

NIHR Unit Newsletter Special Edition



STILLBIRTH & NEONATAL DEATH

NIHR GLOBAL HEALTH RESEARCH UNIT IN
SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA AND SOUTH ASIA

Learning and Sharing Event
Tanzania, 26 - 30 June 2023

Dar es Salaam,



In this special edition we are celebrating the Learning and Sharing Event!

This newsletter will highlight the following:

- *Introduction and background to the event*
- *Focus on capacity development and training*

- *Programme highlights*
 - *Awards ceremony and social event*
 - *A special thanks to CUHAS*
 - *Contact*
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Introduction and background to the event



The Learning and Sharing (L&S) event is scheduled to take place every 2 years and is an integral component of the research life cycle of the Unit. Primarily, the event is a forum for learning and sharing in respect of the multiple research projects being implemented across the 8 countries that are contributing to the Unit. The event provides an opportunity for the country research teams to come together to update on progress, share detail in respect of challenges and successes of the research workstreams that they are delivering, and to benefit from specific training and learning opportunities available throughout the programme.

In 2023, organising this event was a considerable undertaking for the team from Tanzania with more than 80 participants from 12 countries travelling to Dar es Salaam to attend. It was organised by a small management committee comprising key staff from the Catholic University of Health and Allied Sciences (CUHAS) and their partners in Tanzania with support from the team at LSTM. Led by Professor Rose Laisser, the committee met monthly leading up to the event, allocating tasks to be achieved within a set budget and a specific timeline and rigorously planning the programme of activities. The support team of Alpha Boniface and Daniel Nkuba at CUHAS along with Dr Paschal Mdoe at Haydom Lutheran Hospital all worked hard to ensure that issues were resolved, and activities were delivered on time. We are grateful for their contribution to ensuring a successful meeting.

The meeting venue was The White Sands, a resort hotel and conference centre located on Mbezi beach in Dar es Salaam with views of the Indian Ocean. The resort provided facilities for formal presentations and meetings along with plenty of space for less formal gatherings of partners and amenities for the delegates to enjoy.









1 - Event organisers Roy Daley Alpha Boniface, Professor Rose Laisser

Unit Manager Roy Daley provided feedback on the organisation of the meeting;

"The success of such a large-scale event was only possible because of good communication, team-work and attention to detail from the organising committee in the months leading up to the meeting. All of their hard work paid off and they have been able to deliver a safe and positive learning event. Providing the opportunity for all of the research teams to come together for the first time in Tanzania has been a good use of resources and will benefit the longer-term success and cohesion of the Unit. On top of that, it has been held in a fantastic location!".

Planning the programme

A scientific committee led by Dr Carol Bedwell with members drawn from LSTM, the Tanzania team and other partners met to develop the L&S event programme. Focused primarily on oral and poster presentations to enable junior members of the partner research teams to present their work, the committee coordinated an abstract submission and review process. PhD and Master's students on the Unit along with research assistants and CEI members responded to a call for abstracts relating to

progress in their specific research areas and the wider contribution to cross-partner learning. For many of the researchers this was their first opportunity to present research at a national or international meeting.

In recognition of the range of experience in presenting at conferences, formal training sessions were offered in advance including abstract writing, poster design and oral presentation skills. After a formal review process, researchers and students were informed about their mode of presentation and supported in developing the presentations for the event.

The programme was completed by invited presentations from research leads and keynote speakers which showcased the diversity of research and disciplines that make up the expertise of the Unit. The final programme was designed to bring together, and be of interest to, health workers from a range of backgrounds including midwives, obstetricians, nurses, psychologists, as well as non-clinical colleagues and academic specialists including health economists, statisticians and social scientists.

Focus on capacity development and training

To reflect the commitment to capacity development and training, the first day provided an opportunity for all oral presenters to practice their presentations in real time in front of a small audience and receive feedback from international colleagues in advance of their slot in the main programme. Led by Dr Natalie Tate, Dr Liz Ayebare, Ediri O'Brien and Dr Sabina Wakasiaka the practice sessions offered tips on presentation technique and delivery as well as preparation for questions that might be raised in respect of methodologies, progress, and research experience. One of the PhD students funded by the Unit explained how the practice session helped develop their confidence and presentation skills;



“Practicing my presentation was very useful for me; I was nervous but the comments from the audience and my fellow students enabled me to revise my slides and make things clearer for the audience. I felt more confident delivering my presentation the next day, I also felt supported and therefore more comfortable”. *PhD Student*

The poster presentations were on display throughout the event, with presenters allocated times to be present at their board and answer questions about their work.

A Research Assistant working on the Unit shared their experience of designing a poster and presenting their work to colleagues from an international audience;

“This was a very good opportunity for me to learn how to present our work in a poster. The training sessions really helped me with design and to consider how to make a poster look good. I also enjoyed discussing my poster with my fellow colleagues, I was feeling proud of the work which was a nice feeling”.
Research Assistant

Throughout the event both oral and poster presentations were being reviewed by members of the International Advisory Board (IAB) led by the Chair, Dr Yana Richens, and supported by Professor Stine Bernitz and Naomi Mwasambili with prizes for best oral and poster presentations being awarded on the final day of the event.

Check out the Awards section to find out who won!



The programme also included formal training sessions for Training Academy members and research assistants on integrated cross disciplinary research themes delivered by workstream leads and experienced researchers in a masterclass format.



Professor Jamie Kirkham provided a session on using statistics in research, discussing the importance of precise communication about datasets as well how to use comparative methods to evaluate differences in groups. The session also covered the range of methods available to ensure appropriate use of statistics in research. For many students on the Unit, statistics and statistical analysis is integral to their project which for some is a new area of learning. Professor Kirkham was able to answer questions and offered further support following his presentation.

Professor Lucie Byrne-Davis, an expert in Behavioural Science, provided an insightful presentation on behaviour change. For Unit researchers working on Workstream 2 and Workstream 6, behaviour change is an integral part of their research projects, and this provided an opportunity for a deeper understanding of technique and application with real-life examples of how behaviour change can be used in intervention studies.

IAB member Naomi Mwasambili conducted an interactive session on the role that social enterprise can play in research and specifically related this to the potential outcomes of the Unit. The session explored how social enterprise can be used as a tool to ensure the sustainability of interventions. For the meeting participants, this session provided a useful insight into how their research might be impactful in engaging participants to benefit their wider communities on a longer-term basis.

Dr Tracey Mills, Training Lead for the Unit, shared feedback with a focus on capacity development for the less experienced researchers and more recent members of the Unit research community.

"The Learning and Sharing event was fantastic. Academy members and junior researchers made the most of their opportunities to share findings and personal insights from their research journeys during the poster and oral sessions. There was a great 'buzz' during the networking sessions of discussion and interest in colleague's work. They also really valued the expert masterclasses to build their knowledge in statistics, behavioural science, and the emerging area of social enterprise".



Programme overview

The programme was designed for researchers across the 9 workstreams to join together and appreciate the bigger picture and wider context of the projects they are delivering, receive updates on progress, problem solve challenges and celebrate successes. The programme sessions were themed across antenatal, intrapartum, newborn care, postnatal care, and bereavement care, reflecting all research workstreams. To ensure the programme activities were relevant and accessible for all, the schedule was designed to enable whole team events as well as space for specific meetings to take place.

Day 1

The meeting was opened by Professor Rose Laisser, event host from CUHAS, and Professor Angela Chimwaza, Co-Director of the Unit. Rose welcomed the participants and shared her enthusiasm and experience of working with the Unit, whilst Angela highlighted through the lively introductions, the diversity of experience and backgrounds of the community of researchers that make up the Unit.

Day 1 was designed with multiple activities taking place to ensure delegates were able to attend the most relevant and useful sessions. Specific workstream meetings were held with entire multi-partner teams coming together to address specific issues. For those not involved in those meetings, they were able to attend practice presentation sessions in the main conference room, meet with the LSTM team to discuss and review any challenges in finance and governance or attend the formal training sessions with Professor Lucie Byrne-Davis, Professor Jamie Kirkham and Naomi Mwasambili.







Day 2

Opening ceremony and morning sessions:

Professor Rose Laisser opened the event and was joined by the Tanzania team in traditional dress who delighted the delegates with a traditional Tanzanian song "Tazama Ramani" which means "Look at the map, you will see a beautiful country". It was a very warm and special welcome to both the country and the meeting which set the tone for the inclusiveness and friendliness of the rest of the week.



Professor Dame Tina Lavender presented the highlights of the first 2 years of the Unit, recapping on the objectives and the progress that specific workstream projects are making in meeting their milestones. She highlighted the integration of the unique work with Community Engagement and Involvement (CEI) groups, with all of the workstreams incorporating CEI participation and feedback into the ongoing development and shaping of the research. Professor Lavender discussed the ongoing development of cross-country networks and relationship building which strengthens the Unit partnership, highlighting examples of the multi-country events which have brought partners together including the PhD student visits to LSTM in the UK, CEI Leads training in Malawi and the CADA training workshop in Kenya.





The final session of the morning was delivered by keynote speaker Professor Eunice Siaity-Pallangyo, Head of the Nursing and Midwifery School at Aga Khan University in Dar es Salaam. With extensive experience and research interests in Global Maternal and Newborn Health, participants were enthusiastic to hear Professor Pallangyo present her inspiring work. She highlighted the complexities of providing respectful care in maternal and newborn settings and the contextual realities and challenges of doing this work in Tanzania. Emphasis was placed on the importance of not only promoting and encouraging women to address issues of non-respectful care but also in ensuring that health workers are trained and empowered to deliver respectful care. Professor Pallangyo commended the Unit for focusing on this area and drew parallels between her research and our projects in Malawi and Tanzania.

The afternoon focused on a panel discussion with representatives of the in-country CEI Leads. This session highlighted the importance of embedding CEI into all aspects of research. The panel shared experiences and discussed the role of the CEI groups in their specific workstreams emphasizing the necessity of planning CEI activities in research from the beginning of the project design through until dissemination. They gave examples of how members have contributed to discussions about research design to ensure decisions being made were culturally and contextually appropriate as well as considering sustainability, particularly in relation to research projects that include interventions. The panel discussed the challenges faced when working closely with members, including how to provide support through difficult and

emotional conversations about lived experiences and also when encouraging participation from hard to reach groups, such as bereaved fathers. Partners discussed the similarity across countries in the challenges they had experienced; as a group they were able to offer each other advice and support, providing examples of approaches that had worked best in the context of their research and country.

CEI lead Faryal Sultan from Pakistan commented on her experience.

“As a CEI lead, this panel discussion was highly beneficial and motivational. It enhanced my skills and allowed for the exchange of knowledge and cultures. This experience will inspire me to further consider and plan CEI group activities”.



Day 3

Day 3 was opened by IAB member, Professor Grace Omoni, who welcomed the delegates with a prayer and shared her appreciation of her previous experience working with the NIHR Group and Unit, and engagement with the LAMRN midwifery network.

Following this introduction, Dr Yana Richens delivered a keynote presentation focused on the importance of partnership working. She shared her experience of working in UK and LMIC settings and discussed the importance of working together as equal collaborators to help develop sustainable and meaningful partnerships in midwifery and in cross-disciplinary settings. Yana shared her passion for supporting the

professional development of nurses and midwives as researchers and commended the Unit for its dedication to providing space for meaningful reflection and ongoing capacity development.

“The L&S event has been very insightful; it has tackled so many difficult topics which affect maternal and newborn health. To achieve this in 2 days has been phenomenal. It was important to have the dedication to the nurses, midwives, and research assistants. Without them having the skills to do research can be a challenge. The Unit is developing not only researchers, but future nursing and midwifery leads prepared to address challenges”.





The programme continued with presentations from PhD students and Research Assistants working on projects focused on Newborn and Postnatal Care, as well as Bereavement Care. Following each session, the presenters were invited to sit as a panel to answer questions and engage in discussion about their work.





After lunch, the research leads of each partner country were invited to present their 'Words of Wisdom' to the event. With some providing inspiring stories of how they developed in their own research careers including tales of challenges and even failures experienced along the way, they offered guidance for sustaining and enjoying careers in research partnerships. Professor Bellington Vwalika, country lead for Zambia reflected on the importance of partnerships and continuing to develop and learn throughout your career;

"You must always continue to discover your passions and continue to improve yourself. We are all responsible to be change agents and change champions. No man is an island in research".



In the final session of the L&S event, Anayda Portela of the World Health Organization provided some highlights from the meeting in relation to the global landscape of maternal and newborn health. Anayda discussed the parallels between the work of the Unit and the WHO global recommendations for maternal and newborn health and priorities for other areas of implementation research. She congratulated the Unit for the diverse programme of work and emphasised the importance of translating learning in to practice:

“It was brilliant to hear about the progress of the different research teams; the different topics link very closely to many of WHO’s priorities for maternal newborn health, including bereavement care, respectful maternal and newborn care and adolescent’s experiences of pregnancy care. I strongly encourage the teams to share their work with the Ministries and other researchers in their respective countries to strengthen national evidence and research processes and to integrate learnings into practice”.



Following the formal sessions, the delegates had time to view the poster presentations and meet with presenters to discuss their work. The judges of the poster presentations, Dr Yana Richens, Professor Stine Bernitz and Naomi Mwasambili were able to have a final review of the posters, meet with presenters and compile their reviews prior to the awards ceremony taking place later that night. Professor Bernitz provided her feedback.

“I was honoured to evaluate the impressive posters during the learning and sharing event for “Preventing Stillbirth and Neonatal Deaths”. The posters were overall of good quality and included the most essential elements of their work. Presenting the results (both through posters but also through oral presentations and scientific publications) of your work is important; firstly to share your knowledge that

can benefit others, secondly as a respectful act to the participants and/or informants that have contributed to the study and thirdly to include the work as components in building a research career which in turn will contribute to the education of new researchers”.









Awards ceremony and social event

The awards ceremony was hosted over dinner in the beautiful setting of the White Sands resort. Professor Lavender thanked all participants for their contribution to the event, especially to the researchers and students who had presented their work. The judges were also thanked for their commitment and engagement in reviewing the oral and poster presentations.

Prizes for 1st, 2nd and 3rd place were awarded for the oral and poster categories. Professor Lavender and Professor Laisser presented the prizes to the following recipients:

Oral Presentation

1st Place Livuka Nsemwa (PhD Student, Tanzania): *Respectful maternal and newborn care bundle development and consensus process.*

On receiving the award PhD Student Livuka Nsemwa commented:

"I was filled with an overwhelming sense of joy; it was truly a moment of happiness and gratitude. Thanks for the award, the recognition uplifted me as a student".

2nd Place Deepika Vayankarappadam (PhD Student, India): *Parental Involvement in care of sick neonates in India: A qualitative study*

3rd Place Bob Faque (Research Assistant, Malawi): *Respectful maternal and newborn care: findings from a community survey in Tanzania and Malawi*



2 - 1st Prize Livuka Nsemwa



3 - 2nd Prize Deepika Vayankarappadam



4 - 3rd Prize: Bob Faque

Poster Presentation

1st Place: Marietha Slaa (Research Assistant, Tanzania): Healthcare provider's and women's acceptability of PANDA e-health system in Tanzania

On receiving the award Marietha commented:

"I was very excited to receive the award at the event. I think it is important to have a logical structure to your poster, it is also necessary to include all co- authors and follow all guidelines, I also read articles about the tips to make a good poster".

2nd Place: Happiness Shayo (Research Assistant, Tanzania): Adaptation of PANDA e-health system embedded with respectful care components for the provision of high-quality antenatal care services in Tanzania.

3rd Place: Faryal Sultan (CEI, Pakistan): Community Engagement and Involvement for development of bereavement support program: lessons learned.



5 - 1st Prize: Marietha Slaa



6 - 2nd Prize: Happiness Shayo



7 - 3rd Prize: Faryal Sultan

Special awards

The awards ceremony also included special awards recognising achievements and contribution in research over a longer period of time.

The Anne Nendela Award was created in honour of the late Anne Nendela of LAMRN Kenya who sadly passed away earlier this year. Anne was a long-standing member of the LAMRN network and had also

worked on the NIHR Group as a researcher and contributed to the Unit in Kenya. She was described as a committed and enthusiastic colleague, as well as a friend. This award was created in her memory to be given to a researcher who demonstrated the commitment, hard work, and enthusiasm for research that Anne had embodied throughout her career.

The Anne Nendela Award winner for outstanding achievement was presented to Dr Ides Chilinda, a post-doctoral researcher based at KUHES in Malawi. Ides has consistently worked above and beyond her role and is considered an incredible asset to the team in Malawi, and more widely to colleagues across the Unit. Her warmth and commitment to her work was described by Professor Lavender as reminiscent of Anne Nendela. On receiving the award Ides commented:



"I am deeply honoured and humbled to receive the Anne Nendela Award for my work in our respectful maternal and new-born care project. This award holds a special place of significance for me as it represents the countless hours of dedication, collaboration, and passion for pushing the boundaries of knowledge in maternal and newborn care. The award also serves as a reminder of the collective effort and commitment of the entire Malawi team. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my

mentors Professor Tina Lavender and Professor Angela Chimwaza for their unwavering support and guidance throughout this journey. Once again, I am immensely grateful for this recognition".



The LAMRN Lifetime Achievement Award was created to honour long standing commitment and dedication to advancing midwifery research throughout a career.

The award was presented to Professor Grace Omoni, a founding member of LAMRN and recently retired from an outstanding career at the University of Nairobi. Her commitment and dedication to global maternal health work has spanned over 20 years. Grace has been a pioneer and advocate for midwifery

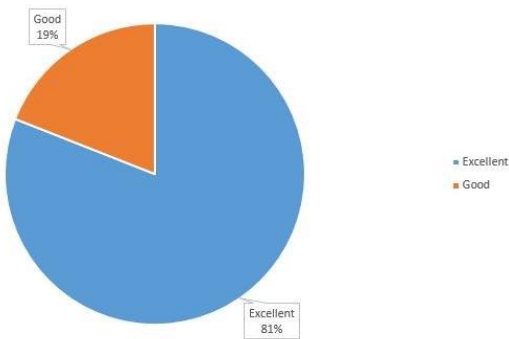
research in Kenya and sub-Saharan Africa and has worked collaboratively in developing partnerships to improve outcomes for women and babies, inspiring and mentoring colleagues along the way. On receiving the award, Grace thanked Professor Lavender for her support and friendship over many years and commented:

"Receiving the award was unexpected surprise and had an overwhelming feeling. I feel energized to perform better than I have done before. Thank you. Ahsanteni."

Participants feedback

As part of our commitment to Monitoring and Evaluation, we requested that participants submit feedback about their experience of the event to help inform the planning of future meetings. Evaluation forms were reviewed and examples of the feedback received is highlighted below:

How would you rate the Learning & Sharing Event overall?



"One of the best meetings I have ever attended. Was so good to see early career researchers being so supported so well by leaders in the field".

"The programme of events was well planned and the presenters presented well. I learnt a lot about the work being done in the unit and it was great to hear the progress of others within the unit in their workstreams. Thank you for organising the event well. Looking forward to the next learning and sharing event".

"Wonderful event. Excellent organisation. Presentations from RA's and students were excellent given their experience and background. The practice presentations on the Thursday was a fantastic idea - inspired the presentations as well as giving a chance for supportive mentorship/comments".

"Beautiful platform to explore researchers of various geographical background, culture and values. The real sharing happened, honored to be a part of this event".

"Superb organisers, the best venue choice, it was a very useful event. Helped me to learn more about other peoples work and make friends".

A special thanks to our hosts and final words

A special thank you must be extended to our hosts and colleagues at the Catholic University of Health and Allied Sciences, led by Professor Rose Laisser, for generously organising this meeting, identifying the venue and ensuring that we had a safe and enjoyable time. It was a great success and you have provided wonderful memories for all those who attended.



8 - Tanzania team led by Professor Rose Laisser

Final words

Bringing the partners together to develop existing relationships and create new ones is a key strength of the Unit and enables us to continue working towards our objectives as a global team. The event programme had a strong focus on capacity development which enabled the students and junior researchers to learn, as well as providing the opportunity to share their work with senior researchers and network with subject experts as well as their peers.

Professor Dame Tina Lavender shared her thoughts on the event;

"The learning and sharing event exceeded our expectations. The scientific content was strong, and even the research assistants that were presenting for the very first time did a fantastic job of delivering their research. I think that what was striking to me was how much individuals had developed. For example, the post-doctoral researchers demonstrated their leadership skills, the PhD students evidenced how they were taking leadership of their studies, and research assistants showed how they had moved beyond being data collectors to junior researchers. The capacity development elements of this programme are phenomenal".

We are looking forward to the next time we will be able to join together as a community of researchers for the learning and sharing event planned for 2025.







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