

A large, stylized map of the African continent is formed by numerous green wavy lines of varying lengths and curves, creating a textured, organic appearance. The map is positioned in the center of the page, with a green rectangular box containing white text overlaid on its left side.

Strengthening Africa's Research Ecosystem

CATALYZING IMPACT DIGEST. ISSUE 2. DEC 2024

Program Directors' Message



Dr. Alphonus Neba

Program Director,
Catalyze Impact initiative

Greetings friends and partners!

As 2024 draws to a close, we reflect on a year of significant achievements and transformative progress through the Catalyze Impact Initiative. Together, we have solidified APHRC's role as a driving force in transforming Africa's Research and Development ecosystem.

2024 Highlights

Increasing discoverability with Africa Research Connect: This year saw the development and piloting of the Africa Research Connect platform's minimum viable product. The Africa Research Connect has revolutionized how researchers across the continent collaborate and share knowledge. By increasing visibility and discoverability, this groundbreaking platform positions African research, researchers, and institutions on a global stage, empowering innovation and fostering partnerships

Advancing Excellence with Good Financial Grant Practice (GFGP)

Certification: Through our technical assistance, some universities in Kenya and Ethiopia have successfully attained GFGP certification. This milestone sets a new standard for research excellence further cementing APHRC's crucial role in shaping the future of African research.

Transforming Maternal Health Policy in Nigeria:

In Kano and Lagos States, our policy profiling and prototyping efforts have shed light on the root causes of maternal deaths. These insights lay the groundwork for targeted interventions, with the potential to save countless lives and improve health outcomes for millions. The potential impact of this initiative's process blueprint on the continent is immense.

Mapping Africa's Research Landscape:

Our unique and comprehensive research readiness assessment dataset of over 700 African universities is poised to provide invaluable insights into the continent's research capabilities, gaps, and opportunities. These insights will guide strategic interventions to strengthen research capacity and drive innovation on the continent.

These and many other accomplishments would not have been possible without our partners' unwavering support. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the Gates Foundation for their continued investment and to government institutions, universities, and research institutions in Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, and across Africa for their commitment to transforming lives.

Looking Ahead to 2025:

As we step into the new year, we are eager to push the boundaries of innovation and scale our impact. We will continue challenging conventional thinking, exploring new avenues, and foster stronger connections between research, policy and practice. Our focus will be on:

- Empowering and increasing the visibility and discoverability of African researchers and institutions
- Identifying and working with key enablers of research, and facilitating consequential connections and partnerships within the African R&D ecosystem and,
- Accelerating progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and creating a brighter future for the continent.

The Catalyze Impact Initiative team wishes you and your loved ones a joyous holiday season and a prosperous New Year 2025!



Breaking the Cycle



Each day in 2020, approximately 800 women lost their lives to preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth. That's one maternal death every two minutes - a harrowing statistic that underscores a global crisis. Tragically, 95% of these deaths occurred in low and lower-middle-income countries (LMICs), with sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) accounting for 70% of the burden.

At the heart of this crisis, Nigeria stands out, a nation disproportionately affected by maternal health mainly due to its large population. With a maternal mortality ratio (MMR) of 1,047 per 100,000 live births, Nigeria's statistics are among the highest in the world. This grim reality is exacerbated by

gaps in the country's Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) system, which hinders the accurate recording and understanding of the causes of maternal deaths. In fact, according to the National Population Commission (NPC), only 10% of maternal deaths are registered, and stillbirths go entirely unreported.

This lack of accurate and reliable data, creates a blind spot for policy and decision makers, making it difficult to grasp the scale of maternal mortality or identifying its root causes. This lack of data has profound implications and impedes the development of effective interventions and lifesaving decisions, perpetuating a cycle of preventable loss.

Bridging the Data Gap: Developing State Led Sample Registration Systems

In a bold step toward addressing the critical gaps in maternal mortality data, the Catalyze Impact Initiative in collaboration with Bayero University Kano (BUK) through The Africa Center of Excellence for Population Health and Policy (ACEPHAP) and the University of Lagos—is pioneering an innovative solution that promises to transform maternal and neonatal health tracking in Nigeria. The core of this solution lies in establishing a Sample Registration System (SRS) to collect vital data via combination of Verbal Autopsy (VA) and Social Autopsy (SA) techniques.

The SRS leverages a blend of household surveys, demographic surveillance to paint a clearer picture of maternal health, and collect missing data. It provides an essential alternative to conventional vital registration systems, especially in areas where deaths frequently occur outside healthcare facilities or where CRVS systems are weak or absent.

In countries like Nigeria, where vast populations live in remote or underserved areas, this system can bridge the gap and help bring a much-needed accuracy to maternal health data.

Beyond merely tracking numbers, this system dives deeper to uncover root causes, prevalent complications, and the social and environmental factors that contribute to these incidences. By revealing the true scale and causes of maternal mortality, the SRS equips policymakers with the insights needed to craft targeted interventions that address the unique barriers women face in accessing care.

A Focus on Kano and Lagos States

The SRS has already shown promise in pilot regions through the Kano State Surveillance for Evidence and Policy (KASSEP) and Lagos Verbal and Social Autopsy (LVASA) initiatives. These projects focus on generating reliable estimates of maternal deaths and stillbirths, while identifying the community-level factors that contribute to such fatalities.

By focusing on a state-wide implementation, the SRS seeks to deliver accurate maternal mortality and stillbirths data, revealing not just the medical causes but also the social and cultural dynamics at play. Factors, such as access to healthcare, socio-economic status, education, and cultural practices shall enable policy makers to design targeted interventions tailored to the unique needs of each community.

One of the most significant advantages of this integrated approach is its ability to capture data on deaths occurring outside formal healthcare settings. In Nigeria, where many women give birth at home or in informal settings, such deaths often go unrecorded.

By utilizing Verbal Autopsy - which interviews relatives or caregivers about the circumstances leading to the death - and Social Autopsy, which focuses on understanding the societal and economic factors impacting health outcomes, the study identifies trends and patterns that might otherwise be missed.





A Collaborative Effort

The collaboration between The Africa Center of Excellence for Population Health and Policy (ACEPHAP), Bayero University Kano (BUK), Yusuf Maitama Sule, the University of Lagos, the respective state governments, the Ministry of Health, and the Catalyze Impact Initiative represents a concerted effort to bring innovative solutions to Nigeria's maternal health crisis.

The partnership leverages the expertise of the organizations in public health research and policy advocacy to strengthen Nigeria's data collection systems, support local healthcare providers, and empower communities with knowledge to improve maternal health outcomes.

This initiative is poised to make a significant impact by focusing on accurate death registration, community-level health data, and understanding the root causes of maternal deaths. The lessons learned from the Kano and Lagos pilot projects will serve as a model for other states across Nigeria, creating a ripple effect that could ultimately lead to substantial reductions in maternal mortality nationwide.

A Vision for a Healthier Future

Implementing the SRS offers hope for a future where maternal mortality is no longer a silent epidemic. By generating accurate, timely data, this initiative equips Nigeria and other LMIC countries to close critical gaps in maternal health care, refine interventions, and allocate resources where they are needed most.

Every maternal death is a loss that ripples through families, communities, and generations. By investing in better data systems, we can not only prevent future deaths but also ensure that women have the opportunity to live healthy, fulfilling lives.

As Nigeria works toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—particularly SDG 3, which targets reducing maternal mortality to fewer than 70 deaths per 100,000 live births by 2030—the work done through the SRS stands as a beacon of hope. Through sustained collaboration, research, and policy action, Nigeria is taking bold significant steps toward ending preventable maternal deaths and building a healthier future for all its citizens.



Strengthening Africa's Research Ecosystem

This year, we've conducted targeted capacity-building initiatives to empower African researchers and institutions with the critical skills, resources, and knowledge needed to thrive in today's rapidly evolving research landscape. We have worked to enhance the quality and visibility of African research. From improving financial management practices to fostering better communication between researchers and policymakers, our efforts are geared towards building a more resilient and collaborative research environment across the continent, where all stakeholders are included and valued. Below are the highlights of the activities we undertook:

Good Financial Grant Practice (GFGP) Training

One of the standout initiatives this year was the Good Financial Grant Practice (GFGP) certification program. With training sessions held in Kenya, Nigeria, and Ethiopia, the Catalyze Impact Initiative empowered universities to navigate the complexities of grant funding. Through workshops

and hands-on support, institutions like Armauer Hansen Research Institute (Platinum), Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, Murang'a University of Technology, and Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (Gold) successfully earned GFGP certification. This certification is a testament to the potential of African institutions and is crucial in helping them secure funding for advanced research.

"We are honored to receive the GFGP certification at the Platinum Tier level. As a leading research institute in Africa, this achievement has been a valuable step in enhancing our financial governance standards. AHRI remains committed to excellence, and we look forward to further strengthening our partnerships and collaborations regionally and globally. We sincerely thank the APHRC staff and leadership for their unwavering support thus far and we look forward to continued collaboration." - Demissie Tassew, Procurement and Finance Executive Officer, Armauer Hansen Research Institute

"Our attainment of the Good Financial Grants Practices certification at the Gold Tier level positions Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology (MMUST) at the forefront of research excellence. The newly established Grants Management Office has fortified our operational structures, enhancing our ability to manage and secure large grants. This certification will drive greater research partnerships and collaborations, thereby empowering our researchers with the tools and resources they need to achieve even greater success." - Prof. Francis Orata (PHD), Director, Research and Postgraduate Support, Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology

We are committed to supporting African institutions in their journey towards GFGP certification.

We look forward to empowering more universities and research institutes and ensuring they have the necessary skills and knowledge to secure funding for their research initiatives.





Kenya's National Engagement Stakeholder Forum on Research Science Technology and Innovation

In a significant step toward strengthening Kenya's Research, Science, Technology, and Innovation (RSTI) ecosystem, APHRC, in collaboration with the State Department for Higher Education and Research, Ministry of Education Kenya, hosted a three-day national stakeholders' forum. The forum brought together government officials, academic leaders, private sector representatives, and civil society stakeholders to develop a comprehensive RSTI framework to optimize Kenya's Research and Development (R&D) landscape and address critical challenges such as overlapping responsibilities, data disparity and limited collaboration.

"The Ministry recognizes the need to create a conducive research ecosystem in Kenya. We are committed to deepening our partnerships with sector players to drive cutting-edge research and ensure robust data and practical insights inform policies." – Dr. Beatrice Muganda, Principal Secretary, State Department for Higher Education and Research, Ministry of Education, Kenya.

This collaborative approach underscores the importance of fostering meaningful and strategic partnerships to leverage diverse strengths, avoid duplication of efforts, and foster healthy competition. The framework, with its potential to align research efforts across sectors, promote innovation, and support Kenya's economic growth, offers a promising future for the country.



Policy Engagement and Science Communication Workshop

Bridging the gap between researchers and policymakers, our policy engagement and science communication workshop equipped researchers with practical strategies to make their research findings accessible and impactful.

Through hands-on sessions, participants learned to communicate complex research in engaging, digestible formats and leverage digital platforms to enhance visibility. The participants had the opportunity to hear first-hand from the Regional Editor for The Conversation Africa who shared insights on using media to expand their audience beyond academia, communicating research through media channels, inspiring them to expand their reach beyond academic circles.

Capacity Strengthening for African Journal Editors

To address visibility challenges faced by African researchers, we held workshops for journal editors-in-chief from academic institutions in Nigeria and Kenya. The sessions focused on elevating African journals to international publishing standards by emphasizing best peer review practices, international indexing, securing Digital Object Identifiers (DOI) and ISSNs, and optimizing digital publication strategies.

The workshops encouraged editors to form a community of practice, fostering collaboration and resources and knowledge sharing to amplify the collective impact on African journals.

University Website Optimization Training

In today's digital age, a robust online presence is essential for increased visibility. Recognizing the growing importance of digital presence, we organized website optimization training to help African universities improve their online visibility. The session provided participants with strategies to enhance their digital footprint by improving website functionality, search engine rankings, and engagement with international audiences.

By boosting their digital presence, African researchers can gain global recognition and attract international collaborators and funders, furthering their research and innovation agendas.





Inaugural Knowledge Fair

Another key highlight this year was the successful inaugural Knowledge Fair, which took place in Addis Ababa. This event marked a pivotal moment in our ongoing commitment to fostering collaboration, sharing knowledge, and driving innovation.

“True transformation is fueled by collaboration and active participation”

Dr. Nosa Orobato, Former Senior Health Advisor, Africa Region Office, Gates Foundation.

Bringing together various stakeholders, experts, and thought leaders, the event created a platform for sharing ideas, learning from successes and challenges, and nurturing collaborations.

The Interactive discussions and presentations featured insights and strategies to strengthen Africa's research and development ecosystem.

Building on this success, we are eagerly looking forward to the next Knowledge Fair, which promises to be more exciting and impactful, attracting a more diverse audience and fostering more collaborations.

Spotlight

GFGP certified Universities

In this month's newsletter, we are excited to spotlight four institutions that have attained the Good Financial Grant Practice (GFGP) certification:

- Armauer Hansen Research Institute (AHRI)
- Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology
- Murang'a University of Technology
- Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology

The GFGP certification marks a significant achievement for each institution, not only in organizational growth showcasing its exceptional commitment to financial transparency, accountability, and robust grant management but also in advancing their scientific and research endeavors.

By meeting the highest standards of financial governance, these institutions are able to attract international funding, expand their research capacity, and unlock regional and global collaboration opportunities.

Well done to the teams involved!



For institutions interested in attaining the GFGP certification, please contact us via info.catalyzeinitiative@aphrc.org.

What we're reading



A landscape analysis of clinical trials and infant clinical trials in Kenya, Ethiopia, and Nigeria

The study identifies the opportunities available and key barriers to conducting effective clinical trials in low-resource settings and underscores the need to strengthen clinical research capacity across sub-Saharan Africa. Findings also reveal that strong human resources, infrastructure, and grant management are crucial for success.

[Read more here.](#)



Discoverability of African Journals by Google Scholar and Inclusion in Scopus

This study sheds light on the critical factors contributing to the discoverability and inclusion of African journals on international platforms. It proposes some interventions that pave the way for increased visibility and access to African research.

[Read more here.](#)

The Year in Pictorials

From impactful workshops and engaging team-building activities to reflective sessions, our journey this year has been one of growth, collaboration, and transformation.

We extend our gratitude to our partners for their invaluable support and look forward to expanding these initiatives in the coming year.







Contact us:

For feedback, content ideas or to be featured, please contact
info.catalyzeinitiative@aphrc.org.