

# Conference Report: Research in Malawi and its contribution to global science

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Delegates to the 2014 SACORE Annual Scientific meeting

Research has the potential to address many challenges that affect developing countries such as poverty, health, food security, HIV/AIDS, malaria, and education. It is for this reason that developing countries should strengthen their research activities. Global health is a growing academic field where high-income country (HIC) faculty and students work in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), especially in Africa; learn about new cultures, settings, and diseases; and possibly develop expertise to address existing and emerging challenges in health care.

The primary role of conducting research that is relevant to one's context is to encourage and stimulate scientific debate amongst health personnel and to stimulate dialogue amongst researchers and health professionals through information that will aid daily practice, lifelong learning, and career development.

In Malawi, there has been an increasing intensification of research activities in the context of malaria and the HIV and AIDS epidemic in particular. Malawi's has a wealth of research organizations such as College of Medicine, Michigan State University, University of Liverpool, University of North Carolina, National Tuberculosis Control Program, just to mention a few who have been involved in research on a variety of diseases.

Since its establishment, the University of Malawi, College of Medicine and its collaborators such as the Malawi Liverpool Wellcome Trust, the Blantyre Malaria Alert Project and John Hopkins University has generated high quality health research findings which have been published in reputable local and international journals and presented at high profile scientific conferences. Some of the findings have enabled Malawi to improve the management of health-related conditions and to formulate relevant health programs and policies. Furthermore, research activities have accorded Malawian graduates and scientists with an opportunity to receive hands-on research training and obtain higher academic qualifications. Research at the College of Medicine is hosted in different departments coordinated by the Research Support Centre.

The Southern Africa Consortium for Research excellence (SACORE) held its annual scientific meeting at the Bingi

International Conference Centre on 31st August – 1st September where health research findings were shared amongst researchers within the consortium.

During his key note address the director of SACORE Dr Moffat Nyirenda said the consortium has aided in promoting a vibrant research culture in southern Africa and that have built a critical mass of research scientists by setting up attractive career pathways. "SACORE have aided in the provision of competitive scholarships amongst researchers, have provided small grants, and have assisted in career guidance and professional development," he said

He added that these achievements have been phenomenal in terms of improvements in research administration, infrastructure and research outputs.

Professor Adamson Muula the Dean of Postgraduate Studies and research at the College of Medicine concurred with Moffat by pointing out that it is the mission statement of the College to be centre of excellence in the training of doctors and other health professionals, in clinical service and medical research, responsive to the health needs of Malawi and its neighbours in the southern African region. "Over the years the college has succeeded in implementing clinical trials, operational research and basic sciences in topics such as HIV and AIDS, Malaria and maternal health". He pointed out that despite this significance the college faces a number of challenges such as weak local research leadership plan and weak links with policy makers and programme implementers.

The consortium (SACORE) comprises three African universities and affiliated institutions with an emerging research environment (College of Medicine of the University of Malawi (Leading Institution), University of Zambia School of Medicine and University of Zimbabwe College of Health Sciences), three other African institutions with established research environments (Stellenbosch University, University of Cape Town and Botswana-Harvard AIDS Institute Partnership) and four UK universities with high quality research environments (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Barts & The London School of Medicine, University College London, and University of Liverpool and the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine.