Community and Public Engagement at the KEMRI Wellcome Research Programme
Background

The KEMRI-Wellcome Trust Research Programme is an internationally recognized health research unit of excellence. The Programme was initiated in 1989 as a partnership between the Kenya Medical Research Institute, a government parastatal, the Wellcome Trust and the University of Oxford. Since 1989, KWTRP has evolved from a small group of 12 staff to a large facility hosting over 100 research scientists and 700 research support staff working across Kenya, Uganda and the region. Our core activities are funded by the Wellcome Trust.

We conduct integrated epidemiological, social, laboratory, health systems, research ethics and clinical research in parallel, with results feeding into local and international health policy. Our research platforms include: state-of-the-art laboratories; a demographic surveillance system covering a quarter of a million residents; partnership with Kilifi, CPGH, Mbagathi and Mbale hospitals in health care and hospital surveillance; a clinical trials facility; a dedicated training facility; and a vibrant community engagement programme.
**Community and Public Engagement**

Our initial community and public engagement (CPE) strategy was developed in 2005 through a series of consultative workshops with stakeholders. We have three goals: (i) Building mutual understanding and trust between researchers and communities; (ii) enhancing ethical conduct of research; and, (iii) enhancing dissemination of research findings to promote uptake into policy. We strive to ensure that our engagement is responsive to community views, provides researchers and communities/stakeholders an opportunity to interact and learn, and promotes ethical conduct of all our work.

**Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)**

Our CPE activities are implemented through a Participatory Action Research approach, involving a large number of stakeholders. Monitoring and evaluation is embedded into all CPE activities so that the knowledge gained through the process continuously feed into the implementation of the engagement programme. An approved research protocol guides the evaluation of all CPE activities, and a range of methods are used to describe, evaluate and strengthen institutional systems and structures for CPE. This includes, the way engagement mechanisms interact, their function, and impacts. M&E methods comprise surveys, case studies, in-depth interviews, deliberative workshops, reflection meetings, participatory video, and focus group discussions. Changes are made to engagement components based on findings from our evaluation. Reports and publications are shared widely for cross learning.

**Our Context**

We implement CPE activities across three KWTRP sites: Kilifi County (Coastal Kenya), Nairobi (capital of Kenya), and Mbale (Eastern Uganda). Our engagement audience in these sites ranges from communities that host research activities, researchers, front line research staff, students in schools and institutions of higher learning, and government ministries such as Ministry of Health/County Departments of Health, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Internal Affairs.
Community and Public Engagement Components

**KEMRI Community Representatives (KCRs)**
Typical community members  
Elected by community  
Roles: Consulting on research; presenting community view towards KWTRP  
> 1000 KCRs in 5 election rounds

**Open Days**
Aim: relationship building and information giving  
Targeted gatekeepers e.g. Religious leaders, local administration  
> 3000 participants reached  
Reduced rumors and misconceptions among KHDSS community

**MoH Engagement**
Major stakeholder in health research  
Provide space for research activities: health facilities/hospitals  
Uptake of research findings into policy

**International Field Workers Network**
Building new/strengthening existing collaborations  
Development of new approaches to capacity strengthening  
3 conferences held; Intl. FWs curriculum being developed

**Magnet Theatre**
Aim: stimulating dialogue on health research among communities  
Pilot 12 outreaches conducted in Mida and Mtwapa  
1454 audience members reached
Review meeting Summary

Engaging with Media

KWTRP seeks to engage with the media as part of its public engagement responsibility to disseminate research. The overall aim of engaging the media is to create and enable sustainable relations between researchers and the Media to ensure accurate reporting of science and research findings. With increased media platforms, a thriving social media and online engagement culture, there is a growing interest in science/research and in turn an increased space to tell the research story.

The primary engagement which is part of the core communication department work happens through regular dissemination of planned research work, project launches i.e. Clinical trials, ongoing research and research findings especially that which impact health. This is through regular Press releases and briefings. The department also facilitates interactions between journalists and researchers through interviews and internal capacity building of media spokespersons.

With the PE award we sought to increase impact through initiatives to engage the media to go beyond our Kilifi Health and Demographic Surveillance System (KHDSS) to reach wider publics in Kenya. Our second aim was to strengthen sustained relations between researchers and journalists to enrich health research reporting. We have done this through 3 initiatives namely;

• A Kenya coast-wide Radio Program ‘Jukwaa la Utafiti’;
• Media engagement workshops; and
• Media Tours.
Radio Programme
The radio programme was initiated to address our overall engagement aim; to build mutual-understanding and trust between communities/publics and the research institution. With the specific objective of; stimulating dialogue about health issues, and health research and its role.

The Design
We initiated a pilot phase of the radio program that aired for 6 months in order to determine the feasibility of the initiative. Content for the program were developed through consultation with the Kilifi County Department of Health. M&E data gathered in the initial 6 months were used to inform the structure of the current program.

The structure;
- Weekly 2-hour program, named ‘Jukwaa La Utafiti’ (a Platform for Research).
- Coverage; the Kenyan coast extending from Tana river, Kwale, Kilifi, Mombasa and Taita Taveta;
- Hosted by Baraka FM; a local Swahili radio station in the Kenyan Coast, with a listenership of about 150,000 at any given time (Ipsos survey 2019),
- Predominantly male listener aged between 18-45 predominantly high school and college going.

The program has been promoted through various activities comprising: a road show during the official launch; features and vox, pops; IEC materials distributed during engagement activities; word-of-mouth referrals; and internal communication. M&E involves a continuous review drawing on feedback from a range of sources including a quarterly review meeting.

Learnings
- Radio needs to be a long-term investment
- Incorporating views of all stakeholders is key to the success of the programme, (sustainability)
- Use of listener groups has extended the intended reach of the programme
- Follow-up face-to-face engagement can enrich impact i.e. through townhall meetings and open days for listener groups
- Communication training is a key requirement to support researchers’ participation
Media Engagement workshops

To facilitate public dissemination of KWTRP research, the communication department has focused on building internal capacity to engage with the media. The PE award has enabled us to create fora to encourage researcher and media interaction. We held a first media-researcher engagement meeting aimed at: strengthening journalist and researcher capacity to understand the procedures and ethics involved in releasing health/science/research findings; empowering journalists to understand basic research processes drawing on user-friendly medical/science terminology; and in helping researchers to pitch exciting research findings to journalists.

Design
This was designed as one day meeting with 3 sessions: plenary sessions with presentations by all research teams; a tour of the facility; and a panel discussion at the end of the day addressing challenges encountered. The meeting had was attended by 24 journalists, the Deputy CEO and Programmes Manager of the Kenya Media Council, 25 senior KWTRP researchers and the PE team.

Learnings
• Need to sustain the conversation beyond the engagement meeting to strengthen relationships and build mutual trust;
• Need to use different platforms to engage the national and regional press teams;
• Need to expand the scope for capacity building for researchers in engaging with media
• Leverage on the interest by upcoming young research leaders to engage with media

Media Tour
Designed as a result of the media engagement workshop, the media tour is used as a measure to fill the knowledge gap specifically experienced by the regional press teams. Despite their proximity to the research unit, the regional journalists based at the coast felt that focus was given to National and international press teams this resulted in the creation of a communication working group which resulted in the Media tour.

A Media Tour is a 2-day annual event that seeks to familiarize the journalist with the key aspects of research and ongoing research activities both in the unit and in the field. The target for this first tour was 20 science reporters drawn from various media houses based at the Coast. Journalists were exposed to various aspects of KWTRP research and presented with potential areas of work suitable for reporting on.

Learnings
• Sustained interactions (suggested twice a year) are likely to strengthen relationships and mutual-understanding and trust;
• Co-supported internships with media houses may be helpful; and
• Focus more on young upcoming journalists.
**Stakeholder engagement**
The unique contexts of the KWTRP hubs (Kilifi, Nairobi and Mbale) necessitates developing specific strategies to fit the hub’s needs. The continuous growth in the research portfolio in Nairobi over the years has meant new stakeholders coming into the fold. This has called for a stakeholder re-mapping by the researchers in Nairobi and subsequent harmonization of the engagement strategies.

**Nairobi Stakeholders Forum**
The objectives of the forum comprised: providing a platform for stakeholders to better-understand KWTRP research, and to appreciate how research fed into their various work and interests; and to provide a feedback mechanism for stakeholders to input into the KWTRP research. Discussions included past, ongoing work with a specific focus on planned work, to ensure synergy between KWTRP research and its stakeholders.

**The Design and Structure**
- An annual event;
- The 5 research groups identify their focus and target stakeholders;
- Identify a common theme for the meeting
- Sessions comprise of Plenary sessions, breakout sessions for individual teams and summary evaluations for all invited teams

**Learnings**
- Need to improve the existing communication channels with stakeholders
- Create platforms to for frequent dissemination of research work
- Need to extend the program to two days
- Need for the representation of stakeholders in the planning of the meeting

**KPA meeting**
Since the majority of KWTRP’s work is with children under five, the Kenya Paedriatic association is a key partner and beneficiary of our health research. The need to engage this stakeholder can therefore not be overstated. The Association currently holds an annual conference bringing together its members and this serves as a platform to:
1. Raise awareness of KWTRP research, its outputs and policy implications
2. To strengthen the capacity of medical practitioners and nurture an appreciation of the role of health research.

The programme has participated in two of the forums by holding one day pre-conference research sessions to achieve the above purpose.
Exhibitions
Exhibitions enable us to engage populations in rapidly-expanding and highly mobile urban settings in Kilifi, Mombasa, and Nairobi through innovative exhibitions and expert debates.

Design
We have facilitated innovative exhibition models and created visual animations to explain complex scientific and research issues used during exhibitions in the said communities.
Over the last decade, the School Engagement Programme (SEP) at KWTRP has facilitated engagement interactions between an estimated 300 researchers and over 15,000 school students from over 60 schools across Kenya.

The SEP was initiated and is continuously developed through a Participatory Action Research (PAR) process which involves regular meetings with researchers, teachers, students, local education officers and parents. This approach has enabled the programme to incorporate stakeholder views into planning, implementation, evaluation and scale-up from a pilot involving 3 schools in 2010 to its current size and scope. Descriptions of the PAR scale-up and two separate mixed-method evaluations have been published in peer-reviewed journals.

The SEP comprises a range of ‘wide’ and ‘deep’ approaches which aim at:

- Raising school students’ interest in science and science related careers;
- Raising students’ awareness of locally conducted research;
- Drawing from unique adolescent insights to inform research; and
- Raising researchers’ awareness of community views and perspectives.

Wide approaches, comprising lab-tours; scientists visiting schools to give health, career and motivational talks; science competitions; science clubs; and on-line engagement, aim at broadly raising an interest in science and science related careers. Deeper approaches, such as our annual school leavers’ attachment scheme, and Young Persons Advisory Groups enable the development of stronger relationship and in-depth mutual understanding with smaller groups of students over time. The latter approaches enable the unique perspectives of young people to be fed into the way in which research is implemented.

Two formal mixed method evaluations comprising: pre and post engagement surveys in intervention and pre-engaged schools; interviews and focus group discussions with teachers, parents, students and researchers; and participatory video evaluation with students have provided evidence that engagement with schools:

- Is enjoyed by students and researchers, and supported by teachers, parents and the local education office;
- Raises students’ awareness and interest in science (biology in particular) and research related careers;
- Raises students’ confidence in speaking with researchers;
- Promotes a better understanding of health research among students;
- Can contribute to capacity strengthening (notably through the School leavers’ attachment Scheme);
- Can contribute to research implementation; and
- Provides researchers with a better understanding of the context in which they work, insights into their own communication and sense of contributing to the local community.

In 2019, the KWTRP School Engagement Programme won the Vice Chancellor’s Public Engagement with Research Award at Oxford University.
Community and Public Engagement at the KEMRI Wellcome Research Programme

**Kilifi Secondary School activities - over 2000 students from 40 schools annually.**
- Up to 1000 students visiting KWTRP annually for lab tours
- Annual inter-school science quiz involving teams from 40 schools
- Support for school science clubs for the Kenya Science & Engineering Fair
- Researchers visiting schools to give health, career and motivational talks

**University Engagement**
Facilitating regular Career research awareness and engagement sessions/lectures with local Uni Students in Kilifi and Nairobi (UoN and Pwani)

**School-Leavers annual attachment scheme**
Annually 9 talented students from Kilifi are hosted for a 3-month-pre-Uni attachment where they experience research work in the field, the labs, the wards and the ICT department.

**Young Person’s Advisory Group**
Gathering unique youth insights into research through regular meetings with 40 students from 3 schools. This approach has contributed to:
- The Nuffield Council on Bioethics Report on the ethics of clinical research involving children;
- Youth views on biobank governance; and
- Drafts of an engagement book targeting school students

**On-Line engagement**
- SEP students’ website
- Annual I’m a Scientist event – 500 students from 25 schools engaging 10 scientists on-line for 2 weeks

**Inspirational Book for secondary schools**
This book project is a collaboration with epidemiologist and science writer Dr Tabitha Mwangi REA University UK, and will feature the inspirational life stories of 10 outstanding Health Researchers from sub-Saharan Africa. The 10-chapter book will be released in 2020.

**International network of SEP practitioners**
2018 Workshop: 29 practitioners from 10 countries. An output includes a draft article

**Pilot primary school engagement**
In 2019, science club activities have been developed through a PAR approach with teachers and piloted in 5 schools. A resource pack is currently being prepared to facilitate scale up to 10 schools in 2020, and 20 schools in 2021.

**Multimedia projects – new tools for school engagement**
- Virtual reality lab tour
- Biobank animation
- Comic book about sickle-cell anaemia targeting schools

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