# Research Brief

## *Lessons and good practice for researchers and implementers*

*Strengthening capacity for research in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) is a long-term and complex process  that requires continuous input at multiple levels - individual, institutional and environmental. This research brief outline research capacity strengthening lessons and good practice examples emerging from experiences and published literature  on the 'science' of research capacity strengthening by the Centre for Capacity Research.*

### Applying for research funds

- Respectful and equitable relationships between research partners are essential – our research indicates that research capacity strengthening programmes are more likely to be successful if they are built on existing partnerships.
- Meet all research partners and stakeholders involved in the research capacity strengthening programme face-to-face to discuss their contributions, synergies, strengthens, challenges and weaknesses.
- Ensure research partners and stakeholders have a common understanding of the funding call and agree the goal of the proposed programme, and the pathway for achieving impact.
- Establish a regular, participatory communication process and define the roles for each partner and their contributions to the application to help facilitate an equitable and effective partnership.

### Starting up a new research capacity strengthening programme

- Hold participatory inception meetings to develop a detailed research capacity strengthening programme plan based on an explicit pathway to impact (e.g. a theory of change). These meetings should engage key players beyond the grant holders such as researchers, laboratory technicians, managers, representatives from government, civil society, industry and think tanks, to ensure the programme addresses national needs, facilitates research uptake and promotes sustainability.
- Plan for annual partner meetings with clear objectives, ensuring all partners contribute to the aims of the agenda of the meeting. Use the workshop to agree the contents, timing and responsibility for the research capacity strengthening programme work plan.
- Publicise the new programme within and beyond partners' institutions to engage relevant networks and to ensure research capacity strengthening activities have broad impact.

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# Embedding research capacity strengthening programmes within institutions

*Research strategies and quality assurance*
- Research capacity strengthening programmes should complement the institution's research strategy, which itself should be linked to an institutional plan with activities, timings and monitoring indicators.
- There should be institutional-wide and high-level buy in (e.g. Head of Department, Faculty Dean, Vice Chancellor) for the research capacity strengthening programme and the research strategy.
- Think through the arguments that are likely to persuade institutions and external stakeholders to invest in research capacity strengthening programmes in the face of high teaching loads in LMICs.
- Plan for the financial sustainability of changes introduced through research capacity strengthening programmes from the outset.
- Explore opportunities to strengthen research offices which support and track research activities and promote research quality, and share skills and good practice between partners.

*Research facilities*
- Improve access to academic journals for LMIC partners through the registration at open source journal sites.
- Plan to empower and train laboratory staff who are critical to much research but often overlooked in programme planning and implementation.
- Develop a participatory laboratory working group so programmes can make 'smart decisions' about purchasing and maintaining equipment and supplies, and technical training.
- Laboratory accreditation will significantly enhance international research credibility and opportunities to market laboratory services

*Research training, supervision and mentoring*
- Make programme-funded training available to related disciplines across the institutions to maximise capacity strengthening impact.
- Actively include research support staff (e.g. accountants, administrators, technicians) in training opportunities.
- Identify opportunities to share skills, training and good practice across programme partners.
- Establish mentorships and supervision systems which are sensitive to culture and gender; consider developing an informal contract between supervisors and students defining their roles.

*Research Uptake*
- Engage policy makers and influencers through the research capacity strengthening programme including (if appropriate) co-supervisors of research students.
- Develop a research dissemination plan and include research uptake training for researchers in the programme plan.

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