our own urban health statistics platform provides one-stop access to key indicators about urban populations in Africa.

The Unit is contributing to the expansion of the Center's regional footprint. Its work as part of the Data for African Development expert working group that explored the root causes of slow data progress in Africa, involved strong regional and global partnerships and resulted in specific, actionable recommendations for strengthening national data systems in Africa. More needs to be done to implement these recommendations, specifically with regard to strengthening national and sub-national data systems to support more effective evidence-informed decision-making.

Our quest for data discoverability continues with an enhanced data visualization platform as well as assignment of digital object identifiers to our publicly shared research products.

Data and measurement will be an institutional signature issue and the Unit, with an expanded mandate to promote the field of measurement, will focus on three key areas:

- **Enhancing the utility of the NUHDSS.** We aim to position the NUHDSS as a data resource for improving living conditions in slum areas in Africa. The Center will enhance the utility of the platform through increased data access and use to contribute to greater understanding of demographic processes, specifically urbanization in Kenya. We will also expand the geographic reach and scope of the NUHDSS, to position it as a model platform for developing and testing solutions, and evaluating major interventions, to improve the lives of slum residents.
- **Establishing robust data systems to enhance the collection, access and use of data.** We will initiate steps to establish a regional data repository and promote initiatives to improve data generation, access and use in governance and decision-making.
- **Advancing the field of measurement.** We will contribute to building sound and strong national data systems able to generate reliable and timely data for development; strengthen capacity for rigorous program evaluation techniques; and create products and tools to support tracking of progress toward achievement of national and global development goals.



WE ARE FAIRNESS

YARAMBA

A woman with short, curly brown hair and a pearl earring is speaking into a black microphone. She is wearing a blue top and a patterned shawl. In the background, other people are visible, including a man with glasses and a striped shirt, and another man in a blue shirt. The setting appears to be a conference or a public event.

RESEARCH CAPACITY STRENGTHENING

Sub-Saharan Africa continues to experience severe shortages in well-trained and skilled researchers able to conduct rigorous research that will yield potential solutions for the myriad socioeconomic and health problems inhibiting the continent's development. The Research Capacity Strengthening (RCS) Division leads APHRC's efforts to build sustainable human capital for research and development by strengthening individual and institutional research capacity in Africa.

The division's work during the last strategic period was guided by a three-pronged strategy:

- Building formal partnerships with universities to improve graduate training in general, and doctoral training in particular.
- Fostering opportunities to support researchers working on African development issues through fellowships as well as technical and methodological training.
- Conducting targeted training workshops.

Through its partnership with universities, APHRC has supported the training of hundreds of doctoral students across the region and has seen more than 160 graduate over the past five years. Through a mixture of postdoctoral

fellowships, internships and scholar exchange visits, the Center has actively mentored young African researchers. A training program initiated in 2015 has worked with academic institutions to design and deliver tailored training for staff to enhance their research skills and productivity. The success of these programs has laid the foundation for the Division's work over the next plan period.

The key achievements of the division over the last plan period include the consolidation of graduate training partnerships with universities; the design and delivery of innovative and high-performing capacity building programs at the PhD and post-doctoral levels; and the cementing of APHRC's reputation as a critical producer of high-level human capacity for research and development in Africa and the go-to place for research training and mentorship.

OUR APPROACH

The RCS Division will pursue four strategic priorities. It will continue to draw on the strong research and policy expertise at the Center and the partner institutions it collaborates with to implement its programs. Working with the Center's Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning team within the Operations Division, it will develop tracking systems to monitor and measure the impact

of the various initiatives and use the learning from these for course correction and to maximize impact. Collaboration with the Policy Engagement and Communications Division will entrench a policy-oriented approach among the research leaders of the future, to optimize the potential for knowledge translation at all levels of decision-making.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In addition to continuing and consolidating the successful initiatives we have implemented in the last plan period, we aim to expand our reach and deepen our engagement and impact in producing the research leaders Africa desperately needs. We will achieve this through four strategic priorities:

- Partnerships with universities to strengthen doctoral training
- Individual fellowships and internships
- Training programs
- Research on higher education and research capacity strengthening

Partnership with Universities to Strengthen Doctoral Training

The Consortium for Advanced Research Training in Africa (CARTA) has been our signature program in strengthening doctoral training in Africa. In partnership with 19 universities and research institutes, the program has supported over 160 junior faculty members and staff at African universities for their PhD training, developing their critical thinking and transferable research skills. It has also focused on strengthening university-wide systems to support research excellence and productivity.

Going forward we will:

- Develop initiatives to support graduates of the program to become research leaders.
- Seek opportunities to institutionalize CARTA innovations in doctoral training at partner African universities, so as to reach all doctoral students at these institutions with these effective interventions available to doctoral students at these institutions.
- Explore opportunities to expand the CARTA model beyond public and population health.

Generating Evidence on Higher Education in Africa

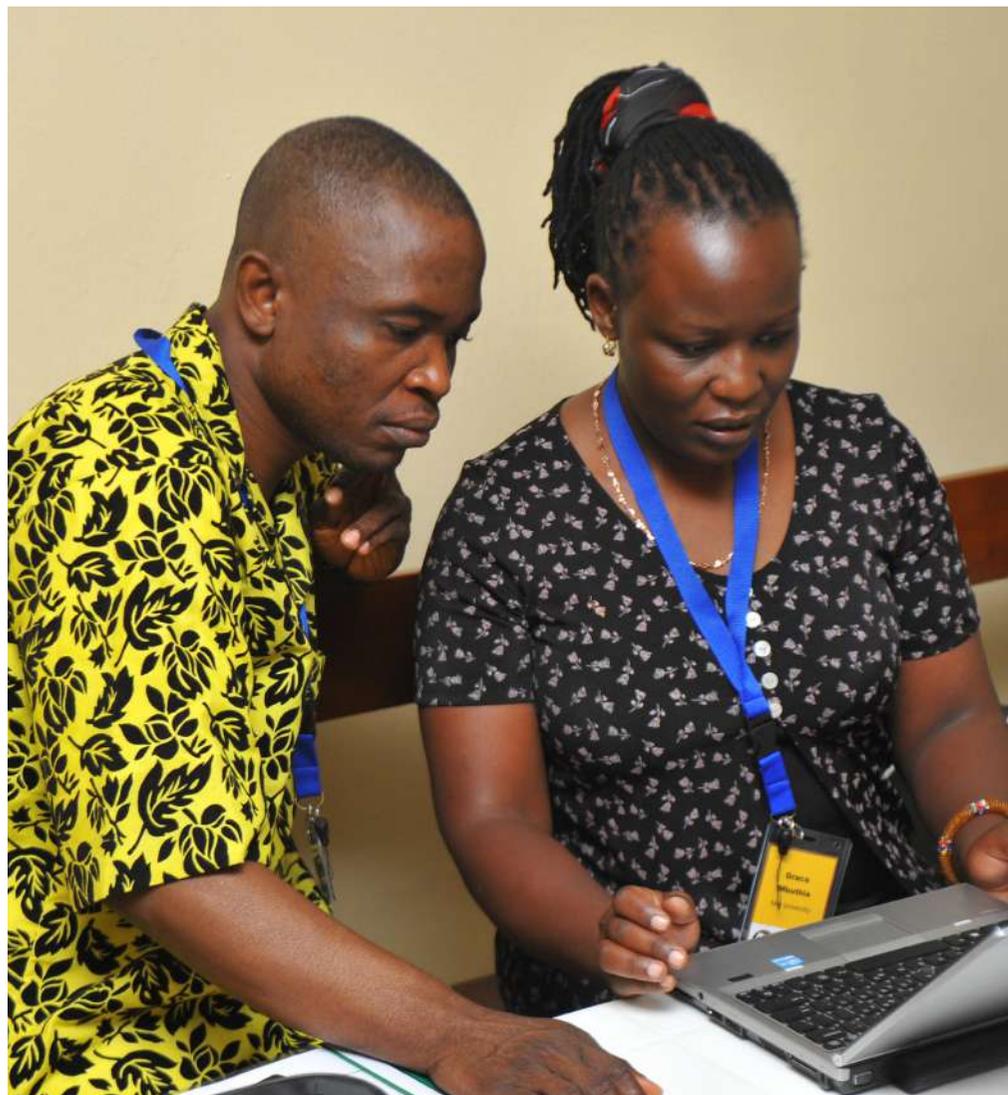
The RCS Division recognizes the enduring contradiction that limits opportunities for direct investment in African institutions due to a ‘lack of capacity’ even as capacity-strengthening remains a focal component of most investments across the continent. Equally, the emphasis on higher education as critical to Africa’s development has been matched with the harsh reality that African universities and scholars contribute very little to the global knowledge economy.

How to fill the gaps in research capacity and higher education across the continent is an enduring question that the Center intends to engage with in the new strategic period. Our interrogation will broaden our understanding of the impact and value of existing research capacity initiatives and what works to make research and higher education systems sustainable in Africa. We anticipate that this knowledge will enable us to make more strategic and high-value decisions with respect to our own programs going forward, while cascading that learning to higher education institutions around the continent.

Training Program

Over the last plan period, APHRC designed and piloted a number of training programs to meet growing demand from individuals and institutions for stronger research capacity. These pilots will help the RCS Division define how to make the Training Program fully market-driven and sustainable through full cost recovery. APHRC plans to develop its Research Leadership and Training Center to meet its growing need for training facilities, and to support the offering of collaborative graduate degree programs that address current and future regional priorities.

Fellowships and Internships



APHRC has supported the best and most promising researchers working on African development issues. Through its pre-doctoral, doctoral and postdoctoral fellowship programs, the Center has supported and mentored hundreds of young Africa scholars. Under the African Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship, more than 200 fellows from across the continent have received support to complete their doctoral dissertation.

The Center has mentored more than 100 postdoctoral fellows, many of whom are now leading institutions and major multi-country research programs. Each year, the Center hosts a dozen or more interns who are at various levels of training.

Over the 2017-2021 period, the Center will explore opportunities to systemize these programs and expand their regional reach. Most of the doctoral interns at APHRC often come from northern universities with resources to support short-term placements. How to provide similar opportunities for students at less well-resourced African institutions will be a primary objective for the RCS Division.

We will draw on existing relationships to develop new opportunities for co-hosting and mentorship of postdoctoral fellows, and explore opportunities to create new fellowship programs to support young Africans with undergraduate training to cultivate their interest in research careers, and sabbatical fellowships and faculty exchanges amongst African universities to increase local and regional research collaboration.



POLICY ENGAGEMENT & COMMUNICATIONS

Policy Engagement and Communications (PEC) was initially conceived as a support function for the Research and Research Capacity Strengthening Divisions, and to guard the Center's corporate identity. Evolution over time has seen PEC's role expand to leading policy-oriented projects.

For the Center to continue to achieve impact, boosting our policy profile, cataloguing our quick wins, and demonstrating where our work is contributing to the decision-making process are critical. It is also the best and most effective way to evolve perceptions of the Center, to take our rightful place as a thought leader and influencer of global and regional agendas.

A policy impact retrospective analysis conducted as part of the strategic planning process showed that APHRC has yet to consistently capitalize on the strength of the evidence it generates in a way that deliberately and strategically informs policy-making at the national or regional level. This is due, in part, to ad hoc rather than systematic engagement with decision-making processes. New efforts to develop memoranda of understanding at various levels of policy structures as well as to track engagements at these levels should contribute to a more deliberate and targeted cultivation of interactions and relationships, yielding the possibility for greater impact of the research generated across APHRC's programmatic Units.

PEC's evolution to achieve regional reach was a defining objective of the 2012-2016 Strategic Plan. Much of what is being outlined for the next five years is extending our reach to become more widely African. Additional emphasis is being placed on improving our ability and commitment to monitoring and tracking our progress toward change, and the relationships we build along the way.

Developing networks and partnerships to share and translate knowledge

will help APHRC achieve its defining goal: to support systematic engagement with all levels of decision-making, using a robust evidence base to drive funding and optimal implementation of policies that will have a transformative impact for, and improve the lives of, the people of Africa.

We will pursue three objectives to achieve this goal. We will:

- Promote a culture of evidence at all levels of government, improving usage through innovative sharing of research findings and recommendations.
- Nurture strategic relationships and partnerships predicated on sound evidence and strong data through knowledge management networks, with thought influencers and agents of change.
- Cultivate greater recognition and visibility of the institution as an Africa-based, Africa-led voice in the implementation of regional and global development agendas.

PEC operations encompass three interconnected portfolios: communications, policy engagement, and knowledge management and learning. How to integrate our activities across these three portfolios, so that we are continuously learning and measuring our progress toward achieving the change we desire as a result of our research evidence, will be at the core of the activities undertaken in the next strategic period.

Policy Engagement Portfolio

Acknowledging that policy engagement is not a finite or binary proposition, we will promote engagement that is enduring, continuous and achieves incremental change in perception and action. Sustained policy impact can only be transformative when it also leads to changed systems, investments, programs, and behaviors.

PEC has developed three ways to use research evidence to inform and influence policy discussions and decision-making, to identify and nurture champions in and out of government, with the ultimate goal of driving more resources toward interventions that work:

- The **More and Better approach**: to encourage wider implementation of what already exists by broadening collaboration.
- The **Revise for Responsiveness approach**: to encourage responsiveness to changing contexts and unmet needs.
- The **Initiate for Impact approach**: to encourage the formulation and implementation of new policies to meet emerging needs due to evolving contexts.

Our responsibility in the 2017-2021 period is to broaden our reach within the context of each approach, while improving our ability to track and monitor our progress toward our desired outcome and impact.

This will include defining the ways APHRC contributes to research uptake both among policy-makers and within the wider development sector. It will mean a targeted, strategic expansion of geographic coverage that includes establishing and growing relationships and increasing participation, collaboration and influencing decision-making and agenda-setting at the sub-national, national, regional and global levels.

Critically, this work will extend beyond the Research Division and into

the Research Capacity Strengthening Division, in order to inculcate the importance of policy orientation in the next generation of research leaders in Africa. Research uptake will be pursued via:

- Knowledge management platforms: to share and learn within a wide network of interested stakeholders, advocates and academics using tested tools.
- National forums: to capitalize on existing efforts to enhance a culture of evidence in national decision-making.
- Pan-African forums: including the AU, UNECA and the Network of African Parliamentary Committees of Health (NEAPACOH).
- Global forums: such as The Lancet Commissions; the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria; and the World Economic Forum.

Knowledge Management and Learning Portfolio

A new systematic approach to knowledge management, with intuitive and routine mechanisms for tracking and analytics of all products from web hits to social media mentions to publications in both peer-reviewed and other platforms, will be fully implemented in 2017. We are broadening our knowledge management portfolio to include learning, in order to provide the time, space and opportunity to share lessons, course correct and maximize opportunities to inform and achieve impact.

Working in close collaboration with the Monitoring and Evaluation Office, PEC will incorporate a way to chronicle the relationships initiated and developed over time, so that every ‘touch’ with a decision-maker or potential champion is recorded. In this way, PEC will contribute to the organization-wide culture of learning that gives staff timely feedback on research uptake successes and missed opportunities.

Communications Portfolio

PEC's emphasis until now has been on the Communications portfolio, providing support to research programs and the Research Capacity Strengthening Division to enhance the dissemination of project materials.

We will continue this successful strategy in the next plan period, investing time and resources in expanding the number and type of innovative communication/knowledge management products we disseminate. We will do so within a more structured framework, with standard operating procedures and protocols, following a house style that will lead to professionalization of the products that emerge from the Center.

PEC also intends to broaden its profile within the organization, being more active and engaged contributor to ongoing discussions about branding, visibility and resource mobilization. This includes not only strategic fundraising and development work, but also crisis communications and risk management.

Emphasizing knowledge translation as the foundation for the culture of evidence



Our Approach

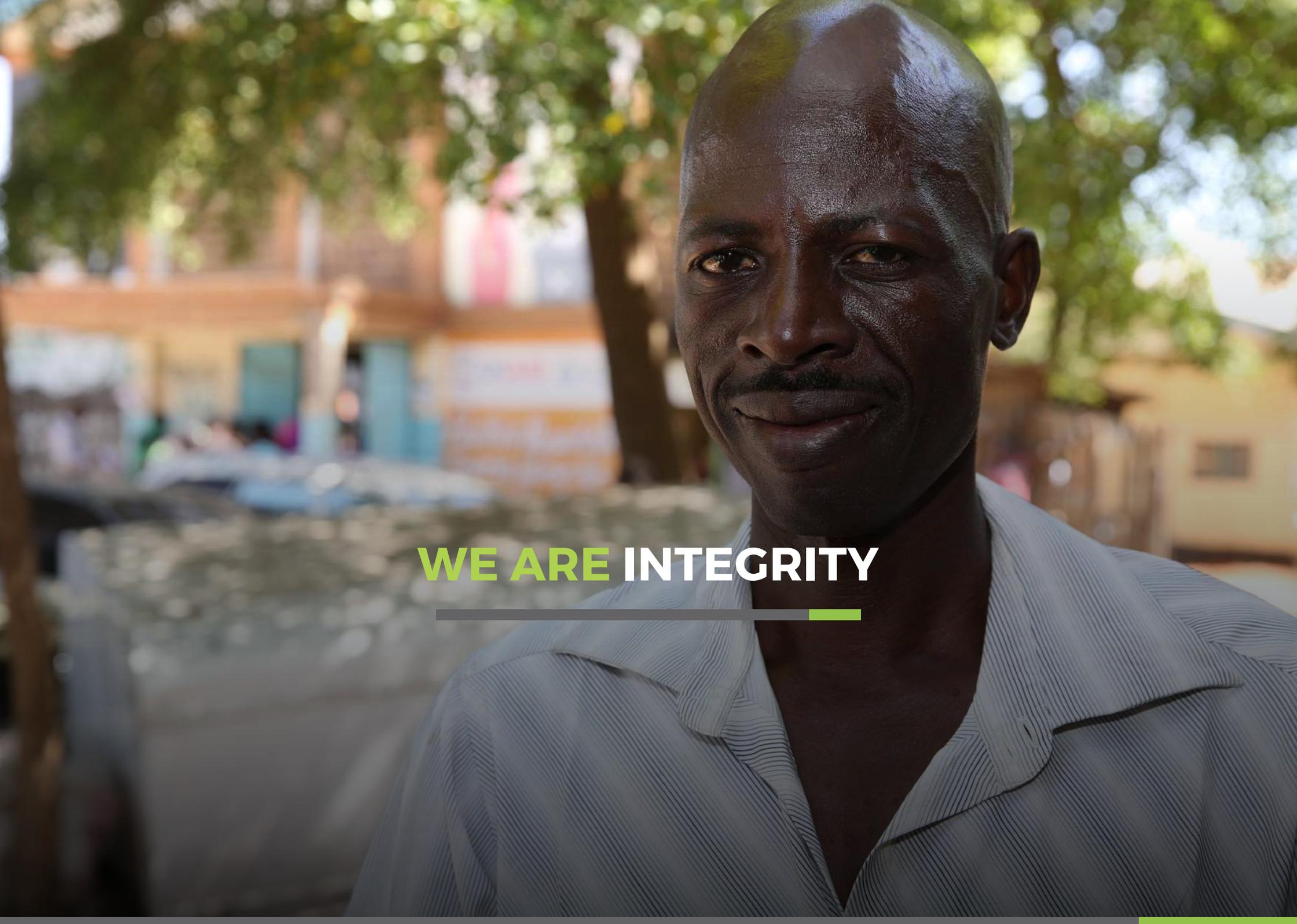
We will emphasize knowledge translation as the foundation for the culture of evidence we are promoting in our engagement with decision-makers and thought leaders through the following approaches:

- Increasing focus on priority issues and building products, events, and activities that promote the body of APHRC research.
- Capitalizing on synergies for thematic policy engagement around signature areas of focus including long-term care; chronic disease management; maternal, infant and young child nutrition; inclusive and equitable education systems; and slum systems for health and wellbeing.
- Strengthening the internal capacity of researchers to share their expertise effectively, through bespoke training for both junior researchers and fellows in the RCS division.
- Creating and responding to the demand from decision-makers to use evidence to inform their work.
- Shifting away from “launches” to “research-to-implementation forums” to cultivate communities of practice where research is emphasized.
- Systematically managing relationships with decision makers to maximize impact.
- Leading and participating in knowledge management networks to share tools and learning, and to collaborate to achieve greater impact.

Strategic Enablers

To achieve our goals we intend to pursue the following strategies:

- Strengthen our internal capacity in areas including: multimedia, basic web coding, analytical writing, policy landscaping and analysis.
- Refine our program-level approach to communications and policy engagement, through improved collaboration and the development of a policy engagement/communications capacity-strengthening module.
- Evolve our approach to ‘engagement’ from launches and one-off dissemination events toward relationship-building with influencers and decision-makers.
- Cement a Center-wide commitment to track research uptake using existing platforms.

A close-up portrait of a man with a shaved head and a slight smile, wearing a light-colored, vertically striped button-down shirt. He is positioned in the foreground, looking directly at the camera. The background is a blurred outdoor setting, likely a village or town square, with trees and buildings. The text 'WE ARE INTEGRITY' is overlaid on the lower part of the image, with 'WE ARE' in green and 'INTEGRITY' in white. A horizontal line, mostly grey with a green segment on the right, is positioned below the text.

WE ARE INTEGRITY



OPERATIONS

The Operations Division at APHRC provides support services in the areas of finance, human resources, fundraising and grants management (development), information technology, facilities and general administration. The Division under its development unit also leads in corporate monitoring and evaluation in line with the Center's M&E Framework.

Over the 2012-2016 period, the Division established strong operations systems, responding to growing needs for project management and accountability, more rigorous accounting, and internal administration.

Across the Center, staff numbers have not increased substantially (from an average of 120 to 130 in 2016) but there has been a deepening of skills at all levels. The number of PhD holders among our employees has increased from about 20 to nearly 30 and field staff and research assistants who arrived without college degrees have now obtained both Bachelor's and Master's degrees.

The star in our portfolio has been the infrastructural development of APHRC's physical presence, embodied by our Campus. Since taking residency in June 2011, we have been able to manage the facility effectively without any distractions from our core business.

Strategic Priorities

To enhance service delivery and to provide operational efficiencies, the Division will seek ways to re-engineer our business processes through effective implementation of information communication technology. We will pursue the following non-routine priorities: automation and integration of processes; monitoring, evaluation and learning; restructuring for expansion; resource sharing; and talent management.

Automation and Integration of Processes

The Operations Division is responsible for managing most of the Center's core systems. In order to optimize our systems for greater efficiency, we will consider implementing an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system that will integrate most of the organization's processes. We will also seek to automate all processes to, as far as possible, operate in a paperless and cashless environment. A cost-benefit analysis and capacity to pay will guide the level of ERP system to adopt. The ultimate goal will be a full ERP system that covers all the operations at the Center.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

Accountability will be encapsulated in APHRC's approach to monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL). More specifically, the purpose of APHRC's MEL will be to:

- Ensure APHRC develops clarity around its theory of change and how the work undertaken across the program divisions will achieve the desired change.
- Provide relevant and timely information to assist principal investigators and project managers to adjust projects in response to research and implementation issues, to allow for course correction that enhances success and impact.
- Provide sufficient evidence to explain both outcomes and impacts attributable to APHRC interventions, activities and engagements.

We will continue with the upgrade of the Project Management System to be the tool for monitoring and evaluation of our strategic plan, to ensure that impact is demonstrated.

Restructuring for Expansion

In line with the Center's intention to expand its regional reach, plans to establish a sub-regional office in Francophone West Africa will be actualized. In addition, we will seek to establish at least one other office in sub-Saharan Africa, as well as a development office in the USA. The Operations Division will therefore establish systems tailored to managing multiple offices.

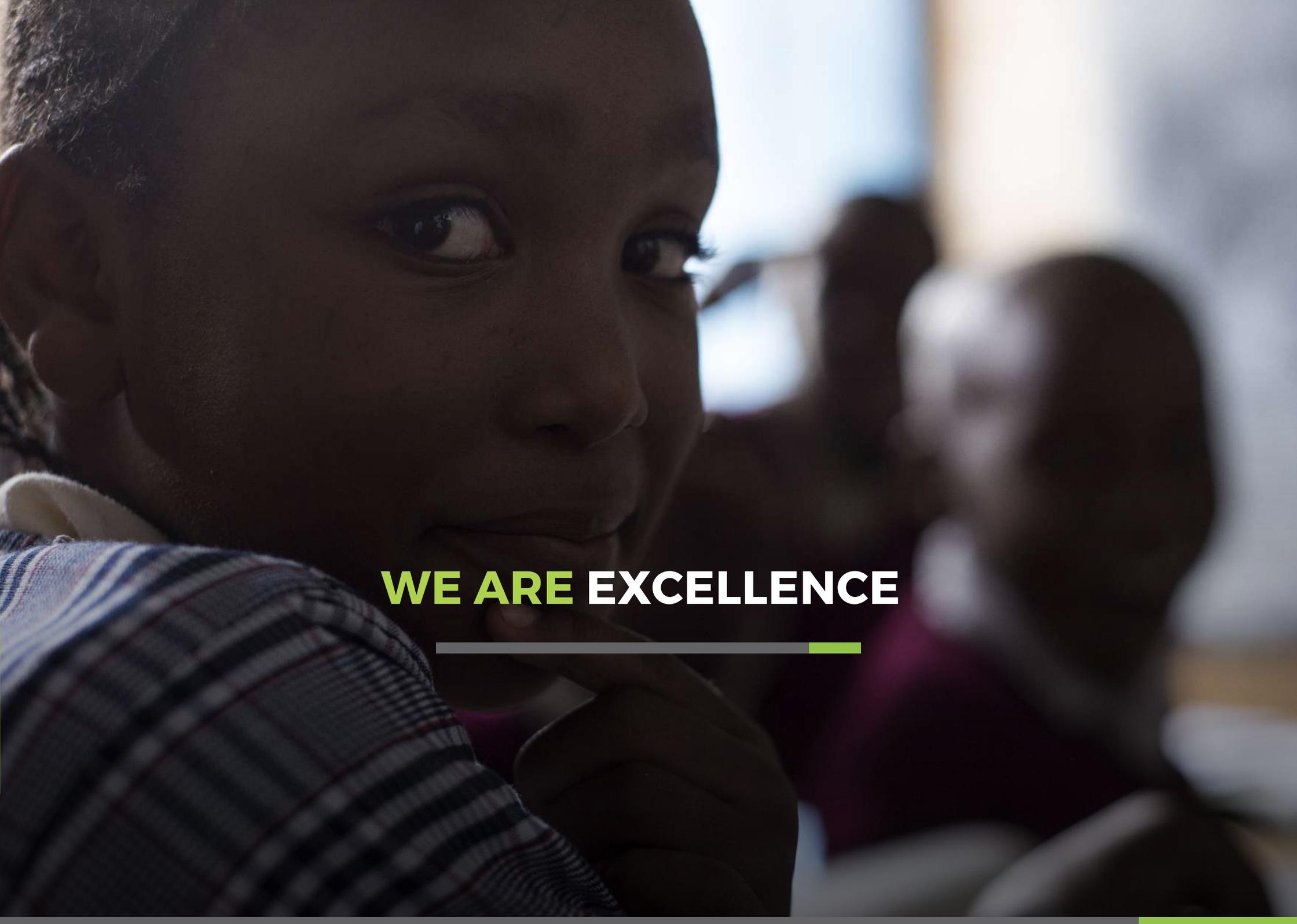
Resource Sharing

As a relatively small institution (less than US\$20m in annual turnover), some investments anticipated in the Operations Division, like a full ERP, may remain beyond reach unless we collaborate with like-minded institutions to take advantage of economies of scale. We will explore opportunities for a consortium of organizations to collaborate on such investments. This will include leveraging the existing strong partnerships formed under the CARTA program or through the INDEPTH Network.

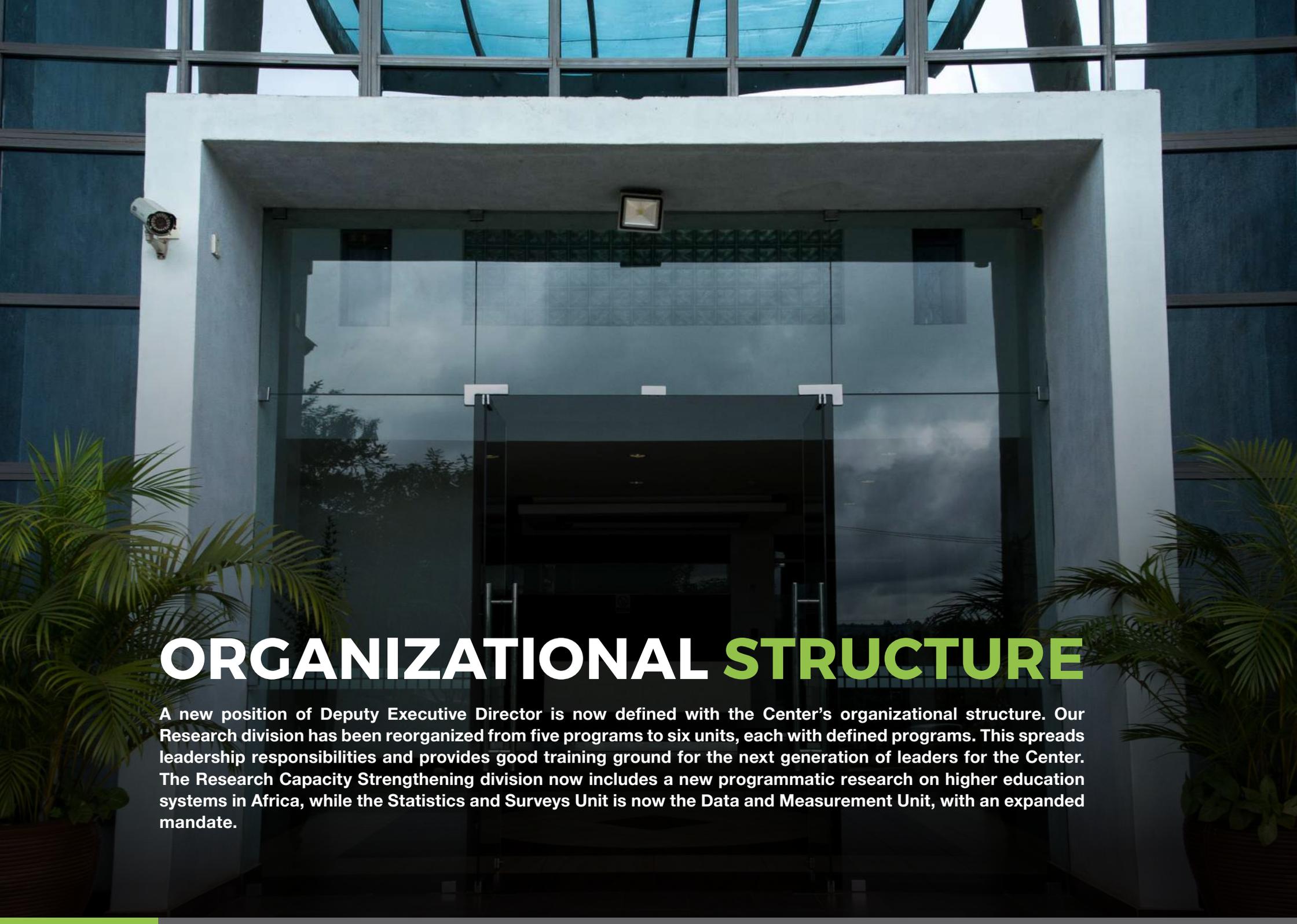
Talent Management

In order to attract and retain talent while remaining competitive, a comprehensive job evaluation will commence in 2017. This is the first job evaluation for the Center since it began independent operations in 2001, and aims to align functions and grade levels with the ethos of equal pay for equal value of work. It is anticipated that this will lead to reclassification of some positions.

Our talent management strategy will, among other things, enhance staff engagement across programs and seek to develop leadership skills at all levels.

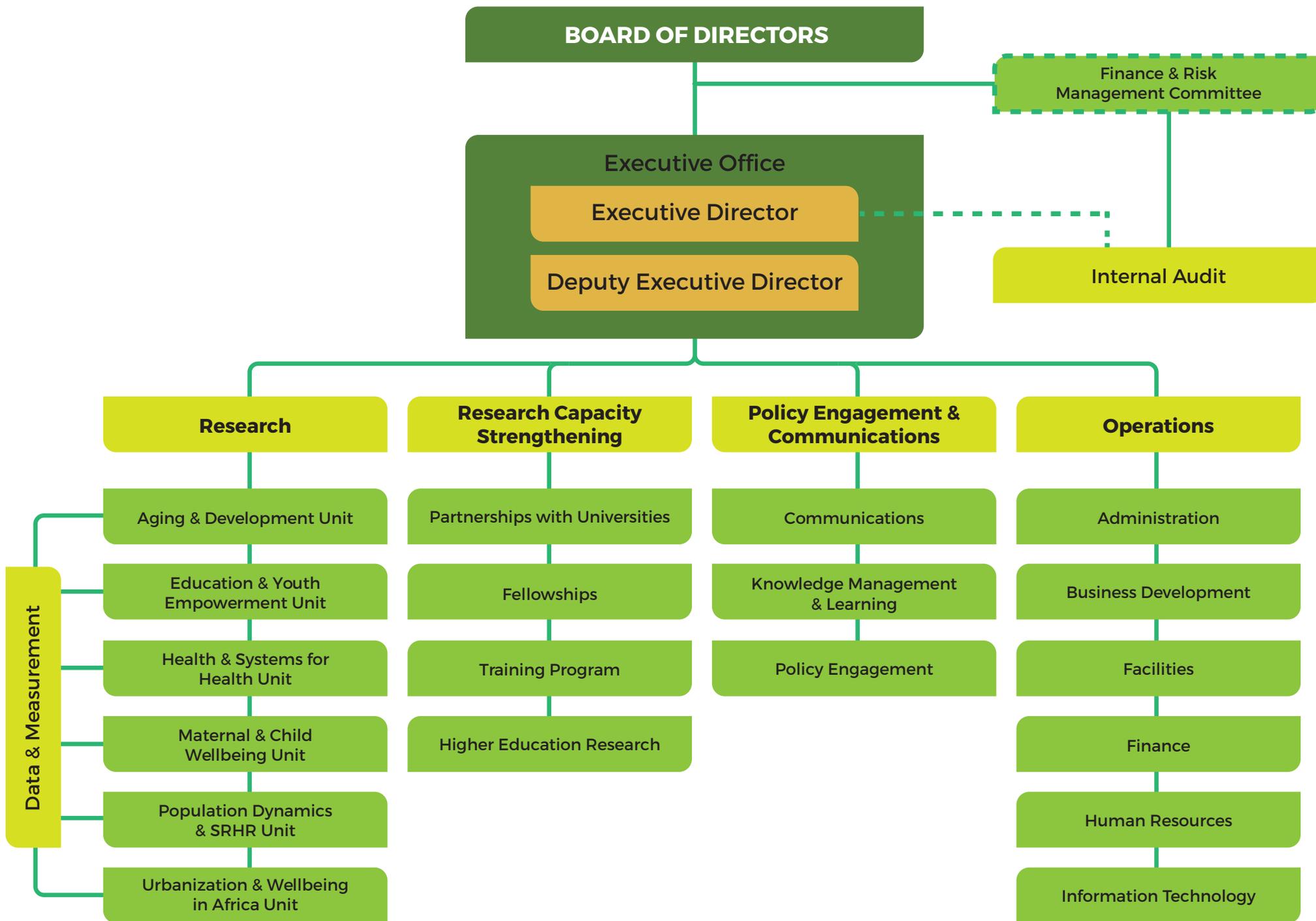
A young girl with dark skin and braided hair is shown in profile, looking thoughtfully to the right. She is wearing a blue and white striped shirt. The background is a blurred classroom setting with other students. The text "WE ARE EXCELLENCE" is overlaid on the image in a bold, sans-serif font. The words "WE ARE" are in a light green color, and "EXCELLENCE" is in white. Below the text is a horizontal line that is mostly grey and ends with a small green segment on the right.

WE ARE EXCELLENCE



ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

A new position of Deputy Executive Director is now defined with the Center's organizational structure. Our Research division has been reorganized from five programs to six units, each with defined programs. This spreads leadership responsibilities and provides good training ground for the next generation of leaders for the Center. The Research Capacity Strengthening division now includes a new programmatic research on higher education systems in Africa, while the Statistics and Surveys Unit is now the Data and Measurement Unit, with an expanded mandate.





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