

Notes of the Annual ESSENCE Members' Meeting

Tuesday 18th – Wednesday 19th February 2025



A group of ESSENCE members and other stakeholders came together for the annual ESSENCE members' meeting and the meeting of ESSENCE Mechanism in Rockville, MD. This was a great opportunity to meet face to face and renew the commitment to improve effectiveness of global health research and capacity strengthening support in LMICs. Topics discussed were a brief overview of ESSENCE and its work, updates from the Working Groups, updates from participants, work being done in Global Health Research by different organisations and most importantly to look ahead

List of Participants is attached as an annex
All presentations are [Here](#)

Key Follow ups and actions:

- **ESSENCE more relevant than ever:** To build on tremendous success of ESSENCE in bringing together members and stakeholders over the years to recommit to focus of the initiative and work together in a changing global health and global health research environment.
- **WGRI:** To further focus on specific activities, support WHO R&D Observatory and WorldReport components of the mechanism, engage new members in the work, enhance communication of the work to the members and beyond.
- **Health, Migration and Displacement:** To organise a webinar to understand funders' perspectives on this topic and how to address any challenges.
- **IR WG:** To send a survey in order to choose future priorities.
- **RM WG:** To develop a plan for enhanced collaboration with the RIMAs;
- **ESSENCE membership:** To confirm interest of new organizations present to join as member or observer of ESSENCE and engage new networks with similar interest to continue act as an ESSENCE umbrella for global engagement of various actors.
- **Future work:** To build more collaborative environments, scale up future projects, discuss evidence use and knowledge translation, as well as research culture and early careers.
- Establish a **new IMPACT Working Group:** Document the value of investment in order to make a case for global health research for development to Policy Makers and Governments in low, middle and high-income countries, and track these investments against global declarations.

Introductions and overview of meetings

- Jonathan Underwood (Wellcome) and Montasser Kamal (IDRC) chaired this half of the meeting.
- Brief introduction of participants at meeting (present and online)
- Brief introduction of ESSENCE.

History and Overview of ESSENCE in Global Health and its value today

- This item was presented by Val Snewin and Garry Aslanyan
- Brief overview of ESSENCE and its work over the years
- Information on members; funders, organisations, observers, non-members
- Brief overview of ESSENCE Working Groups and history of their establishment
- Timeline of Health Research Declarations and how ESSENCE contributed at each stage.
- Evolution of ESSENCE through experience, discussion and opportunities and recognition that ESSENCE initiative is needed now more than ever.

Session 1: Routes to Effectiveness in Global Health Research

- This item on the agenda was presented by Clare Battle, Peter Taylor, Christian Acemah and Garry Aslanyan.
- Brief overview of items and their role in Global Health Research
 - The Lusaka Agenda
 - IDS/Southern Voice
 - Uganda National Academy of Science
 - ESSENCE/UKCDR

Session 2: Research Networks Roundtable - Regional approaches to enabling research for health

- This item on the agenda was presented by John Gyapong, Moses Aloba and Michelle Mulder.
- Brief overview of networks, their achievements, history of their work and plans for the future.
- Key takeaways: good communication, learning over time and trust in partnerships
- ARUA
- Science for Africa Foundation
- African Health Research & Innovation Funders' Forum

ESSENCE Working Groups Updates

- **Review of Investments:**
- Co-chairs: Joyelle Dominique, Thabi Maitin
- Quick overview of Working Group as their work is presented later in the Mechanism Meeting.
- WGRI works through World RePORT, the Global Observatory on Health R&D, and ESSENCE of Health Research Mechanism.
- Prior Mechanism Meetings have focused on data and metrics for health research capacity and clinical research related to pandemic preparedness.
- **Research Management Working Group:**
- Co-chairs: Kathleen Victoir, Allen Mukhwana
- Presentation on RIMAs by Nelisha Naidoo
- Professionalisation of Research Managers, recognition of the importance of research management support in building sustainable research capacity
- Tools and guidance for Research Management
- Equity in Research Management
- Collaboration with RIMAs to promote Research Management
- **Implementation Research WG:**
- Co-chairs: Morven Roberts, Rachel Sturke
- Good Practice document in 2020
- Future priorities decided through survey
- Funding research
- Scaling up implementation research

- **Working Group on Health, Migration and Displacement:**
- Co-chairs: Qamar Mahmood, Nalini Anand
- Introduction of the Working Group
- Feedback on general Working Group concept
- Webinars for the Working Group, survey for future of Working Group, topics of interest
- How to best engage funders (inside and outside of ESSENCE)

Updates from ESSENCE Members and stakeholders:

- **Andrew Dykens:** CUGH – Capacity Strengthening Platform
- Overview of Capacity Strengthening Platform and its uses for early-career researchers
- Connect in three ways on the platform – partnerships, training or mentoring relationships
- Use for individuals and funders – to develop, grow and bridge network
- **Miriam Orcutt:** WHO
- Five key research themes for Global Research Agenda – how do we move forward and address these themes?
- Strengthening inclusive and equitable collaboration
- How can we better increase sustainability for funding – how do we mainstream this work into existing strategies?
- **Jennifer Maroa:** Gates Foundation
- Encourage 80% of funding to go to LMICs, 20% to northern collaborations
- Understand previous investments in strengthening local capacities
- Want to build and work on the relationship rather than focus on the money
- **Jordan Kyongo:** FCDO
- Need for co-creation, need for equitable and direct funding. How can we better partner?
- Shift focus to southern partners – better inclusion
- Leverage resources and processes
- **Martin Eigbiki:** Gawani Advisors Africa Inc.
- Contribute to the change that is needed – people need to contribute to research.
- Cannot fix clinical research without looking at national research systems/research ecosystems of that country.
- What can technology do? Introduce research to undergrads and encourage them to become interested in Research Management
- **Eren Zink:** Sida
- Reduction in funding
- Work with universities
- New strategy for working with health – 400 million Euros investment – development coordination
- Achieve greater impact through involvement in stakeholders and leverage funding from other countries
- **Jonathan Underwood:** Wellcome
- Fund discovery research, mental health, infectious diseases, climate and health
- Fund international programmes, research institutions, fund funders – diversify who the money goes to
- Challenges for LMIC-led discovery research and supporting them

Future Priorities and Directions for ESSENCE in the current global health environment

- Future thinking and plans to address funding gaps and research priorities
- Continuum of innovation
- Building collaborative environments
- Track our own progress in LMIC capacity
- Communication of impact is vital –share resources with investigators and institutions – no one currently knows where to look for the important resources
- EDCTP Forum in June in Rwanda and ESSENCE side meeting
- More LMIC funder representation – different issues to be brought to the table
- ESSENCE at AHRIF – joint projects – present and report on their work
- Non-funders can be ESSENCE members – observers

Notes of the ESSENCE Mechanism Meeting

Wednesday 19th – Thursday 20th February 2025

This was the fourth Mechanism Meeting. The aim was to demonstrate partnerships and investments to bring research and research tools forward. Different countries and partnerships presented their work and findings. LMIC funders shared their perspectives. Joyelle Dominique (NIAID) and Thabi Maitin (ESSENCE) chaired this half of the meeting.

Follow ups from these meetings:

- **African National Health Research Systems Barometer:** WHO AFRO to complete rollout of NHRS survey, track and reconfirm performance of National Health Research Systems.
- **GloPID-R** to connect with ESSENCE, LMIC WG and WGRI and identify areas of collaboration.

Part 1: Highlight Senegal ESSENCE Mechanism Exploration

- **Garry Aslanyan** ESSENCE
- **Samba Corr** Senegal
- Ask for ESSENCE to coordinate research capacity strengthening to prepare for future pandemics
- 3 objectives: greater data access, greater research translation, greater research training coordination
- Plan to establish platform in order to improve coordination around research
- Possible interest in increasing research capacity in low-income settings

Part 2: Collaborative Funding for Science Diplomacy

- **Vivian Kouri**: IPK
- **Joyelle Dominique**: NIAID
- Importance of collaboration, connecting scientists, reducing barriers, and progression, building global research relationships
- Overview of IPK, answers for emergencies in Cuba
- NIAID and IPK shared interests established a foundation for collaborations
- End goal is that good science is important and can sustain partnerships to overcome barriers

Part 3: Funding agencies collaboration: Wellcome and Science for Africa Foundation (SFA)

- **Moses Alobo** SFA
- **Jonathan Underwood** Wellcome
- Clear criteria: operational communication aspects to benefit the relationship, reporting clear with objectives
- Challenge of reporting and discussion in terms of fine details: reports can be tough but SFA is learning; a basis of mutual respect, trust, accountability and openness, supports grown and listening from both parties.
- Overcome ego and continue with work with smaller opportunities. It is a balancing act to align and deliver.

Part 4: Science Granting Councils Collaboration

- **Matthew Wallace** IDRC (online)
- **Christian Acemah** UNAS
- Technology, education and inclusive science, building strong institutions: reducing inequality and building inclusivity into programs

- Start conversations about what equality means for health research capacity building opportunities

Science Granting Councils Initiative

- Launched in 2015: 17 councils have gone through transformations. Growth through domestic funding and partnerships
- Recent example of programme: rethink use of platform of SGCs and develop health research
- Pilot initiative launched last year: develop mini research agendas, invest and match funds. Successful pilot exercise – pan-African initiative – innovation and vaccines

Strengthening indicators to track preparedness and responsiveness of Health Research Systems for Health Emergencies

- **Nicolas Pulik** PSI (online)
- Knowledge gaps and research questions framing Nicolas' work
- Capacity strengthening, funding elements – health research systems need to be in place
- Health research system stakeholders can answer Nicolas' questions – contact them about next steps

Part 5: GloPID-R, the global alliance of pandemic preparedness research funders (Pandemic Pact, GRIPP)

- **Margit Baring, Julie Cronjaeger** Charité
Margaux Chavardes ANRS
Nicolas Pulik PSI (online)
Val Snewin DHSC
- Overarching goal: bring together funders in research related to pandemic response and different objectives
- Strengthen pandemic response – faster, sustainable and bridging gaps
- Pandemic Pact: improve research response and preparation for future outbreaks
- Explore with LMIC Working Group and WGRI – bring them together and assess what they have in common through joint meeting

Tools for Funders and Researchers: Global Observatory on Health R&D

Indicators of Impact on Global Health Funding

- **Sarah Charnaud** WHO
- Overview of tools
- Support health for all: specific priorities in specific products, similar priorities
- Monitor R&D, gather data on R&D, develop research priorities
- Data can be measured in different ways, different sources and databases
- Map biomedical research capacity based on available data

Overview of World Report

- Map of funding and grants, 22 funding agencies, available to everyone
- Researchers can identify funders, priorities, and other researchers for collaboration; funders can identify research capacity, other funders' interests, and regions with variable investment

Impact Global Health (presented by Sarah Charnaud)

- Infectious disease tracker
- Different ways of tracking impacts
- Interactive way of using the tools
- Monitoring funding towards research priorities on migration and health, monitor investments

- ESSENCE to add value of what could happen – attempt to know who is planning to fund what
- Advocacy for importance of research and tools to capture gaps and opportunities

Part 6: Collaboration of Research Institutes in the Context of the Pasteur Network

- **Kathleen Victoir** Pasteur Network (online)
- **Philippe Buchy** IP Laos (online)
- Climate and health are new to the Pasteur Network – need support from policy makers
- Budget: focus on covering all costs, salaries. Overheads are often too low and not accepted by donors, not viable – can be stopped by political decisions
- Organisations may not be aware of what other organisations are doing in a similar space. How do you track and can you collaborate?

Part 7: African National Health Research Systems Barometer

- **Thomas Nyirenda** EDCTP (online)
- **Constance Assouhou-Luty** WHO AFRO (online)
- First assessment in 2018, second in 2020, strengthening national research capacity, aim to repeat survey in 2025
- Barometer scores decline indicates need for interventions and improvement of existing research support systems
- Devise a tool to assess NHRS and track performances, guide and capacity-building initiatives
- NHRS survey is currently being rolled out in all 47 countries in the African region – questionnaire updated to include impact of COVID on systems and continuing research strengthening
- Invitation of survey help from ESSENCE members – different aspects that may be pointed out

Tools for Funders and Researchers: Pandemic PACT: Tracking Research Funding and Evidence for Preparedness and Response

- **Alice Norton** GloPID-R (online)
- Demonstration of tool – tour of the website – led by UKCDR and GloPID-R, including up to date COVID funding data
- Other tools: funding across all health research but specifically pandemic preparedness and response-related topics
- Funding data during COVID was easy as most funders were sharing and it was publicly available on funders' web sites. There are now limitations of clinical trials data and other funding data.

Reflections

- Knowing what questions to ask, be clear on what we want to challenge and overcome
- Revealing and encouraging improvement
- Power of allyship without fear of retribution – willingness to work together
- Serving different functions and different roles, complementing each other, allowing things to work

Closing Remarks

- Thanks to participants and members
- Success through partnerships and learning
- Investments and resources come in many different shapes and sizes
- Being honest about limitations – optimal situation and overcoming obstacles and complexities
- Beginnings of conversation on optimal outcome of global health research – connect and reflect