



Impact on individuals

Strengthening local research capacity in national blood services reaps rewards for both individuals and institutions. This is a clear lesson to emerge from T-REC, a programme to build the capacity of blood services in Africa. This brief introduces some of the individuals who have benefitted from T-REC, and demonstrates the impact that research capacity building can have on African blood services.



DPDM graduates in Ghana

Who benefitted from T-REC?

T-REC supported the following individuals to do local research in Ghana and Zimbabwe:

- Four African researchers undertook PhDs relating to blood services
- 44 African blood service staff undertook training and conducted workplace research, as part of the Diploma in Project Design and Management (DPDM)
- 46 African graduate students undertook small research projects on blood services.

Impact

The above individuals who participated in this research capacity initiative reported the following impact:

- PhD students have gained skills, knowledge and are embedded in international networks, and will contribute to the future of African blood services.
- Blood service staff learnt new research skills, and gained confidence and greater motivation to seek practical evidence-based ways to improve their blood services. They are making greater contributions to their workplaces.
- Graduate students have an increased awareness of blood transfusion as a potential career.
- The sub-Saharan health workforce is ultimately stronger with individuals equipped with new skills, knowledge and motivation.

The number of individuals now researching blood transfusion topics has increased significantly and this will enhance the ability of blood services and policy makers to support and use locally-generated research. As a result of T-REC, research carried out by the PhD, diploma and bursary students will provide evidence that can be used to modify current blood service policy.

Ultimately this will have an impact on the health of populations, particularly women and children in sub-Saharan Africa, through a more effective and safer supply of blood to those who need it.

Why build individual research capacity?

In Mombasa in 2008 a group of blood services directors and transfusion users from across Africa identified a scarcity of local researchers and an urgent priority to strengthen the research capacity in Africa's blood services. From 2011-2015, the European Commission funded T-REC, a programme to strengthen local research capacity in Zimbabwe and Ghana. International academics, experienced in designing and conducting research, worked closely with African blood service staff and managers who have in-depth knowledge of their services.

Impact of PhD studies

Four PhD students from Zimbabwe and Ghana were selected through open competition and jointly supervised by researchers from their local university and a European university. Their projects cover donor motivation, rationalising syphilis screening, changing HIV patterns and economics of infection screening.

“ The opportunity to pursue a PhD degree through the T-REC project has helped me to develop the self-motivation, discipline, confidence and requisite skills to undertake in-depth scientific work independently.

The support and network that continues to exist among the T-REC partners make me even more confident. This is invaluable for my new role as the head of the newly established Research and Development Department of the National Blood Service Ghana, with responsibilities to establish the department to international standards.

I feel equipped to drive the full establishment of the department. I am also in a better position to appreciate the research needs and readiness of my institution, to support other staff to undertake relevant operational research to influence policies and procedures in the organization, and to build and lead an effective local or multinational project team. ”



Lucy Asamoah-Akuoko,
National Blood Service Ghana

Impact of workplace research

The Professional Diploma in Project Design and Management (DPDM) is a one-year, part-time course that introduces health professionals to research by ‘learning-through-doing’ in the workplace. In both Ghana and Zimbabwe, a total of 44 students took part in the DPDM, with projects ranging from looking at information management systems, blood donor motivation and testing blood for safety. Seven DPDM students gave oral and poster presentations at the African Society for Blood Transfusions’ seventh International Congress in 2014 and feedback has indicated that DPDM graduates are making a greater contribution to their workplace as a result of completing the course.

“ I feel I want to perform more than before, and now I am very confident that I can do better. I wish that all my colleagues be included or involved in such programmes, so that we can help together to uplift the issues of research in the national blood service Zimbabwe. ”

Stella Rupi,
clinical nurse,
National Blood Service Zimbabwe,
DPDM graduate

Impact of small bursaries

A total of 46 undergraduate and graduate students in Ghana and Zimbabwe conducted research projects related to blood transfusion within their degrees. Students have an increased awareness of the blood transfusion service as a potential career for postgraduate research.

“ During my research I was with the blood donation committee of the Komfo Anokye Teaching Hospital. We moved round and I gained a lot of experience because ... when you go to the field the story is different. I realized that even though there are false deferrals and some false acceptances, the copper sulphate method is good. ”

Richard Owusu-Boateng, graduate
Kwame Nkruma University
of Science and Technology
and bursary recipient, Ghana.