

Strengthening Africa's Research Ecosystem

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The Marathon for Africa's Research and Development Future: We've Just Begun the Race

Transforming Africa's research and development (R&D) ecosystem is not a sprint—it's a marathon. And as this phase of the Catalyze Impact Initiative ends, we recognize a crucial truth: we've only completed the first few kilometers of a long, purposeful race.

The Initiative was born out of the urgent need to reclaim Africa's agency in R&D, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic exposed deep-seated systemic inequities. Over the past two years, we've laid the groundwork—strengthening institutions, elevating local expertise, and fostering collaboration across borders. But like any marathon, the real test lies ahead: sustaining momentum, enduring challenges, and pushing forward until we cross the finish line.



Building Endurance for the Long Run

In these early stages, we have set a strong pace by:

- Developing the <u>Africa Research Connect</u>—a platform linking institutions and amplifying African expertise on the global stage.
- Co-creating evidence-to-policy action frameworks in Nigeria, Kenya, and Ethiopia to support locally driven R&D agendas.
- Providing mentorship, coaching and training researchers, policymakers, and institutions in grant management, editorial best practices, website optimization, and financial sustainability—because a marathon requires preparation and strong systems, not just speed.

These milestones matter, but they're just the beginning. True transformation demands consistent effort, strategic partnerships, and unwavering commitment over the long haul.



Pacing Ourselves for Lasting Impact

A marathon runner knows that the most challenging stretches come later—when fatigue sets in and the finish line still seems distant. For Africa's R&D ecosystem to thrive, the following ingredients are necessary:

- Enhancing institutional resilience will enable universities and governments to take true leadership and ownership of Africa's development agenda.
- Expanding funding and partnerships to ensure no runner—no country, no researcher—is left behind.
- Maintaining the urgency of this mission, even when progress feels incremental.

We've proven that change is possible. Now, we must endure.

Join us for the Long Run

This marathon isn't ours alone. Every policymaker, institution, donor or researcher, who steps forward ensures that we continue moving forward. The Initiative has been a pacesetter, but the race belongs to everyone invested in Africa's R&D future.

The Initiative has been a pacesetter, but the race to a self-staining African R&D ecosystem belongs to everyone. We invite you to keep running with us into Africa's future.



Strengthening Financial Governance in African Universities



Photo: Joseph Gichuru, APHRC Deputy Executive Director and the Director of Operations facilitates a discussion on Financial Governance during a workshop in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, February 2025.

frica's ambition to lead its own research and development (R&D) agenda is no longer a vision—it is a necessity. At the African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC), we firmly believe that sustainable Africanled development must be anchored in strong, transparent, and accountable institutions. One critical pathway to achieving that goal is through enhanced financial governance. That is why APHRC, through the Catalyze Impact Initiative, is proud to be driving the uptake of the Good Financial Grant Practice (GFGP) certification across the continent in collaboration with African universities and research institutions. This certification is not just a choice but a crucial step toward the future of African research and development.

Amidst the evolving funding landscape, the necessity for robust financial and operational systems is undeniable. The GFGP certification presents African institutions with a distinctive opportunity to showcase their preparedness to handle international research grants while also fortifying their internal systems for long-term sustainability. In support of this endeavor, APHRC has introduced the GFGP Virtual Learning Academy, a platform tailored to guide institutions through their certification journey, from self-assessment to audit.

Through interactive modules, resources, and expert guidance, the Virtual Learning Academy enables institutions to assess their existing governance structures, identify gaps, and implement globally recognized standards. APHRC has been working closely with universities and research institutions to support their onboarding onto the platform, ensuring that they are not only equipped to pursue certification but also to improve their operational systems sustainably.

"We are committed to strengthening the African research and development ecosystem, enhancing the visibility of African excellence and driving impactful research for development."

Dr. Catherine Kyobutungi, Executive Director, APHRC.

As of May 2025, nine institutions had completed the GFGP certification process, with five from Kenya, two from Ethiopia, and two from Nigeria. These early adopters are now among the first in Africa to hold GFGP certifications, all of which are at either the Gold or Platinum level. This achievement is a clear rebuttal to the outdated narratives that often underestimate the financial and administrative capabilities of African institutions.

Participating institutions have reported significant enhancements in internal processes, including more structured financial controls, improved documentation practices, clearer lines of accountability, and enhanced staff capacity in grants and finance management.

These improvements enable institutions to craft stronger proposals, enhance donor confidence, and ultimately improve their chances of securing and managing funding.

"The GFGP created a grant winning mentality among researchers and staff in our institution."

Dr. Genanew Kassie Getahun, Research and Community Services Coordinator at Menelik II Medical and Health Science College.



Dr. Catherine Kyobutungi, APHRC Executive Director, presents the GFGP Certificate to Prof. Victoria Wambui Ngumi, Vice Chancellor of Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, March 2025

"Masinde Muliro has just established a Grants Management Office. The Grants management office benefited largely, through the certification process in terms of gathering documentation and in building operational structures that are required in grants application and management."

Prof. Francis Orata Omoto (PHD),Director, Research and Postgraduate Support, Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology. "For our Institution, GFGP wasn't just about compliance - it was about building sustainable institutional capacity."

Ms. Elizabeth Kussaga, Senior Research Administrator at the Kilimanjaro Christian Research Institute (KCRI).



Prof. Francis Orata Omoto receives the GFGP Certificate on behalf of Masinde Muliro University during the launch of the Good Grant Practice Virtual Academy Project in Nairobi, Kenya, March 2025.

For many institutions, the GFGP journey is a transformative experience. What starts as a compliance exercise quickly evolves into a comprehensive institutional strengthening initiative. From risk management to procurement, from human resources to project reporting, GFGP permeates every aspect of organizational operations—ensuring that institutions are better positioned not only to attract grants but to implement them with integrity and efficiency.

As we celebrate the success of the initial cohort, APHRC remains committed to expanding access through the GFGP Virtual Learning Academy and encouraging more institutions across Africa to begin their certification journey. With over 120 institutions already engaged in the broader certification process, the momentum is building. We invite university leaders, research directors, grant managers, and finance officers to explore the <u>Virtual Learning</u>
<u>Academy</u> and take the first step toward certification.

More than ever, funders are seeking partners with proven systems and practices, and GFGP offers a credible, internationally recognized pathway to demonstrate this readiness.



Dr. Alphonsus Neba, Program Director, APHRC, presents the GFGP Certificate to The Armauer Hansen Research Institute (AHRI) representatives during an APHRC-led capacity strengthening workshop in Addis Ababa, February 2025.



Dr. Luchuo Engelbert, APHRC Head of International Programs facilitates a training on Editorial Practices of African Journals for Nigerian universities in Abuja, Nigeria, 2025

Assessing the Research Readiness of African Institutions

frica's universities and research Ainstitutions are vital engines for innovation, knowledge generation, and the development of solutions to the continent's most pressing challenges. However, persistent gaps in institutional capacity continue to limit their ability to conduct and sustain high-quality research. Recognizing the need to systematically identify and address these challenges, the Research Readiness Assessment was commissioned to assess the capacity of African institutions and guide targeted interventions for their growth and development.

By December 2024, the assessment had been conducted for over 500 institutions across Africa, a significant milestone in the effort to map research capacity and strengthen it.

The assessment's findings, which covered key areas such as institutional

governance and research infrastructure, were instrumental in designing customized capacity-strengthening programs in Kenya, Ethiopia, and Nigeria. These programs formed the basis of the pilot phase, directly addressing the identified gaps.

Targeted Interventions

The value of the Research Readiness Assessment lies not only in what it uncovers but also in how the results are utilized. Following the comprehensive evaluation, we deployed several targeted and impactful interventions to address the most prevalent capacity gaps. These interventions were designed to enable institutions to enhance their research performance and position them to contribute more effectively to Africa's development goals.

1. Strengthening Editorial Practices of African Journals

A significant number of institutions surveyed either hosted academic journals or were affiliated with them, yet many of these journals struggled with visibility and international recognition. To address this, institutions were supported through training on best editorial and publishing practices. The training focused on improving peer review processes, publication ethics, digital archiving, and strategies for indexing with reputable global databases.

By enhancing the quality and discoverability of African-led research, these journals will be better positioned to shape global conversations on development and science. We held workshops in Kenya, Ethiopia, and Nigeria, with participants comprising renowned editors and assistant editors.

2. Grant Proposal Writing Training

A common issue identified during the assessment was the low volume of successful research grant applications among many institutions. In response, practical workshops on competitive grant proposal writing were conducted, equipping researchers and administrators with the skills needed to craft compelling, fundable proposals.

These sessions focused on understanding donor expectations, aligning research with funding priorities, and building robust research teams. For institutions that had secured few or no research grants in recent years, this was a game-changing opportunity to enhance their funding potential and initiate new research initiatives.



Dr. Hesborn Wao, APHRC lead, Individual Capacity Strengthening, facilitates a Grant Proposal Writing Training for Kenyan universities in Nairobi.

3. Strategic Digital Communication through optimizing websites

In an increasingly digital world, an institution's online presence plays a key role in its research visibility and credibility. The assessment found that while many institutions had websites and assigned staff, their platforms were underutilized or poorly maintained.

With participants from universities' ICT and communications units, we offered tailored website optimization training, focusing on developing a website strategy, improving content strategy, technical performance, user experience, and online branding. These improvements are helping institutions better showcase their research outputs, attract collaborations, and enhance stakeholder engagement.

4. Facilitation of GFGP Certification

Sound financial governance is a prerequisite for attracting and managing research funding. Yet, many institutions had not yet aligned with international standards. To address this gap, institutions were supported through the GFGP certification process through the Good Financial Grant Practices (GFGP) certification process, including assistance with onboarding, training, and meeting audit requirements.

By working toward GFGP certification, these institutions are strengthening their financial systems, increasing funders' trust, and laying the groundwork for long-term research sustainability.



Lamech Mutava, APHRC Multimedia Officer, facilitates a training session on Strategic Digital Communication for Nigerian universities, focused on optimizing institutional websites, held in Abuja, Nigeria, 2024.

The Research Readiness Assessment is not just a diagnostic tool—it is a transformative process. It empowers institutions to identify their strengths and address their challenges directly. By combining robust assessments with responsive support, the RRA is helping build a stronger, more capable research ecosystem across Africa.

Institutions that once struggled with visibility, funding, and operational capacity are now better equipped to generate high-impact research and contribute to solving Africa's unique challenges through evidence and innovation.



KCA University leadership receives the GFGP Certificate from APHRC representatives, March 2025



Dr Kirimi Sindi, APHRC Catalze Impact Project Manager takes KCA University faculty members through the Research Readiness Assessment and Africa Research Connect tools.

Dr. Vincent Were, APHRCResearch Scientist, presents findings from the Lagos Verbal and Social Autopsy (LVASA) Study during a dissemination event in Lagos, Nigeria, June 2025.

Catalyzing Change: A Collaborative Effort to Improve Maternal Health Outcomes in Nigeria

The global maternal health crisis presents a sobering reality every day, over 900 women die from preventable pregnancy-related causes, with nearly two million stillbirths occurring annually. These numbers, while staggering, only hint at the countless personal tragedies that unfold, especially in low-middleincome countries where health systems struggle to document and analyze these deaths. Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, is a stark example of this crisis, with persistently high maternal mortality rates, particularly in rural communities where deaths often go unrecorded and their causes unexamined.

Recognizing the urgent need for action, the African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC), through its Catalyze Impact Initiative, embarked on an innovative collaboration with Bayero University Kano, the University of Lagos, and state health ministries in Lagos and Kano. This partnership aimed to address four critical gaps

in maternal and perinatal health data: chronic underreporting of deaths particularly outside health facilities, delays in data availability for decision-making, weak cause-ofdeath attribution systems, and poor integration between different health information systems.

What made these projects, Kano State Surveillance for Evidence and Policy (KASSEP) and Lagos Verbal and Social Autopsy (LVASA), unique was their deeply collaborative approach, bringing together government health agencies, academic institutions, statistical bodies, and community stakeholders in a shared mission to transform Nigeria's understanding and response to maternal deaths.

The challenges were substantial from the outset. In Kano State, outdated population data threatened to undermine the validity of the entire study. However, through technical collaboration between demographers, statisticians, and local health officials,



Photo: Research officers under the Kano State Surveillance for Evidence and Policy (KASSEP) project collect household data as part of the fieldwork activities.

the team developed innovative population projection methods to create a robust sampling framework.

This cross-sector problem-solving extended to the adaptation of the WHO's InterVA software for verbal autopsy analysis. Recognizing that the existing version didn't align with Nigeria's context or current data collection tools, the partnership customized the platform, enabling accurate cause-of-death determinations by non-clinicians —a crucial innovation in a country with severe healthcare workforce shortages.

Our initiative was not just about collecting data-it was about ensuring that this evidence translated into action. Through Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis workshops, policymakers worked alongside researchers to interpret findings and prioritize interventions. This collaborative decision-making process was a significant step in bridging the gap between evidence generation and policy implementation. Most notably, the project successfully integrated community-level mortality data with Nigeria's national Civil Registration and Vital Statistics system, establishing a unified framework for understanding maternal health patterns nationwide for the first time.

The success of this initiative demonstrates the effectiveness of collaborative approaches in addressing complex health challenges. By combining academic expertise with government leadership and community insights, the partnership has created systems that will continue to generate valuable data long after the project's conclusion.

More importantly, it established a model for how multidisciplinary teams can collaborate to transform health statistics into life-saving interventions proving that when diverse stakeholders unite around shared goals, even the most entrenched health challenges can be addressed. As Nigeria continues to refine these systems, the lessons learned offer valuable insights for other countries grappling with similar maternal health crises, showing that sustainable solutions emerge when we break down silos and work collectively toward a shared vision.



Building it Forward for Research Leadership

APHRC through the Catalyze and SARIMA are tackling a key challenge in African research: the reliance on external funding that has historically limited the continent's scientific independence. The "Building it Forward for Research Leadership" program backed by the Gates Foundation, is a strategic intervention that aims to prove, with solid evidence, that African research can and should be primarily sustained by African resources.

The approach is both systematic and compelling: by meticulously documenting and analyzing nearly

ten case studies of successful Africanled research initiatives across South African universities, the team is building an undeniable case for increased domestic investment in research and development.

What makes these case studies particularly impactful is their real-world relevance. Each example has been carefully chosen to demonstrate how locally rooted research leads to tangible change—from shaping national policies to enhancing community health outcomes and fortifying innovation systems.

The assessment framework, developed in collaboration with SARIMA, ensures these cases meet high standards of scientific excellence while staying true to African priorities. When this collection of success stories is completed in September 2025, it will be more than just academic reference material—it will be a strategic advocacy toolkit for research leaders and policymakers across the continent.

The impact of this work goes beyond individual research projects. By systematically demonstrating the returns on research investment,

APHRC and SARIMA are challenging long-held assumptions about funding dependencies and creating new models for sustainable knowledge production.

As the Catalyze Impact Initiative enters its next phase, this partnership stands as a testament to what can be achieved when African institutions unite to reclaim control over their research ecosystems. The vision of a self-sustaining African research landscape is becoming a reality—one compelling case at a time.



Team members of the Target Policy Profile Framework to Leverage African Genomic Heterogeneity (TALAGH) project including Gaye Agesa, Program Manager, APHRC Catalyze Impact Initiative (second from right).



Spotlight: Why having boots on the ground makes all the difference

You can't zoom your way into understanding what makes local systems tick. That truth comes alive in our interview with Dr. Abimbola Olaniran, Catalyze Impact Initiative Lagos-based Liaison Consultant, conducted by Eugenia Sirengo, Senior Communications Officer.

What inspired you most about working on the Catalyze Impact Initiative?

When I took on this role in June 2023, I knew I was stepping into something special but nothing could have prepared me for the extraordinary journey of witnessing African research evolve from concept to tangible change.

Walk us through a typical "day in the life" of your work in Lagos.

[laughs] There's no such thing as "typical" and that's what makes it thrilling. Based in bustling Lagos, my days are anything but routine. One

moment, I'm providing technical support to Nigerian researchers; the next, I'm in high-level meetings where policy and research intersect. The Catalyze Impact Initiative has taught me that actual impact happens when we stop treating African research as a charity case and start treating it as what it truly is: world-class intellectual capital waiting to be unleashed.

What's been your most memorable moment so far?

The magic happens in the connections. Like bridging Nigerian researchers with other African experts and then watching their confidence grow as they master grant management. Or seeing policymakers lean forward in their chairs when researchers present findings, that electrifying moment when you realize today's data will shape tomorrow's decisions affecting millions.

Our work in Lagos and Kano stands out particularly sharp in my memory. Those pilot verbal and social autopsies weren't just studies, they became powerful conversation starters about maternal health. And now, as we help establish an Intellectual Property Desk at the Lagos State Ministry of Health, we're putting systems in place to protect the brilliant innovations springing from Nigerian minds.

The Catalyze Impact Initiative emphasizes collaboration. Can you share an example of this in action?

Our verbal autopsy work perfectly illustrates this which entailed collaborative efforts to collect data on causes of maternal deaths. We didn't just collect data, we built bridges:

- Community health workers helped design culturally appropriate questionnaires
- University researchers trained government staff in the analysis
- Policymakers co-developed response protocols.

The result? A surveillance system that's scientifically rigorous yet operationally practical because everyone who needed to use it helped create it.

What's the one lesson you wish more development programs understood?

If there's one key lesson I've learned from this journey, it's this: stakeholder engagement is not just practical; it's non-negotiable. Transformation doesn't occur through reports or recommendations. It happens when you gather the right people around the table early—policymakers, researchers, community leaders—and let them shape the solution. That's how projects outlive funding cycles. That's how change becomes unstoppable.

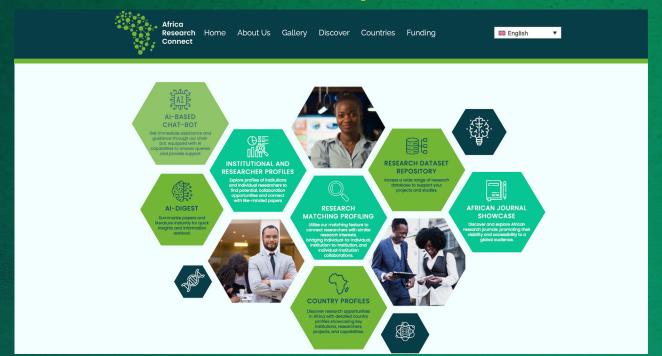
Final Thoughts:

The most powerful resource in Africa isn't our minerals or arable land, it's our intellectual capital. This experience has deepened my belief that Africa doesn't need saving. It needs support, strategy, and, most importantly, spotlighting. And I'm proud to be part of the team that helps shine the light.



Dr. Abimbola Olaniran moderates a panel discussion on Strengthening Africa's Research Ecosystem during a capacity strengthening workshop for Nigerian universities in Abuja.

The Africa Research Connect Explained



What is Africa Research Connect (ARC)?

ARC is a premier web-based hub dedicated to fostering research collaborations across Africa. Utilizing cutting-edge technologies, ARC aims to transform how institutions, researchers, donors, and other stakeholders connect and collaborate within the African research ecosystem.

Who is the platform for?

ARC serves a diverse audience, including:

- Researchers: Seeking collaboration, literature, and networking opportunities.
- Institutions: Looking to showcase their research capabilities and connect with partners.
- Donors and Private Sector:Interested in funding opportunities and partnerships within Africa.
- Policymakers: In need of research insights to inform policy decisions.
- General Public: Anyone interested in African research and development.

What are the objectives of the platform?

ARC is designed to:

- Streamline Research Collaboration: Simplify finding and connecting with potential partners.
- Foster Knowledge Sharing: Promote active exchange of resources and ideas through communities of practice and innovation hubs.
- Facilitate Networking: Help users discover and align with complementary skills and resources.
- Ensure Inclusivity: Commit to genderresponsive and equitable research partnerships.

What features does the platform offer?

- Institutional and Researcher Profiles: Detailed profiles to help users find and connect with potential collaborators.
- Al-Based Chatbot: An Al-driven assistant to provide immediate support and personalized guidance.

- Research Dataset Repository: A collection of open-access research datasets to support projects and studies.
- African Journal Showcase: The platform will be linked to the Afrika Journals Platform to increase the visibility and accessibility of African journals.
- A section that helps adapt research findings into actionable insights.: Resources to bridge the gap between research and practice, ensuring insights inform decision-making and policies.
- Donor and Private Sector
 Engagement: Profiles and tools to connect donors and private sector entities with research partners.

How can I use the AI chatbot?

The Al-based Chatbot is designed to provide immediate assistance and personalized guidance. Simply type your query into the chat interface, and the chatbot will respond with relevant information, drawing from the platform's comprehensive database.

How does the "Discover" section work?

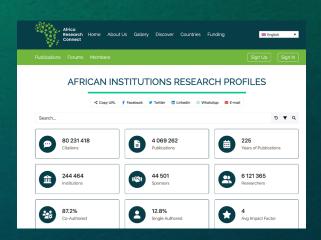
The "Discover" section allows users to search for institutions or authors within the African research ecosystem. By entering relevant keywords, users can access detailed profiles and connect with potential collaborators.

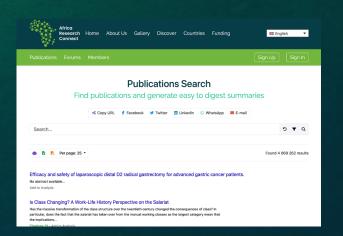
How are countries, institutions, and researchers profiled on the platform?

Profiles are crafted using multiple data sources to provide accurate and comprehensive overviews. They highlight expertise, research focus, publication history, ongoing projects, and specific research capabilities, facilitating informed decision-making for collaborations.

Why are my publications or my institution's work missing from the profiles?

ARC collects data from online repositories, and while efforts are made to be comprehensive, some publications, especially those not available online or in accessible repositories, may be missing. The platform is continually updating its data to improve completeness.





Explore the Africa Research Connect Now

Can I update or add to my profile?

Currently, the functionality for users to directly update or add to their profiles is not functional. In the meantime, users can provide feedback or request updates by contacting the support team via the provided email address.

What should I do if I find inaccuracies in my profile?

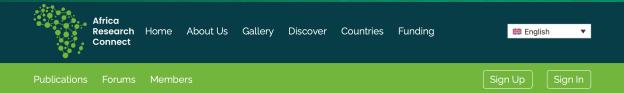
If you identify inaccuracies in your profile, please reach out to the support team through the contact information provided on the platform. They will assist in correcting any errors.

How are institution aliases and discrepancies managed?

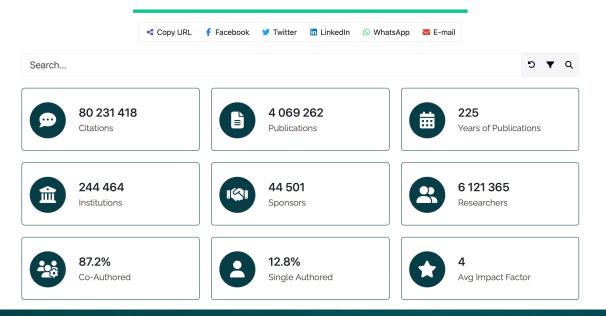
ARC is aware of issues related to aliases and discrepancies, such as variations in spelling. The platform employs advanced AI to merge and correct these discrepancies and is continuously being improved to enhance data accuracy.

Where does ARC get its data from?

ARC gathers data from publicly accessible online repositories, institutional websites, and research databases. The data includes publications, researcher profiles, and institutional information. Efforts are ongoing to expand data sources, particularly for African journals that are not widely available online.



AFRICAN INSTITUTIONS RESEARCH PROFILES



Explore the Africa Research Connect Now

How does the platform address missing or incomplete data for African researchers and journals?

ARC strives to ensure data completeness. With the development of the African Journals Platform, more African research outputs will be captured. The platform also plans to introduce a functionality allowing users to claim and update their profiles directly, enhancing the accuracy of data.

Can I request to have my profile removed?

Yes, if you would like your profile removed, you can contact the support team via the provided email. Requests will be processed according to the platform's data protection policies.

What should I do if I experience technical difficulties with the platform?

If you encounter technical issues, you can reach out to the AI chatbot for immediate assistance or email the support team for further help.

How can I provide feedback or report an issue?

Feedback and issue reporting can be done via the contact email provided on the platform. Your input will help improve the platform.



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Our Objectives

Our platform is designed with clear goals to



Streamline Research Collaboration

Simplify finding and connecting with potential partners.

Enhance Data-Driven Decision Makina

Access a rich database of research outputs in a way that informs decision making.

Foster Knowledge Sharina

Engage in an active exchange of resources and ideas to boost your institution's capabilities through communities of practice and innovation hubs.

Facilitate Network Analysis

Discover and alian with complementary skills and resources for impactful collaborations

Ensure Inclusivity

Commit to genderresponsive and equitable research partnerships.

Explore the Africa Research Connect Now

Phase Two in Pictorials

From impactful ministerial meetings, workshops, training and engaging team-building activities to reflective sessions, our journey 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 next phase.



Participants attend a capacity strengthening workshop convened by APHRC for Ethiopian universities and research institutes, held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.



Dr. Florah karimi, APHRC Head of Research and Related Capacity Strengthening facilitates a grant writing workshop in Abuja Nigeria.



Stakeholders including APHRC team participate in a validation meeting for the health R&D landscapeReport for Ethiopia's Ministry of Health, in Addis Ababa.



Participants of APHRC-led capacity strengthening workshop in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.



Stakeholders, including APHRC's Gaye Agesa, Dr. Vincent Were, and Dr. Abimbola Olaniran, attend the Knowledge Translation and Dissemination event for the Lagos Verbal and Social Autopsy (LVASA) project in Lagos, Nigeria, June 2025.



APHRC's Catalyze Impact Initiative team meets H.E Ato Kora Tushune Ethiopia's State Minister for Education.



The Catalyze Impact Initiative team showcases their work at the Africa Health Agenda International Conference (AHAIC) in Kigali, Rwanda, April 2025.



Participants of a capacity strengthening workshop convened by APHRC for Nigerian universities and research institutions, in Abuja, 2025.

