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Oak Foundation learning review: Insights from grantees and peers

Final report

Stephanie Nicolle, Maria Jose Orozco and Vanesa Weyrauch

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About this report

The Oak Foundation's Prevent Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) Programme initiated a rapid learning review of its investments and best practices for fostering new research talent in the field of Prevention of CSA. The foundation commissioned OTT to facilitate this process into shedding light on how the programme has done so far and avenues for future improvements. To do so, OTT examined current models of supporting new research talent within the foundation´s portfolio as well as explored best practices from peer funders and organisations. This report outlines the key learnings from Prevent CSA and other significant investments, strategic insights on supporting new research talent based on various donor models and shares a set of recommendations for the Oak Foundation to further aid early career researchers in East and Southern Africa.

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Executive summary

The Oak Foundation's Prevent Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) Programme, in collaboration with OTT, initiated a learning review to assess its investments in fostering new research talent in the field of CSA prevention. This review aims to illuminate the foundation's achievements, identify challenges, and propose strategic recommendations for the Oak Foundation and other organisations looking to support early career researchers (ECRs) effectively. The insights are drawn from interviews with project leads and ECRs from programmes supported by Oak, and peer organisations that develop similar initiatives, alongside a critical analysis of existing support mechanisms and their contributions to the research ecosystem.

Key learnings

1. **Mentorship and support**: Mentorship emerged as a critical enabler for ECRs, especially in navigating the complex landscape of academic research and personal challenges. Effective mentors instill confidence, foster skill development, and offer guidance, significantly impacting ECRs' perceptions of their capabilities and career trajectories. However, mentors' time constraints and the need for diverse mentoring models, including peer mentoring, were highlighted as areas requiring attention.

2. **Capacity building and skills development**: Capacity building extends beyond research skills to include leadership, ethical research conduct, communication, and policy engagement. ECRs benefit from programs that offer a holistic approach to skill development, facilitating their growth as well-rounded researchers capable of contributing meaningfully to their fields and society.

3. **Networking and exposure**: Exposure to diverse ideas and opportunities for collaboration is vital for ECRs' growth. Conferences, workshops, and interdisciplinary projects provide platforms for ECRs to broaden their perspectives, engage with the global research community, and foster potential collaborations.

4. **Funding and financial support**: Stable, long-term financial support is crucial in addressing the precarious nature of research careers, especially in LMICs where ECRs often face significant financial burdens and job insecurity. Flexible funding models that prioritise the needs and contexts of ECRs can alleviate these pressures and enhance their career development and research productivity.

Recommendations for foundations

1. **Develop strategic partnerships**: Collaborating with other foundations, academic institutions, and policy-making bodies can amplify the impact of support programs. Strategic partnerships can leverage collective resources, expertise, and networks to create a more conducive environment for ECR development.

2. **Flexible and sustained funding models**: Adopting flexible funding approaches that cater to the individual needs of ECRs can significantly impact their career development. Long-term support, including post-project engagement and career transition grants, can help ECRs navigate the challenges of establishing themselves in academia or related fields.

3. **Tailored mentorship programs**: Foundations should invest in developing diverse and innovative mentorship models that accommodate the varying needs of ECRs, including peer mentoring and group mentorship schemes. These programs should also address mentors' capacity issues, possibly through incentives or dedicated funding lines for mentorship activities.

4. **Holistic capacity building**: Support programs should encompass a broad spectrum of skills, from research methodologies to leadership, communication, and policy engagement. Workshops, retreats, and online courses can be effective in delivering these skills, with a focus on practical, real-world applications.

5. **Facilitate networking and collaborative opportunities**: Foundations can play a pivotal role in creating opportunities for ECRs to network, share ideas, and collaborate. This can be achieved through funding travel bursaries for conferences, organising interdisciplinary workshops, and supporting collaborative research projects that encourage cross-sectoral and cross-regional partnerships.

6. **Create platforms for knowledge exchange**: Foundations could establish online platforms or forums where ECRs can share their research findings, challenges, and successes. This would foster a sense of community among ECRs, provide peer support, and disseminate knowledge more broadly.

7. **Promote diversity and inclusion**: Foundations should ensure that their programs are accessible to a diverse group of ECRs, reflecting a broad range of backgrounds, disciplines, and regions. Strengthening the gender and intersectional lens would contribute to this. It could include revising selection criteria to accommodate non-linear career paths and implementing policies that support gender equality and inclusion.

8. **Support institutional capacity building**: Recognising the role of institutions in nurturing research talent, foundations should consider strategies that also strengthen institutional support for ECRs. This can include funding for research offices, administrative support, and infrastructure that facilitates high-quality research.

9. **Foster policy engagement**: ECRs should be encouraged and equipped to engage with policy processes, ensuring that their research has practical implications and contributes to evidence-based policymaking. This also contributes towards the sustainability of the investment. Foundations can facilitate this by including policy engagement training in their programs and connecting ECRs with policymakers and practitioners.

10. **Implement monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) frameworks**: To assess the effectiveness of support programs and make informed adjustments, foundations should establish robust MEL frameworks, departing from a clear theory of change. These should focus on both short-term outputs and long-term outcomes, including individual career trajectories, research impact, and contributions to societal challenges.

In conclusion, supporting early career researchers requires a multifaceted and collaborative approach.

1. Introduction

The Oak Foundation's Prevent Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) Programme initiated a learning review of its investments in fostering new research talent. OTT engaged with the project leads or principal investigators of programmes supported by the foundation, as well as with new researchers and early career researchers benefitting from the programmes, and philanthropic organisations (referred to as 'peer organisations' in the study) conducting similar initiatives to develop new research talent. The views and insights of these individuals and organisations are analysed in the study but are kept anonymous to safeguard their privacy. In addition to assessing the programme's effectiveness, we hope that the findings are useful on a broader scale, providing valuable perspectives on good practices, opportunities, and areas requiring further support.

This synthesis report focuses on the perspectives of grantee-partners and beneficiaries of programmes supported by the foundation (the project leads/principal investigators and early career researchers (ECRs) and lessons and insights from peer organisations.

It is important to note that there is no general consensus among similar initiatives on what ECRs are. In fact, different interventions use different terms to define their target public such as "early career researchers, "young researchers", "emerging leaders". Criteria of what an ECR is also differ from context to context (e.g., it´s not unusual for Southern ECRs to be in their 40s). Moreover, each funding organisation establishes a particular definition according to its own working agenda and areas of interest that are in turn reflected on the goals of their programmes.

2. Samples

For the rapid review of the Prevent Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) Programme, OTT interviewed 16 individuals from 7 programmes supported by the Oak Foundation (Oak). Of these 16, 10 were project leads or principal investigators and 6 were ECRs. As a result, it's important to note that the perspectives shared are mostly from those working in the field of preventing sexual violence and abuse against children.

For detecting best practices among donors and implementing partners, OTT interviewed 8 individuals from organisations, 5 based in the Global North and 3 in Africa (see Annex 1 for list of interviewees).

2.1. Project leads

The thematic focus and scope of the project leads varied from project to project. The work areas they focused on included prevention-oriented research from a psychology perspective; approaches to understanding the reasons for the prevalence of violence, pathways of risk and predictors of violence; health consequences experienced by survivors of violence from childhood to adulthood; and engaging with policy-makers and other decision-makers to ensure that evidence-informed interventions are adopted at a national level.

The project leads were based in North America, Europe, and across different parts of Africa (South Africa, Central Africa, and West Africa). The focus of their work, however, tended to be global, with some more concentrated on research in Africa and LMICs.

2.2. New researchers and early career researchers

The scope of research undertaken by new researchers and ECRs included assessing the effectiveness of prevention and intervention models; the relationship between climate change and the risk of violence; and the impact of sexual abuse and adolescents living with HIV. Most ECRs and new researchers were PhD students from across the African region, with two postdoctoral fellows from North America who were conducting global research.

2.3. Peer organisations

Programmes conducted by similar initiatives in general aim at supporting and equipping emerging researchers with the needed skills and knowledge to conduct research on development-related issues, most without a specific focus (see Box 1 for examples of programmes' objectives). Several work with partners or intermediary organisations such as think tanks and universities.

Box 1. Types of goals

- Equip young researchers with the skills, confidence, and knowledge they need to thrive in a research career while at the same time reaching out to people who would not normally access this kind of support.
- Equip young people with technical competencies and competencies in corporate leadership with the ultimate purpose of preparing them to become associates of the organisation.
- Support talented researchers to undertake research projects dedicated to improving the learning and development of children and youth worldwide.
- Support emerging leaders in the application of research to contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals and specific development outcome areas of particular interest to the organisation.

3. Insights and lessons from grantees and peer organisations

3.1. What others are doing

Below we share main goals and activities of the interviewed peers that are developing initiatives to support young research talent development.

Organisation	Goal(s)	Main activities and useful links
INASP	Equip early career researchers with the skills, confidence, knowledge and networks that they need to thrive in a research career. Leverage digital learning and community building to support ECRs at scale across the majority world. Support ECRs in diverse institutions, especially those who would not normally access this kind of support.	An online learning platform and community, targeting ECRs in LMICs. A regular programme of e-courses and webinars is offered free of charge and supports around 10,000 ECRs annually, with additional thematic programmes run in partnership with other organisations for specific ECR cohorts . It is led by a group of LMIC 'community stewards' and has a series of hubs in several countries and thematic areas. The programme provides skills training in proposal writing, research for impact, writing and publishing, communicating to policy-makers and research users, developing mentoring skills. Individuals are encouraged to contribute to the community, and to build skills, by participating in discussion groups, contributing blogs, or hosting and facilitating events. Members also use the community to find research partners, grow their network, and to seek advice from peers. The programme adopts a gender-responsive pedagogy, and is developing specific support for women researchers. https://www.inasp.info/project/authoraid-network https://www.authoraid.info
PACKS Africa	Equip young people with technical competencies and corporate leadership skills with the ultimate purpose of preparing	By technical competencies, they hope to instil the following: how to access evidence and aggregate it, how to identify good evidence, how to produce good quality evidence, how to communicate and use the information.

	them to become associates of the organisation.	The support comes in the form of a mentorship programme. Access is restricted to young professionals in the African continent, aged from 26 to 31 that hold a graduate certificate and are employed at the time of taking the mentorship course. https://africaevidencenetwork.org/en/learning-space/article/117/
Jacobs Foundation	Support talented researchers to undertake research projects dedicated to improving the learning and development of children and youth worldwide.	The support comes in the form of a grant directed to the individual, not to the institution. It targets researchers who have received their PhD within the past 10 years, mostly early career researchers that are transitioning into their mid-career. There is a special interest in reaching researchers capable of working across disciplines, with an appetite to work across sectors and influencing policy. The programme is highly selective and strives to attract talented researchers. https://jacobsfoundation.org/activity/jacobs-foundation-research-fellowship-program/
IDRC	Support emerging leaders in the application of research to contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals and specific development outcome areas of particular interest to the organisation.	This support comes in the form of an award and is addressed to doctoral students enrolled in a Canadian university. Students must be Canadian or coming from a LMIC. There is a special focus on development for the Global South and a transversal approach to capacity- and leadership building of researchers (more on how they do this in the section covering lessons learned).
IDRC	Build partnership programmes between Canadian universities and universities in LMICs, particularly in Africa, to support international study, research, or internships for	The support goes directly to a Canadian university to partner with an international university in a LMIC and build a framework for doctoral researchers, post-doctoral fellows and early career researchers from Canada and LMICs, to develop solutions to complex national and global challenges.

	outbound Canadian students and/or study and research for inbound international graduate students in development issues.	https://idrc-crdi.ca/en/project/expanding-canadian-queen-elizabeth-ii-diamond-jubilee-scholarship-program-advanced-scholars
Echidna Giving	Strengthen the capacity of local leaders to advance gender equality in and through education across the Global South.	This programme is designed in partnership with another institution, more precisely, a think tank. The funding organisation funds a six-month fellowship to support scholars in conducting individual research focused on improving learning opportunities and life outcomes for girls, young women, and gender non-conforming people. At the same time, fellows are accompanied by a series of virtual workshops, group working meetings, and individual advisory sessions in order to develop their leadership and evidence-based policy skills, build substantive knowledge on gender and global education issues, and expand their pathways for impact. The fellowship also consists of a residency at the think tank which strengthens scholars' impact by teaching best practices for analysing, communicating, and leveraging research for policy and key audiences, as well as expanding scholars' networks and promoting visibility. During the two-year post-residency period, support is also provided to alumni as they implement impact plans that build off their research. Through strategic advisement, group working meetings, and leadership development support, scholars are encouraged to leverage the knowledge, skills, and connections built throughout the fellowship to catalyse change in their local contexts. https://www.brookings.edu/about-the-echidna-global-scholars-program-and-the-application-process/

Zenex Foundation	Support emerging researchers in South Africa to build capacities on monitoring and evaluation. Supporting emerging researchers in South Africa to carry out research on evaluation.	The support comes in the form of scholarships for postgraduate studies or internships in organisations such as think tanks and NGOs working on M&E related to education issues. The organisation aims at attaining diversity in education policies, debates and dialogues in South Africa. It supports emerging career researchers, and more particularly, researchers from underrepresented groups, to increase their opportunities to enter the field of research on education and M&E related to education. https://www.zenexfoundation.org.za/
Science for Africa Foundation	Support the best research to address problems or challenges in development in the African context.	This organisation is a pan-African non-for-profit that offers different programmes in different areas to support the ecosystem of research and development in Africa. They run a fellowship programme for post doctorates. In their view, the post-doctoral culture is not strong in Africa, it is something they are aiming to build, and they want to do it in a way that is fit for purpose for Africa. They have priority areas of research (public health, climate change, agriculture, and biodiversity) on the basis of which they design post-doctoral programmes. Once the programme is designed, they mobilise funding to then be able to give grants to post doctorates to adhere to the research programme. https://h3africa.org/index.php/the-science-for-africa-foundation/

3.2. Insights on how to assess interventions to support ECRs

To adequately frame how lessons learned are generated, OTT asked interviewees from donor agencies and implementing partners to share how they usually evaluate their investments and work.

Overall, we found out that there is a noticeable shift from a quantitative approach to a qualitative approach in the way they assess programmes and interventions. Traditional

assessments have consisted in using objective indicators such as the number of publications and grants awarded to the fellow.

However, there is an increasing interest in going beyond the direct results of the research project itself and seeking to understand how the support has helped (or not) the career development and social contributions of ECRs once it has ended. Funders acknowledge that they cannot attribute mid and long-term success directly to their funding. However, they have begun to look more integrally at the development of the fellows' career to detect new types of outcomes, such as network building, leadership capacities and impact on society.

Many funders are interested in ensuring that these fellows remain in the field (the lack of academic and research job positions is a challenge that will be analysed below) and that the research they conduct has a visible social value.

> *"We are looking at ways of evaluating career trajectories through perhaps establishing some kind of Alumni network. It helps us to keep in touch [and] see where they're going…The impacts that we want to see in our strategy […] you'll only see in the long-term. So, we would really like to do a lot more work there. It is on the table as a discussion for the future. –* ***Peer interviewee***

Interviews with peers reveal that evaluating the support given to researchers is a big area of opportunity and development for most of them. In general, they expressed not having a systematic evaluation approach. Some organisations have done external evaluations, but these are isolated experiences which also require a significant investment of resources. Others acknowledged that there is still a lot of work to do in this area, mostly when it comes to how to implement qualitative approaches. Additionally, organisations are still working on refining the theory of change of their programmes to have a clearer idea of what would be significant to expect as a result of their programmes.

> *"This is where we've been relatively weak (assessing the programme). I think there's a lot that could be done […] We've done Tracer studies to see if these people end up working in international development or research for development fields. But is that what our end goal is? What is the theory of change in that project? […]" –* ***Peer interviewee***

To implement a qualitative approach, funders have also started to do interviews with the fellows to get direct feedback from them and more accurately detect the results of their support.

> *"The real goal is enabling researchers to do research that has a social value. So now we [have] started to do more simple case studies, […] following researchers, asking them what their*

experiences have been, what their research aims to do, how they do that and then asking them if any of this was enabled by what you access from (our programme)" – ***Peer interviewee***

"Let's[…] talk to people and see what it was that they had in mind when they started, where they stand […] a couple years later and where they stand when they finish the fellowship […] We started to evaluate the programmes by first and foremost […] doing a lot of interviews with the fellows." – ***Peer interviewee***

The organisations expressed that the results of this interviewing exercise have been beneficial in shedding light on how to refine the programmes. For example, one of the organisations found out that fellows really valued the annual fellows meeting where they have the chance to connect with other researchers and come up with ideas to collaborate in multidisciplinary projects. This inspired them to do a network analysis to see whether the fellowship programme has really made a difference in pushing collaboration among the fellows. A further discovery was that researchers knew it was important for the organisation to take the research into a level of policy influence, but they were not knowledgeable on how to do that. This led to the development of a new mechanism to bring together fellows in organisations interested in evidence-based research (for more on this see Box 2).

Box 4. LEAP: Fostering innovative, evidence-based education solutions

LEAP, an initiative co-sponsored by the Jacobs Foundation and MIT Solve, aims to bring together researchers, social entrepreneurs, and educational companies with a shared interest in devising impactful solutions for 21st-century education challenges.

The collaboration between researchers and education practitioners is often hindered by obstacles such as time constraints, perceived incompatible needs, or a lack of awareness of available expertise. Even when joint projects are initiated, there is a scarcity of professionally managed and customised support. LEAP seeks to diminish these barriers, fostering innovative, evidence-based education solutions.

Participation in LEAP allows researchers and social entrepreneurs to apply their expertise to support organisations addressing urgent global educational issues. Managed by MIT Solve, the collaboration process ensures that participants can concentrate on content creation.

Education organisations, acting as project hosts, submit applications to receive support from a team of LEAP fellows—comprising researchers and social entrepreneurs—specialised in the relevant topic. The project undergoes further refinement during a Design-Thinking Workshop and is staffed with the most suitable experts from the fellows' pool. Fellows work on the project part-time over a 12-week sprint, maintaining regular check-ins with the project host to create the final

deliverable, whether it be a report, framework, research plan, or another form. LEAP fellows receive individual compensation for their time, while education organisations hosting a project receive a USD 5000 stipend.

Source: https://jacobsfoundation.org/activity/leveraging-evidence-for-action-to-promote-change/

Another qualitative strategy is to convene fellows after the grant ends. This creates a continental community of practice where they can stay connected, and the funder can track their developments. Another strategy is to invite them to sit on steering committees to identify research priorities.

3.3. Lessons learned

3.3.1. Programme design and evaluation

The importance of having a theory of change

As mentioned above, developing a clear theory of change is important for organisations to be able to track the impact of their programme more holistically and establish an accurate evaluation system.

Listening to what the research community needs

We found out that organisations that are receptive to the needs of their fellows are able to refine their programmes in order to meet those needs and have a greater impact in their development. This implies a willingness to adapt and remain flexible. For example, one of the organisations decided to implement a new initiative to bring together researchers, social entrepreneurs, and companies once it realised its fellows were not sure how to create impactful solutions to contemporary issues.

> *"We started interviewing [...] fellows across the cohorts to give us ideas [on how] to refine the programme [...] Something that came [up] is that fellows realised that [...] to have [...] influence on practice and [...] on policy was an objective that the foundation had, but they were not entirely sure how to go about this and they were not entirely sure what kind of offers we actually had in place and [how]to promote this". -* ***Peer interviewee***

Social value of research goes beyond being published

As analysed above, there is a general agreement between funding organisations in recognising that research is most valuable when it has an impact on society. This recognition invites funders and academia to rethink the incentive structure put in place to make researchers be more conscientious of their work and its impact.

As an example, one of the organisations interviewed mentioned that they have started to state this interest of taking research into practice in their open calls. Even though they acknowledge it is a hard criterion for researchers, they are making it clear that their ideal fellow would have an appetite to bridge the gap between research and practice.

3.3.2 On effective strategies

Offering mentorship in diverse capacities and with an artful combination of technical expertise and human coaching: Support from senior researchers (vertical mentorship) was a running thread among ECRs. Expectations of a single mentor are high and diverse. Often ECRs want mentors to be a technical expert, a caring coach, a relatable friend or 'older sister/brother'. In some situations, they're looking to tap into the technical expertise. But in other instances, they want someone who can coach them or just be there for them.

ECRs highlighted the weight of a human centred approach to the mentorship**.** They valued mentors who instilled confidence, addressed skill development, and supported them in how to navigate personal challenges, particularly among researchers from difficult contexts. However, ECRs noted that it's important acknowledge mentors´ own limitations especially in terms of time availability. It is challenging to factor in funding or even a project line that captures how much time and effort goes into 'being there' and wearing these different hats for researchers.

> *"It's important that mentors let their students know that they see their potential... [a senior lecturer I valued said] I think you have great potential. It's these simple words of motivation that made a big impact in how I saw myself because I didn't realise [it] myself and I left the meeting with a very different view of what I could possibly do"* ***- ECR***

> *"I was not cut out to be an academic, but I was motivated by the people around me. Looking at the work that they were doing, getting involved in the work... having someone guide or hold your hand or shield some of the worries you have, can help a lot"* ***- ECR***

Combining online, to expand reach, and face to face, to empower networking and collaboration.

Going online was seen as a very good decision in the case of the organisations that seek to reach as many early career researchers as possible, giving them support they otherwise wouldn't have. Besides offering courses, the online platform has also allowed

the construction of a learning community with large potential for individuals to connect and collaborate.

> *"The support that exists is often a small island of support. If you're really lucky you're in this institution, you've got a partnership within the university, there's some funding from somewhere, there's some workshops around some training or you have a mentor and that's fantastic [but] they don't reach many people. [...] For a given investment you can support many more researchers and you can get beyond these islands, beyond these sort of Apex centres [...] and build networks across the south and across disciplines."* **– *Peer interviewee***

On the other hand, some organisations expressed that bringing people together in person, through fellows or alumni meetings for example, offers a possibility of building networks much stronger than when done online.

> *"What came out from the interviews was that the fellows appreciated the annual fellow meetings, [...] the getting together to have time in person to exchange about their work."* **– *Peer interviewee***

> *"For us the networking has been huge. We have grantees meetings once or twice a year and then we encourage them to apply for collaborative grants. Very often researchers in Africa, particularly early career researchers, can be the only person [researcher] in their institution [...] there isn't a community for them in their institution to talk to about their research, and they have found that actually interacting with others, even from other countries, has really been amazing for them."* **- *Peer interviewee***

> *"I did participate [in a conference]. I did not present but I [...] attended, and it [...] changed a lot of things for me... I came back and changed a lot of things in my research because I was [...] inspired by [...] the researchers. So, attending conferences, even if you're not presenting, it's just so important"* **- *ECR***

The importance of integral capacity-building

Providing technical training for capacity-building is considered to be very important to ensure holistic development of researchers. Peers agreed that in order to be successful and influence their context, researchers need a diverse set of skills such as writing skills (for policy briefs and grant applications), communication skills (to engage with local communities and understand the use of the evidence), administrative skills (to manage grants), strategic thinking and leadership skills (which include decision-making

capabilities), and relationship building skills such as the capacity to take a collaborative approach, and supporting others.

Some funders offer tailored capacity-building as an embedded approach to the research programme. Others also provide engagement opportunities such as short programmes where researchers collaborate with organisations or with research users such as local communities to create innovative solutions to real problems. By supporting and promoting networking activities and mentorship opportunities, funders encourage the development of collaborative and leadership skills as well as foster motivation.

One of the organisations interviewed also offers support on technical competencies by teaching best practices for analysing, communicating, and leveraging research for policy.

The value of locally led knowledge and solutions

All the organisations interviewed, except for one, support early career researchers from LMICs. They do this because they believe that global challenges require working in global coalitions that convene local players. Nevertheless, several argue that research talent in the South has been traditionally excluded from the knowledge ecosystems that has instead privileged Northern frameworks and perspectives to solution making.

To change this situation, peers work to support researchers in the South who have a better understanding of their own contexts and so, can bring grounded and viable solutions to local and global challenges. Some have called this having a "decolonised approach".

> *"What we saw in South Africa was that spaces of influence are dominated by mainly white people. So, our goal is to ensure that education policy, debates and dialogues have the diversity that's needed for the South African context." -* ***Peer interviewee***

> *"We invest in a way that ensures that the leadership is coming from the countries that are closest to those development challenges and it's not [...] about northern experts doing research on development in southern countries." -* ***Peer interviewee***

The need for a systemic approach to support

Some of the organisations interviewed identified that a big obstacle for researchers to thrive are persisting systemic barriers within academia, research organisations and the fields they navigate in. Therefore, some have developed programmes to support organisational development within institutions.

For example, one of these organisations strives to make multi-level interventions by also engaging with the systems where researchers are embedded. In other words, they contribute to organisational strengthening as another way of providing long-term support to researchers and encouraging higher-quality research.

This support can come in different ways, from financial support to institutional and technical support. Funders can work with institutions to carry out institutional reforms, such as reviewing their inclusion policies, or to establish a Monitoring and Evaluation system or to develop communications capacities to widen their audiences. The provision of effective support will typically require a tailored partnership between the organisation and the funding institution.

> *"If you're not at the same time helping move the spaces that they [the researchers] operate in, once the programme ends the systemic barriers remain. [...] The programme within itself can only do so much, and there really has to be a complementarity either by providing long-term support to those individuals as they leave the programme and go back into [...] the systems that have those barriers or by trying to engage at the organisational level as well and look for institutional reform. And that can be around their inclusion policies, what their governance structures look like and how gender fits into that. So that's the idea of the sort of multi-levels of intervention". -* ***Peer interviewee***

Another organisation identified that in their continent (Africa), most universities lack well equipped and well-established research support offices. Therefore, they have built an institutional support programme that looks at the best way to help these institutions to develop this. The kind of support they provide are things like training research managers on topics such as putting together a budget for a research proposal.

> *"We find that the best applications we get come from institutions that have research offices [...] We have a real need to invest in institutions." -* ***Peer interviewee***

Contextually aware and informed approaches

Understanding the context of the researchers allows the peer organisation to adapt its own structures to better meet the needs for their development. This is highly relevant when working with researchers in LMICs who face entry barriers to the academic sector and the reality of job shortages. It is also closely linked to listening to what the community needs.

> *"It shouldn't be something for the South run by the North. We're very concerned to meet the real needs of researchers from the Global South, so we take a flexible definition of an early career researcher. We know that often [in LMICs] you don't get your PhD until you're 40, maybe because you've been teaching alongside. So, you're not just a researcher, you're probably an academic, a lecturer too, you don't have much support from your institution, there probably isn't like a wonderful staff development programme that you can enrol in and take you through everything you need to."* ***- Peer interviewee***

4.2.3 On funding models and practices

Funding individuals rather than institutions

Funding individuals rather than institutions, or a project embedded in an institution, assures that the money is allocated directly to them and to respond to their needs instead of being channelled through a project and its own paces and structure.

It is also a more flexible approach that allows researchers to decide their own working structure. In the words of one of the organisations interviewed, it helps them to "buy out time", meaning they can reduce their teaching load or hire research assistants and focus on actually doing the research.

> *"I think it's important that it's flexible and that it goes to the person [...] I'm hearing again from colleagues and from researchers that are sitting at departments that struggle financially and they are not even in a position to acquire [additional] funding, because the funding that they would acquire goes straight away to the department. If it's not allocated to the researchers really as an individual person, it can be channelled to anything as project money." -* ***Peer interviewee***

On the other hand, another organisation mentioned that they considered it important to not only support individuals but also the institutions where these individuals could end up working. In an LMIC context, those institutions are often under-resourced and cannot employ researchers. So, thinking about long-term support for early career researchers also implies thinking about mechanisms to keep them in the field.

> *"I think it's important for donors to think about both supporting the early career researchers and supporting the institutions in which those researchers might have a career and thinking about those in tandem. [Think about] where those researchers can be situated and really have space to [...] set the agenda and so think about those in tandem, not in isolation." -* ***Peer interviewee***

> *"And I think it's really important that both [individual and organisational] are seen as [...] complementary strategies[...] So you can have dedicated fellowships and awards which give individual grants to individuals [...,] and we have dedicated funding, we call it core support, [for] organisational capacity opportunities [...] with an organisational development component of a research programme* ***- Peer interviewee***

Offering long-term support

In view of the difficulties that ECRs face to get formal employment, some donors are thinking about offering long-term support. This support could be given in different ways, such as offering tailored support to individuals for disseminating their work or engaging with institutions that are potential employers.

Nevertheless, one of the organisations interviewed working in a MIC stated that they have tried to engage with institutions to pave the way for the insertion of their fellows, but that it has not been possible to guarantee places for employment after the fellowship programme because of the lack of resources. This example shows that long-term support is sometimes an issue that goes beyond willingness.

> *"We asked the universities to put in some financial contributions for the postdoctoral researcher as well [...] but we haven't been able to get a guarantee of employment from the universities. Most universities say that that's not within their control, it's usually [decided] at a senate level. So that hasn't worked and that would be a win and I've seen where other foundations have such a significant budget that they can enter a partnership with particular universities so they can actually begin to negotiate that kind of relationship."* - ***Peer interviewee***

3.4. Enablers and challenges for career development

3.4.1. Enablers

Supportive environment: this includes several factors:

(i) ***Care and support mechanisms*** that help address the challenges researchers face in terms of stigma, historically disadvantaged backgrounds, the mental toll of their work, capacity to be intellectually curious and make mistakes, and instilling confidence to assess opportunities. This can include on-call counsellors[1], empowerment through involvement in advocacy, giving researchers periods of rest away from traumatic research topics, and safe spaces[2] where researchers feel comfortable to think freely and critically. These are all integral components of this supportive framework.

Several peers mentioned concrete support for caretakers (usually women) as a strategy that contributes to this enabling environment. Caretaking can be a big barrier to researchers' development. Funders acknowledge the importance of reviewing the programme design to ensure that it does not exclude women and caretakers. Then they put in place structures that allow

[1] Having a list of therapists, and counsellors who are available to speak to researchers navigating traumatic research projects or dealing with triggers.

[2] This can be with peers and other mentors. It's a space for open conversation and where they can support each other on how to approach difficult topics.

those researchers to balance caretaking responsibilities with their research career.

"There are bigger barriers for women and particularly women that have young children or caretaking responsibilities. So, I think support needs to allow those women to balance their caretaking responsibilities and their career in research." - ***Peer interviewee***

(ii) ***Fostering a collaborative atmosphere over competition*** that puts the researcher's health and wellbeing at the centre of practice. Senior mentors have limited capacity in LMICs and so involving peer support (horizontal mentorship) helps to counteract isolation among ECRs. Peers highlighted the importance of securing representativity among mentors: the profiles of mentors should be diverse so that ECRs from different backgrounds can find mentors who they identify with.

(iii) ***Encouraging continuous learning*** that contributes to an open, evolving space for collective growth (e.g., feedback surveys), and giving researchers the freedom to explore ideas without prescribing views.

"In some cultures, you're not encouraged to ask questions due to certain social norms. You're told to accept things as they are. So, [asking questions like] 'what is original about your research? Are you, as a scientist, pushing things even further?' is a challenging skill. And this is the reality of many Global South researchers" - ***Project lead***

Box 3. Reflections on hierarchy and seniority

"Culture distils a deeply rooted respect for hierarchy and seniority, which is echoed in medicine, academics, and research, as well as strict formality in communication and dialog to the point that challenging the opinions of a senior scientist or faculty can often be considered offensive or inappropriate.16 The formal addressing of peers and superiors by their titles and ranks instead of first names continues to be considered a sign of respect in LMICs, even in regions such as South America where warm, close interpersonal relationships and informal interactions are the social norm. This can represent a barrier to the development of a strong mentor–mentee relationship, preventing the trust that can enable questioning or disputing of the mentor's position or views.

Source: Lescano et al.

Long-term financial support: The demanding nature of the research field and the lack of sustainability and job security make long-term financial support a vital enabler.

Moreover, for those with family commitments, particularly in LMICs, direct, sufficient, and sustainable funding can go a long way.

> *"When we do budgets for my students, almost all of them have a line about money they send home [...] Especially for women, they have these other commitments, and money goes back home. By the time you've gone beyond your undergraduate years, if you're not earning an income to contribute to the family and you're planning to further study, then it's very difficult to make it."* ***- Project lead***

The lack of support presents several challenges that will be addressed next.

> *"I think the biggest thing is making sure that they have the right environment, they need to be well equipped and supported with people with time to care about them. [...] Sometimes you're working with senior people who are also really busy, and they really don't have time to allow you to even fail, sometimes you need to be able to try something and feel that there's a safety net"* ***- Peer interviewee***

Thoughtful knowledge development & skill building:

(i) ***Communication skills*** include translating knowledge for use, writing (particularly for non-native speakers of English and also because academic writing can be challenging), and effective presentation skills. The ability to convey complex ideas to diverse audiences and 'talk to them in their own language' was emphasised;

(ii) ***Comparative learning with research teams in other countries***;

(iii) ***Opportunities to 'learn from doing***', also described as the 'classic apprenticeship model' (e.g., supervising junior researchers). Additionally, cascading learning approaches where one group teaches another.

> *"I think getting opportunities where you can get guidance [to improve your] writing like writing retreats [are important]. And the opportunity and space to present and share ideas. I think it boosts one's confidence to be able to express your views"* ***- ECR***

Separately, several project leads and a few ECRs mentioned methodological proficiency in both quantitative and qualitative research, which tend to be framed as binary skills. While some interviewees mentioned the need for specialisation, others stressed the value of having a good knowledge of both skills. There was a recognised gap in quantitative skills training at the undergraduate and master's level in LMICs compared to counterparts in more developed nations, highlighting the need for targeted skill development. However, our interviews with ECRs from and based in North America suggest that proficiency in these skills are valued across geographical contexts.

Other areas mentioned were having the intrinsic motivation and drive to engage in this field due to the general financial challenges in the research sector, the demanding nature of research work and the psychological impact of the work, and equitable partnerships between institutions in the Global North and South that foster mutual learning and appreciation to counter academic cultures that favour Northern practices.

> *"We need equitable partnerships where Global South researchers can learn from Global North universities and have access to funding because this is what is available there. And also, to hear and learn from the practice base and knowledge that is generated by Global South researchers. [Recalling personal experience as an ECR] I really felt behind, although I knew I had the skills. I was one of the best in my country until I arrived at a Global North university. I would question myself, but then it took me about 10 years to realise that the system was moulded in a way that favoured those who are already in those systems."* ***- Programme lead***

3.4.2. Challenges

Many challenges are due to the enabler not being in place. The foremost challenge mentioned by project leads and ECRs was **limited funding.**

Balancing family/work with research responsibilities

Allocating resources for care and support mechanisms (including for those with family commitments), adds a layer of complexity, emphasising the need for comprehensive funding strategies.

> *"There is a culture of silence about balancing a family and work as an early career researcher. But the problem with people speaking about it is that… there's this resistance because of the backlash [one might face]. It's the same situation where women are less likely to be employed because of family commitments. So, they are deprived of opportunities because people will be hesitant about making concessions"* ***- ECR***

Negative attitudes towards the field

A few project leads and ECRs working broadly in the field of psychology and prevention noted the negative attitudes towards the field. Cynicism about the effectiveness of prevention efforts creates a barrier to investment. Researchers also grapple with a form of 'secondary stigma' requiring them to justify and explain their association with the

prevention field. Those in the field look at those who have perpetrated violence or are at risk of perpetrating violence. But society doesn't always understand the importance of working with those characterised as 'criminals' or 'deviants'.

Finding the appropriate mentorship model

Mentorship is recognised to be a big support for ECRs. Nevertheless, this translates into a high demand for suitable researchers to be mentors, making their time very limited.

> *"We think about mentorship as a big support for young researchers [...] there's a high demand for folks who are well suited to be mentors, so their time is very limited". -* ***Peer interviewee***

This becomes specially daunting in LMICs since there are significant differences with Northern traditional mentorship schemes (see Table 1 for some examples of these differences). As Nicolle (2023) found, "when designing and implementing mentoring models, it is crucial to consider factors such as the institutional culture, support for mentors, and the availability of suitable mentors. These factors can influence the success of mentoring initiatives in the region."

Table 1. Differences between high-income and LMICs relevant to tailor mentoring efforts

Issue	High income	LMIC	Mentoring adaptation
Availability of mentors	Extensive, some trained in mentoring.	Scarce, limited mentoring training.	Phased implementation, train the mentor, joint mentoring with high-income country scientists. Group mentoring, progressive mentoring and peer mentoring. Mentors primarily in mid-career.
Culture	Horizontal, challenging	Tends to be hierarchical,	Establishes rules to allow respectful disagreement.

	mentor's ideas is encouraged.	requiring acceptance of senior's ideas and discouraging critical thinking or challenging mentor.	Explicit support for diversity. Promotes use of appropriate and acceptable language to express differences in opinion.
Resources	High	Low	Includes institutional resources in funding proposals.

Source: Lescano et al.

On the other hand, there are positive aspects of mentorship models from the Global South. For example, as Lescano et al. points out LMICs can build on several valuable opportunities to implement mentoring programs. For example, undergraduate students generally engage in research earlier than in high-income countries. Additionally, many LMIC researchers return home after completing international degree programs. They can become potential mentors.

Also, community oriented societies encourage peer mentoring and support. They engage in more communal learning. This can be seen in the example of the programme that engaged policy-makers, students and practitioners. This insured that there was research participation and uptake at a community level. In addition, these community-based societies recognise the importance of balancing and supporting families while pursuing research careers.

Finding employment opportunities after the fellowships

The employment opportunities of researchers in the academic sector are very limited, representing a big challenge in their career's development. Funders expressed their concern in trying to offer long-term support to their fellows. Some of them do this by continuing to offer targeted support to researchers and others by engaging with institutions and organisations to also intervene at the system level to encourage institutional reforms to be more inclusive with early career researchers.

Nevertheless, some acknowledged that it is very hard to negotiate employment for their fellows and that most of them struggle to continue in the field after their programme has finished.

Researchers need to be immersed in an environment that supports and promotes their development, but this is not always the case. In LMICs, institutions don't always have well-established research offices to support researchers with administrative tasks such

as making a budget for a research project proposal. ERCs also find themselves very often working with senior researchers that don't have enough time to guide them.

> *"Good research cannot come out of a poor environment. Unfortunately, many higher education institutes don't provide that environment the way they should [...] Most universities across our continent [Africa] don't even have a proper research office. They don't help you with things like budgets." -* ***Peer interviewee***

The academic system itself

Organisations interviewed expressed that the academic system itself can be a constraint for early career researchers' development. It is a very closed system where it is difficult to innovate in terms of working structures, this also limits foundations from being more flexible with their funding.

Today, funders highly value multidisciplinarity and policy influence. Nevertheless, traditional academic systems place a higher value on publications. This leads researchers to prioritise publishing over talking with other disciplines and making sure their research gets used.

> *"Interdisciplinary collaborations [are] [...]mentioned everywhere, but we believe the scientific system is not really supporting [this]. If you are on tenure track, you just focus on publications, and nobody really cares about your interdisciplinary collaboration. We really want to see in applicants this appetite [...] to work across disciplines". -* ***Peer interviewee***

For LMIC's researchers, the academic system is also a constraint in terms of structural discrimination. It is harder for researchers coming from minority groups to access posts in academia. Peers working in LMICs highlighted that the structural changes needed to make academia more inclusive won't happen organically. It is, therefore, important for them to think about how their own interventions, through their funding and support to researchers, can contribute toward making the desired shift towards inclusiveness.

Isolation and language barriers

For researchers in LMICs, isolation and language barriers are a big challenge. They do not have the same exposure as researchers in HICs and do not frequently participate in international conferences.

> *"Researchers in the Global South [...] are not exposed [to the same opportunities as the Global North]. They do not participate in international conferences or in the meetings of the research societies. They have no funds to travel there and even struggle with getting the visa approved."* ***Peer interviewee***

The lack of opportunities to access networks and build partnerships increases isolation and diminishes opportunities of growth and collaboration.

> *"Networking with fellows in other institutions and departments… Conferences are one of the best ways to meet others. Having an opportunity to meet each other and share ideas and even collaborate in the future… because I didn't know any academics before I came here […] for instance, I was able to get to know other individuals in the project [that I'm a part of], but I'm sure that there are researchers in other contexts who are doing similar work. So, how can we share ideas and encourage each other"* ***- ECR***

Grantees working in the African region and LMICs also observed how publications, funding and research opportunities **primarily cater to an English-speaking audience**, creating disparities in accessibility. The issue extends to the authorship of research articles, where even topics pertinent to the Global South are often researched and led by authors from the Global North.

Adopting a gender and intersectional lens approach

Project leads recognised the importance of adopting a gender lens to foster equity in the research ecosystem. Those working with African ECRs emphasised the significance of considering diverse experiences, skill development opportunities and cultural contexts. This is not easy to operationalise. For instance, they highlighted how an ECR from Uganda may have family commitments and other responsibilities and challenges which would differ from the lifestyle and trajectory of an ECR in the US or Western Europe.

Those in fields like psychology noted a predominance of females in the field. Along with several other project leads, they suggested that a broader equity lens, encompassing underrepresented groups based on factors like ethnicity, race, geography, and language, would be beneficial. They also emphasised the need for an intersectional approach, addressing not only gender but also considering those from historically disadvantaged backgrounds or persons with disabilities. In the South African context, challenges were highlighted for non-white women engaging in quantitative research.

> *"A more diverse set of people bring a broader perspective and I think a more vigorous perspective than a monoculture" -* ***Project lead***

3.5. The potential of partnerships

Overall, funders and peers are willing to establish partnerships to increase their impact.

Some partner with other funding organisations to increase their support on a particular project. Some also partner with local organisations situated where interventions take place and with an understanding of the local context. This helps them better assess the implications of implementing a given project in a particular country or place. This is also done to shift power to locally led and based organisations.

Funders also partner with other types of organisations. For example, one of the organisations we interviewed has a partnership with a think tank. The fellowship program they offer includes an internship within the think tank. This helps the researcher develop skills that will take their project to the next level. Also, during the two-year post-residency period, the think tank provides targeted support to alumni as they implement impact plans that build on their research. Through strategic advice, group working meetings and leadership development support, scholars leverage the knowledge, skills, and connections built throughout the fellowship to then catalyse change in their local contexts.

Another similar case is an organisation that is partnering with MIT Solve to increase their fellows' capacities to have a social impact with their research projects. This initiative brings together researchers with social entrepreneurs for 12 weeks. They receive professionally managed and tailored support to work together to build innovative and evidence-based solutions in the field of education. Nevertheless, although very valuable, this partnership was mentioned to be very expensive. The organisation is not certain about the long-term continuity of this programme.

Project leads were able to name a handful of organisations providing support to new research talent in the field of preventing sexual violence against children. In many cases, the funding is usually for the field in general and not specifically targeting ECRs and new researchers.

- Thorn Foundation
- World Childhood Foundation
- Porticus
- Lucy Faithfull Foundation
- Association for the Treatment and Prevention of Sexual Abuse
- Wellspring Philanthropic Fund
- UBS Optimus Foundation
- Sexual Violence and Research Initiative
- ELMA Philanthropies
- Girls Not Brides
- Together for Girls
- Conrad N. Hilton Foundation (focusing more on child health, abuse and neglect)
- Becton, Dickinson and Company (BD)

Below a list of funders, programmes and organisations working on similar initiatives (for details of those that have not been interviewed see Annex 3):

- INASP
- IDRC
- Zenex Foundation
- Echidna Giving with Brooking Institute
- Jacobs Foundation
- PACKS Africa
- Science for Africa Foundation
- African Science Partnership for Intervention Research Excellence
- African Population and Health Research Center
- Consortium for Advanced Research Training in Africa
- Science Granting Councils Initiative
- Coalition for African Research and Innovation (CARI)
- African Science Partnership for Intervention Research Excellence (Afrique One-ASPIRE)
- DELTAS Africa, hosted by the Science for Africa Foundation

3.6. Advancing the field

3.6.1. Key trends

Some key trends in the mid-term (2-3 years) were identified that ECRs and new researchers in their projects should address, along with suggested approaches.

Trends

The top three trends that emerged were research into effective preventive mechanisms and how to scale them, harm reduction by focusing on groups at risk of perpetrating violence, and the harmful effects of new technology and online violence–including the interplay between online and offline violence.

Other trends that were discussed included studying the patterns and links between different forms of violence (e.g. how violence against male children can shape the cycle of violence), precision programming by combining different types of data, the impact of violence on intersectional identities, social norms and systems as drivers of violence, and violence in emergency settings (places where there are ongoing conflicts or sudden episodes of conflict that erupt). This could be thought of more broadly as well. For example, in the context of sociopolitical instability (e.g., military coups), violence and a suspension of rights become the norm. Different emergency settings can make certain environments more prone to violence.

Approaches

The main approaches that were recommended for researchers to address these trends included communicating their research findings at conferences, webinars and events and collaborating with different actors. Some of these actors were civil society organisations that don't conduct the research but can use the research to inform their interventions and amplify the findings. There was also a suggestion to identify how the research could eventually inform policy interventions.

Other approaches that were recommended included using existing data sets in research studies, like the Knowledge Platform by Together for Girls which has updated information on violence, instead of 'reinventing the wheel' and duplicating data collection efforts. This will also involve diverse voices in the data gathering and analysis phases.

For more on this, see Annex 3.

4. Recommendations for the future

Based on insights of participants and OTT´s own experience, we present a set of recommendations that could guide Oak´s and other peers´ future decisions to focus and sharpen their portfolio of investments.

- **Increase funding of local institutions**: build on funder interests in local contexts by directly funding local institutions and bypassing international intermediaries (including large multilaterals based in local settings as they have lengthy and complex processes to disburse funds). While acknowledging the challenges that local institutions may encounter with managing large grants, funders could explore avenues on how to support local capacities in grant management. In the long-term, such an approach would strengthen local institutional capacities. [3]

- **Expand exchange and mobility schemes to increase networking opportunities:** Review exchange and mobility schemes, particularly in easing access to conference funding and travel opportunities. The focus was on streamlining approval processes and designing schemes that can particularly support women with care responsibilities.

  Networking allows fellows to connect with people and develop a set of capabilities that will have a beneficial impact on their development, such as collaborating and working across disciplines. Dialoguing with others is also an opportunity for them to increase their awareness of the implications and the relevance of their research for policy and practice.

- **Adapt selection criteria and project timelines to account for more diversity in terms of career trajectories and other critical factors**: Recognise the non-linear career trajectories prevalent in the Global South, which are shaped by work and family commitments and diverse contextual challenges. An illustrative example was shared by a project lead, highlighting the contrast between Global North ECRs in their late 20s and early 30s, and their counterparts in Africa, some of whom might be in their 40s and 50s. This acknowledgment underscores the importance of context-based adjustments to better align with the varied journeys of researchers.

  Grantee-partners and beneficiaries should be of different, underrepresented groups, and should consider diversity in terms of linguistics, geography, gender, race, etc. Funders should also look for ways to be more inclusive in grantee selection. Even within Africa, certain countries may be overlooked or treated as having very similar profiles while requiring different approaches.

[3] For more on this, we welcome you to read Mendizabal´s reflections on funding for local problems here.

While it it's not easy to look at all the criteria, selecting partners committed to inclusion could be a step forward. Doing this means expanding the geographic scope and type of grantees while at the same time balancing the value of continuing to fund part of the existing pool.

- **Ensure an integral and strategic approach to capacity-building:** funding organisations agreed on the necessity of researchers developing certain capacities beyond the technical skills related to conducting high quality research. Donors and peers could adopt measures to foster these capacities which will help researchers take their work to the next level of social impact. For example, they could focus on researchers' ability to build relationships and work collaboratively. Capacity development could also include helping them to develop a rigorous ethical approach when working with communities to increase awareness of the implications and relevance of their projects for policy and practice on the ground.

- **Strengthen a gender lens and intersectional approach to promote an equitable research environment.**

  As Sutton et al. state (N/D) at the individual level, it is critical to clearly understand who is traditionally supported in the field and then identify concrete measures to engage underrepresented groups to foster inclusiveness.

  There is also value in thinking about the impact the projects could have on gender equality and inclusion. Additionally, funders could also foster capacity-building to strengthen specific skills needed to address gender equality and inclusion in the work of every fellow.

  Through their funding, donors could also work with institutions and organisations that are committed to making knowledge systems more equitable and inclusive of underrepresented groups. To do so, Sutton et al. highlight that it is advisable to work with organisations to clarify and create the appropriate framing and integration of gender equality as a factor of their being and functioning.

  These authors also suggest looking at the systemic level, where gender and inclusion lenses invite us to understand and tackle the root causes of inequity. For example, when designing the programmes, donors should consider social dynamics that could condition the participation of women and other underrepresented groups such as caretaking activities or discrimination and put mechanisms in place so that those situations do not become an impediment.

  Finally, to foster an equitable research environment, attention should be paid to ensuring accessibility for Southern grantee-partners to directly engage with funders and build relationships.

  > *"We're not living in high income countries. We're not hanging out with the funders over dinner. We're not walking to the track with them. We're not in the meetings with them. And so, there's a barrier*

there. We just don't have that access and so just helping funders to reach out to grantees [would be beneficial]." - ***Programme lead focusing on research development in South Africa***

- **Connect grantees-partners-funders** to:

    - **Promote collective thinking about shared challenges:** the experience and perspectives of grantees and partners can further inform the way forward in terms of how to face specific challenges, ensuring strategies are contextually informed and cocreated with Southern individuals and organisations.
    - **Identify potential synergies:** grantees can learn from each other, develop potential joint projects and collaborate to avoid duplication of efforts.
    - **Develop thoughtful mentoring models:** there are different mentoring models that present advantages and disadvantages. As stated by Nicolle (2023) we recommend combining models in innovative ways, building on the benefits of each and crafting contextually-responsive models that align with desired goals. Also, to enable effective mentoring in contexts of high demand and low offer, there needs to be more thinking around budgets, available resources and implementation.
    - **Cocreate a gender and intersectional approach to the programme:** discuss about how to develop concrete policies and practices that increase the gender and intersectional lens throughout the various stages of a fellowship.

- **Foster a holistic support ecosystem/harness the potential of partnerships** so as to build on the different existing initiatives and create bridges between them. Cross-fertilisation is a key strategy when resources are limited, and needs are large. A specific strategy to further map out existing organisational and programmatic capacities and detect synergies could be developed.

- **Empower new researchers with leadership opportunities and capacity-building:** Conventionally, well-funded projects are designed to be led by experienced mid to senior researchers. Smaller, more modestly funded projects can offer new researchers the opportunity to lead and manage others. This shift could significantly impact their career trajectories, providing invaluable experience. This should be coupled with capacity-building on leadership, which should be based on those skills more demanded by younger researchers. For example, a survey conducted by IDRC revealed that key features ERCs observe about good research for development leadership include decision-making capabilities, accountability, the ability to empower and inspire others.

- **Create advisory boards with context experts:** Establish an advisory board with membership extended to those in the countries that funders support. These members could offer insights into the local context and operational dynamics, including what type of research should be funded and how the project should be conducted in different countries so that suitability of ideas is locally assessed.

- **Connect grantee-partners for research efforts:** Create platforms for grantee-partners to connect and exchange knowledge. A project lead working in Africa highlighted the prevalence of partnerships between African nations and Western countries, emphasising the need for more connections with other African countries that can better relate to local conditions.

- **Develop a theory of change with a viable MEL approach/learning agenda:** several funders are ready to start thinking about a more detailed theory of change that can provide a rationale for their investments as well as a basis to conduct future monitoring and evaluation efforts. This should be based on a clearer understanding of what the organisation wants to achieve in terms of nurturing young research talent and how to go about this. Additionally, funders could design a learning agenda guided by a predefined set of learning questions that can be used to gather the related evidence and to document lessons learned and how to use them to refine and further strategise its portfolio.

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Annex 1. List of interviewees-Peer organisations

Name	Organisation	Role
Jon Harle	INASP	Executive Director
Kirchuffs Atengble	PACKS	Director
Gelgia Fetz	Jacobs	Co-Lead Learning Minds
Amy Etherington	IDRC	Senior Evaluation Specialist
Katie Bryant	IDRC	Programme Officer - Education and Science
Gail Campbell	Zenex Foundation	CEO
Dana Schmidt	Echidna	Program Director
Judy Omumbo	Science for Africa Foundation	Senior programme manager

Annex 2. Approaches

Several other approaches to address trends in the field were mentioned by grantees:

- Communicate research findings beyond the academic bubble.
- Research findings should not be restricted to academic circles. Society at large should be better informed about the causes of violence, how to address them when violence occurs and how to prevent them. Researchers need to learn how to get their findings across to different segments of society such as the media, NGOs, policy-makers etc. The idea is to mainstream their research findings. The media can bring more attention to these issues, policy-makers can devise national policies and NGOs can be involved in advocacy and implementation efforts.
- Communicating their research can be done by speaking at conferences that attract different audiences, or through webinars, events, writing blogs etc.
- Collaborations is another way to communicate findings. Collaborating with NGOs was seen to be an important step as NGOs work with local populations and can act as an awareness and advocacy partner. This form of collaboration is effective because researchers may not always be good communicators, whereas certain NGOs would have better experience and capacity to do so. The other benefit is that NGOs and civil society become better equipped to ground their interventions in science and data, which NGOs do not necessarily engage in.
- Make use of existing primary data.
- There are already primary datasets compiled by different entities. A lot of money and time is wasted trying to replicate these studies, mostly because researchers don't know that this data exists. It was suggested that it's more effective to use existing data to conduct deeper analyses or identify gaps to address rather than starting from scratch and gathering primary data all over again.

Annex 3. List of similar initiatives (not interviewed)

Organisation	What they do	Useful link
Developing Excellence in Leadership, Training, and Science in Africa (DELTAS Africa)	It is a long-term, multimillion dollar initiative launched in 2015-2022 to support collaborative consortia led by Africa-based scientists to amplify Africa-led development of world-class research and scientific leaders on the continent, while strengthening African institutions.	https://scienceforafrica.foundation/deltas-africa#:~:text=The%20Developing%20Excellence%20in%20Leadership,scientific%20leaders%20on%20the%20continent
The Consortium for Advanced Research Training in Africa (CARTA)	It was formed in 2008, to support the development of a vibrant African academy able to lead world-class multidisciplinary research that impacts positively on public and population health. The consortium enhances the capacity of African universities to create sustainable multidisciplinary research hubs by supporting junior faculty members to undertake their doctoral training locally and to become internationally recognised research leaders	https://cartafrica.org/
Science for Africa Foundation	Has a pan-African fellowship programme that supports Africa postdoctoral researchers to grow in research leadership in their home countries and conduct research and innovation that addresses African priorities for sustainable development.	https://scienceforafrica.foundation/.
African Science Partnership for Intervention Research Excellence	A pan-African research consortium for capacity-building in “One Health”. Collaborating with 21 institutions from 14 African and European countries. Its research focuses on ecosystem and population health by broadening disciplinary, sectoral, linguistic, cultural and geographic boundaries. With nearly 65 Postdocs, PhD and Master students, ASPIRE conducts interdisciplinary and	http://afriqueoneaspire.org/

	transdisciplinary research on diseases at the human-animal-environment interface (zoonoses).	
African Population and Health Research Center	The African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC) is the continent's premier research and policy organisation, exploring population, health, and well-being questions. Headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya, and with a West Africa Regional Office (WARO) in Dakar, Senegal, the Center seeks to drive change with evidence led by a growing cadre of research leaders from across sub-Saharan Africa. The Individual Capacity Strengthening (ICS) unit seeks to strengthen the technical, intrapersonal, and interpersonal aspects of an individual's capacity to undertake high-quality research or related functions that contribute to the development and implementation of Africa's self-sufficiency in R&D.	https://aphrc.org/runit/training-programs/
Coalition for African Research and Innovation (CARI)	The Coalition of African Research and Innovation (CARI) is a sustainability platform set up by the African Academy of Sciences (AAS) in partnership with African and global partners. CARI is an initiative to build a highly coordinated, well-funded and African-led platform to improve systematic collaborations and scale up resources for African Science Technology & Innovation (STI) to achieve outcomes that would help more Africans lead better lives sooner.	https://old.aasciences.africa/cari

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www.onthinktanks.org