MAINSTREAMING CARTA INTERVENTIONS FOR A LASTING LEGACY

IN THIS ISSUE

03 Working Towards Sustainability of CARTA: the iCARTA Project

06 Obafemi Awolowo University Honors CARTA Co-Director, Prof. Sharon

08 5th Vice Chancellors and Heads of Research Institutions Meeting

09 Fellows Say: Cohort 10
Welcome Note

Welcome to the January to June 2022 edition of CARTA News. The edition comes at the time when CARTA is transitioning again; now able to hold in-person meetings once more.

This transition is possible because of science and research. Basic science has produced a vaccine and applied science is essential to ensure vaccine coverage. The lab-to-community continuum is critical. The pandemic has had unequal impact, and also exposed various inequalities. On impact for instance, there are those that are at higher risk of death or severe COVID-19 illness. This is due to individual factors such as age, which is immutable. There are risk factors for death from COVID-19 that may look like individual factors such as chronic diseases or obesity, and are not immutable. In actual sense they are socially determined.

The epidemic of obesity and non-communicable diseases in Africa has its roots in what we consume and how we consume and this includes what we eat even as babies. This is determined more by what is available and affordable, which is often processed foods that predisposes us to obesity and chronic diseases. Population level change in avoiding those risk factors is best done through social, not individual change. The other inequality that was so apparent in COVID-19 is that non-medical methods of control - physical distancing, use of masks, and working from home were largely viable for middle- and upper-class people and some rural communities. For the vast majority of people who live in densely populated areas and multiple generation households, the measures were a challenge and at times impossible.

The most cynical expression of inequality was that of access to vaccines. Rich countries prioritised national access above pandemic control and national governments, seemingly protecting big pharma. Vaccines, using even the most conservative neo-liberal economic definitions, is a public good yet not all countries have equal access to vaccines. We have two fights to take on, that of redefining public good and tackling inequality; and making sure that in Africa we have our own scientists generating knowledge and products for Africa and the rest of the world.

As we move from 100% virtual to options for face-to-face engagement, we need to take stock and ask ourselves what worked well in the virtual world that we should keep and what is best done collectively in person. Both have advantages and disadvantages, and we need to choose the right mix of mediums of engagement moving forward.

The excitement of seeing people again however cannot be overstated. May 2022 saw a large CARTA community coming together in Nairobi to consolidate the work that has been on-going virtually through iCARTA. This is funded by Norad as part of the CARTA institutionalization strategy to develop and share our various CARTA curriculums across the network. Prior work done virtually made the four days together very productive. Everyone knew that the virtual work was essential and important, but the efficiency of being together; being able to get so much done so quickly face-to-face was noted by almost everyone.

May also saw Joint Advanced Seminar two (JAS 2) and the Supervisors Workshop happening at the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa. Again, the vibrancy and excitement that was generated when people from across the CARTA Consortium met was evident. The dancing at dinner is just one example.

Our strategy to build the future of CARTA Early Career Researchers (ECRs) is also progressing. We awarded 15 ECRs grants, a combination of post-doctoral fellowships and re-entry grants. Congratulations to the recipients. We are looking forward to announcing our research hub strategy soon, so look out for that.

The most notable thing for me personally over this period of CARTA is how our graduates are leading in so many ways, both leading CARTA itself as well as within their institutions. Halala!

Welcome you all and I hope you enjoy reading about our more recent activities and achievements. Many thanks to our Board, Secretariat, Fellows, Partners and entire CARTA community for their contributions to the program.
Working Towards Sustainability of CARTA Interventions: the iCARTA Project

By Dr. Cavens Kithinji, CARTA Program Coordinator

CARTA has for over ten years concerned itself with activities that enhance the capacity of African scholars and universities to create sustainable multidisciplinary research hubs. This is by supporting both junior faculty members to become internationally recognized researchers and research leaders, and strengthening university-wide systems to support research.

In our approach to mainstream CARTA interventions at partner institutions and the need to have a wide reach to other willing African universities, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad) is funding CARTA to carry out a course review of its interventions and develop Training of Trainers (ToT) training programs. The project, dubbed iCARTA - Institutionalization of Advanced Research Training in Africa project, is funded through Norad’s Norwegian Programme for Capacity Development in Higher Education and Research for Development (NORHED).

iCARTA commenced in late 2021 and was officially launched in a virtual meeting of Vice Chancellors and institutional heads of partner institutions on February 7, 2022.

The aim of iCARTA is threefold. The first objective is to avail online digital resources. In this, CARTA has reviewed its current courses to be congruent with online digital material and has developed ToT training programs for the Joint Advanced Seminars (JASes), Supervisors’ Workshops (SW), Graduate Workshops (GW) and the Academic, Professional and Administrative Staff (APAS) Seminars (previously known as FAS).

The second is to strengthen the capacity of partner institutions to enable them to adopt CARTA intervention courses in PhD training and management at the institutions. This is being done through a series of ToT workshops for JASes, SW, GW and APAS. CARTA recognizes the important role that the management of these institutions play in effective PhD and research training. Therefore, the third objective is to engage higher management of these institutions in thinking through the best approach to collaboratively enhance the research ecosystem at the institutions.

The digitized content (accessible on CARTA’s website) will be used as resources in the training sessions of JASes, GW, SW and APAS and will be available to other willing universities and research institutions for use in their efforts to build effective research environments in Africa. Access will be open and free, registration will be required only for tracking purposes.

The University of Bergen, with support from the CARTA Secretariat, is coordinating the iCARTA project, and three CARTA partner institutions (University of Rwanda, University of Malawi and Makerere University, respectively) will host the ToT workshops for the entire CARTA network.

The aim of iCARTA - Institutionalization of Advanced Research Training in Africa project is threefold: to avail online digital resources; to strengthen the capacity of partner institutions to enable them to adopt CARTA intervention courses; and to engage higher management of partner institutions in thinking through the best approach to collaboratively enhance the research ecosystem of the institutions.
Institutionalizing CARTA Interventions: Training of Trainers Course Development Workshop Held in Nairobi

By Ann Waithaka, CARTA Communications Officer

The CARTA program is now in its third 5-year phase dubbed CARTA 2025. This phase has four strategic objectives, among them supporting the creation of research-supportive environments in African partner institutions. To this end, CARTA is working towards mainstreaming its interventions at partner institutions. These interventions have been used within the Consortium to strengthen the research, and related capacities of CARTA fellows, graduates, supervisors, and faculty and administration staff. They comprise of the Joint Advanced Seminars (JASes), Supervisors’ Workshop (SW), Graduate Workshop (GW) and the Academic, Professional and Administrative Staff (APAS) Seminar (previously Faculty and Administrative Staff – FAS).

One key activity towards mainstreaming CARTA interventions at partner institutions has been the review of the related curricula and the development of related Training of Trainers (ToT) programs. Through the ToT workshops, CARTA seeks to strengthen the facilitation capacity of partner institutions to be able to independently carry out the interventions.

The ToT development workshop process follows a series of engagements with the teams, including the review of the course outline that kicked off in mid-2021. Owing to the ongoing pandemic, the review of the courses and the development of the ToT programs had taken a virtual approach. For the course review – largely virtual, the teams participated in an inception meeting, course revisions and team correspondences, review meetings, external reviews by the Secretariat and other CARTA members, and consultations with an e-learning/curriculum expert.

CARTA convened a face-to-face ToT development workshop in Nairobi (Kenya) between May 9-12, 2022. The workshop brought together teams of coordinators, facilitators and graduates of the JASes, SW, GW and APAS, supported by the CARTA Directors, Secretariat and consultants, to finalize ToT materials and develop annotated ToT programs for JASes, SW, GW and APAS. During this process, the workshop enhanced the participants’ understanding of the CARTA pedagogy and the rationale behind the interventions; including the sharing of best practices in the development and facilitation of ToT Workshop; and provided the participants with opportunities to determine the most appropriate modes of delivery for the various interventions and ToT programs.

The workshop, being the first face-to-face event after the long duration of virtual meetings and events that were occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic, also enabled the teams to connect. It was an intensive yet interactive four-day workshop, and participants had a lot of positive feedback on the whole process. One participant said that “it has been a very rewarding and rich experience,” while another reported that “we realized that some of our practical sessions were mis-titled and changed them. We also developed a new ToT session and incorporated it into the new ToT curriculum.”

The final reviewed courses, the ToT programs and a number of learning resources are being uploaded on the CARTA website. CARTA intends to complete the curriculum review and ToT development process by the end of August 2022.

The CARTA course review and the development of the ToT workshop course is funded by the Norwegian Programme for Capacity Development in Higher Education and Research for Development (NORHED), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and the Carnegie Corporation of New York, as part of efforts to promote sustainability of CARTA interventions through strengthening the capacity of institutional-based facilitators to independently carry out the CARTA interventions in their respective institutions.
We are pleased to welcome Alexander Kagaha, the new Coordinator for CARTA’s Non-African Partners (NAP). Alex is a CARTA graduate who joined the program in 2018 as a fellow in cohort seven and graduated in 2021. He is an Assistant Lecturer at Makerere University, Uganda and a Honorary Researcher at the School of Public Health, University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), Johannesburg.

In this new role, Alex will be supporting CARTA in respect to:
- Coordinating the identification of experts from NAP institutions, who can contribute to CARTA activities;
- Harmonizing roles of focal persons who support CARTA activities in NAP Institutions;
- The review of applications for CARTA post-doctoral awards;
- Facilitation of trainings, proposal development and fundraising;
- Identification of research placements/internships, research training courses, placement teachers, postdoc placements, possible international collaborators and career development opportunities for CARTA fellows;
- Coordinating Graduate Workshops; and
- Participating in governance meetings and preparing necessary documentation.

CARTA’s Non-African Partners include nine institutions that offer technical support and academic advice. The institutions have long standing research and/or training collaborations with African counterparts. The Non-African Partners bring experience in establishing and running successful PhD programs, ability to mentor both students and PhD supervisors, and skills in strengthening institutional research and training capacity.

Responding to the appointment, Alex shared that:

“Getting this opportunity to serve as the CARTA NAP Coordinator is an honor for me. It demonstrates that CARTA walks to its ideals of nurturing talent and advancing its graduates. I feel humbled, honored and empowered to work with my mentors and to discuss and interact freely. I welcome this role as both a challenge and an opportunity; it means understanding and appreciating the complexity of work, networks and partnerships that produce the fruits that we enjoy as CARTA fellows. I have now joined the team that makes things happen and I have to bring my competences to light.

I am confident that this position immerses me in a web of diverse resources, with opportunities for mentorship, capacity building and institutional strengthening. There is wealth of lessons, and skills to acquire, challenges to confront and destinies to forge. In a world of ever-increasing complex problems where even local problems are globally connected, working in this position is an opportunity to build critical networks, resources and wisdom to confront shared problems.”

“During my two year tenure in the role, I will use this opportunity to grow and establish myself both as an international scholar and research leader. With mentorship from scholars of international acclaim, I will undertake postdoctoral scholarship of power structures and practice, in north-south partnerships. I will also focus on publishing, disseminating findings, and building collaborative research networks,” he says.

Alex commits to using the opportunity to link CARTA graduates to research capacity strengthening and research grants opportunities available among Non-African Partner institutions. Further, he will link resource persons in the global north to graduates for research collaborations and facilitate access to mentorship opportunities for fellows and graduates.

Alex holds a PhD in Public Health from Wits; an MSc in Development Management from University of Agder, Norway; MA in Sociology; and a BA in Social Sciences from Makerere University. His doctoral project investigated the operations of power in the policy making and abortion care practice in Eastern Uganda. He is passionate about studies that investigate power in population and public health matters in Africa.
For three years, Nigeria’s Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), one of CARTA’s eight African Partner Universities had been implementing the Intervention towards Strengthening Research Training in Obafemi Awolowo University (ItSTRETO) seed grant. The ItSTRETO grant was provided by CARTA to scale up the program’s curriculum and mainstream its interventions at OAU.

In concluding the grant last year, 17 doctoral fellows received certificates for successfully undergoing an intensive research methodology training. The fellows comprised doctoral students from science, health sciences, arts, education and social science faculties. Additionally, the Vice Chancellor of OAU presented awards of recognition to the project team from the university that initiated and drove the programme. The team included: Prof. Kayode Ijadunola, Prof. Akanni Akinyemi, Dr. Joshua Aransiola, Dr. Sunday Adedini and Dr. Ojo Agunbiade.

Recognition awards were also presented to local and international facilitators who were involved in developing the CARTA program and related interventions. They include Sharon Fonn - Professor, University of the Witwatersrand; Akinyinka Omigbodun - Professor, University of Ibadan; Alex Ezeh - Professor, Dornsife School of Public Health, and CARTA’s first Director; Yetunde Ajibade - Professor, OAU; Funke Fayehu (Dr) - Senior Lecturer, University of Ibadan and CARTA Board Chair; as well as the rest of the CARTA Board. All the awardees with the exception of Prof. Yetunde Ajibade participated in the event via Zoom.

Later, Prof. Fonn, an advocate of research capacity strengthening in African universities, was presented her award physically during a Training of Trainers course development workshop that took place between May 9 - 12, 2022 in Nairobi, Kenya.

During its implementation, ItSTRETO project had three main components. One arm to build the research capacity of doctoral candidates in population studies and public health related disciplines. The second arm focused on strengthening the capacity of doctoral supervisors at the university, while the third component was stakeholder’s engagement. This last component involved the creation of a platform for critical reflections on doctoral training at the university.

In its lifespan, the project achieved the hosting of a series of four joint seminars, where leading experts in various aspects of research methodology were invited to train and mentor the doctoral fellows. The supervisors of the doctoral fellows and board of the Postgraduate College were also involved in the grant through four supervisors’ academic workshops and four steering committee meetings respectively. Decision extracts from supervisors’ academic retreats and steering committee meetings were adapted into the new postgraduate college regulation.

While initially, the project faced challenges - delayed for about eight months owing to the local industrial dispute among the staff of the university and national strike, the intervention has recorded many successes. One key outcome is the approval of the research methodology course used to train the ItSTRETO fellows by the university’s Senate. The curriculum has been adopted as a compulsory methodology training course for all doctoral students in the university. According to OAU, the students have commended the college for the timeliness of the course and the uniqueness of the curriculum in bridging the gaps in capacity for research at doctorate level.
Tell us about yourself and your research interests

I am a medical doctor with graduate training in infectious diseases prevention, a believer in Jesus Christ, a wife and mother to four lovely children. My research interests include women’s health, vaccine-preventable diseases, as well as understanding and preventing infection-associated cancers through optimizing available evidence-based interventions.

How would you describe your CARTA journey?

It has been a fun-filled, learning and self-discovery adventure! A journey that had meaning because I could see where I was headed and the impact of the work I was doing.

What has inspired you to keep going as a PhD candidate?

Loving what I am doing, knowing the value of the results, during the process and in the end.

COVID-19 came with a lot of pressure to almost all aspects of life. How did you manage to progress your PhD amid the pandemic?

For me the COVID-19 pandemic came when I was at the tail end of my doctoral work. By October 2019, my second paper had been published, and I was in the process of writing my thesis. In March 2020, I had completed a draft for my supervisors to review and approve, so that I submit for examination. Therefore, even with the associated effects of the pandemic - global and systems lock-down, and slowing down of almost all processes for more than a year, my doctoral degree was not substantially affected.

Are there any aspects of the CARTA program that have greatly influenced your PhD journey?

Several components of the CARTA training model impacted my studies positively. First, the availability of a wide range of mentors with expertise in various fields, coupled with clear and regular communication, and an effective administrative system. I would know where to go for whatever I needed. Second, the flexibility in what fellows can focus on and what set of skills they could build within the wider training model. For me that was fantastic. It allowed me to lead my own work, and shape my future. Third, the organization and scheduling of the four Joint Advanced Seminars (JASes), each with its expected timeline and outputs, helped to set a gauge on individual progress. It allowed me to monitor myself. They also availed the much-needed protected time to focus on my progress, with peer support from other fellows, and in environments that supported mental wellbeing. I appreciate that very much!

What lessons have you drawn from being a CARTA fellow that you can share with current fellows?

It is important to love what you do, because then, it becomes a journey of discovery that enables you to identify where you can make meaningful contributions to population health, to academia and to society. Multiple skills are required, for a smooth journey, such as time-management, communicating effectively, and respecting others. You need to be confident enough to know your next steps, and where you need support either from mentors, colleagues, or anyone who knows what you do not know.

Do you think there is a particular trait that you must have to succeed as a doctoral student?

I believe it is important to have grit! By this I mean, really be able to stay focused on your goals and to live with them every single day of your life, no matter what. Also, to hold a futuristic view of your role, capacity, your abilities and what you need to move forward.

What advise can you offer those who wish to progress their education, particularly PhDs in Africa?

First, to have a strong desire to make a contribution to society, through this specialized training [PhD]. Then to
CARTA aims to build capacities to mainstream its well-established and proven research capacity strengthening interventions at partner institutions. This is an initial step towards sustainability, upscaling and diffusion of its gains beyond the specific partner institutions and the envisaged 20-year span. As a way of gaining buy-in to mainstream interventions, CARTA has brought on board university management.

Early this year on February 7, 2022, CARTA virtually held the 5th CARTA Vice Chancellors and Head of Research Institutions’ meeting. The key goal of the convening was to update the partners on CARTA’s performance, including funding; work towards strengthening postgraduate training, research, and related research ecosystems at the partner institutions; and launch the NORHED II iCARTA project. Further, the participants were apprised on an APHRC project dubbed ‘Catalyzing Impact via Africa-led Implementation Research Platforms,’ and discussed possible involvement of the CARTA partner institutions in the project.

The meeting was attended by 63 participants who included Vice-Chancellors and Heads of Institutions, Deputy Vice-Chancellors, Directors of Research, Heads of Postgraduate Schools, and Heads of other Departments from CARTA partner institutions, as well as the CARTA Directors, Focal Persons and Secretariat. Opening remarks were delivered by CARTA Co-Directors, Dr. Catherine Kyobutungi and Prof. Sharon Fonn who presented the program’s strategic objectives and the progress update for the previous year.

The meeting had a productive outcome with participants reporting to have found the discussions and engagement gainful. In a post evaluation survey conducted by the CARTA Secretariat, 95% of the respondents acknowledged that their expectations had been met. Further, they made key commitments towards institutionalizing different CARTA interventions at their institutions. Some of the aspects found key to facilitate implementation included preparation and support of research hubs; adaptation of the bibliometric dashboard; support of the training of trainers workshops to be able to host the Joint Advanced Seminars (JASes), and supervisors’ and graduate workshops; encouragement of CARTA fellows and graduates to attract other sources of research funds; and greater collaboration for opportunities such as post-docs and grants within and among the partners institutions.
The CARTA Joint Advanced Seminar Two (JAS 2): Highlights from Cohort 10

Maureen Majamanda  
University of Malawi  
By participating in JAS 2, I have been able to identify gaps in my research and gain clarity on the research question. I have also developed the ability to write concepts that get financial support, understand published journal articles and make meaning of the relevant information. Further, I now have the ability to appreciate other people’s comments on my work and incorporate their suggestions.

Takondwa Bakuwa  
University of Malawi  
I am better now in the way that I teach, package my work and equip students to deliver quality work. For instance, I exposed them to tools like Mendeley early on and now I am excited about being able to teach them Nvivo. I am also more proactive about seeking professional networks.

Omotade Ijarotimi  
University of Ibadan  
CARTA encourages teamwork in a multidisciplinary environment. Working with people from other disciplines opened my eyes to some things I usually take for granted.

Apatsa Selemani  
University of Malawi  
My approach to teaching has changed in that now I try to be creative and to engage my students a lot to facilitate participatory learning as opposed to just delivering lectures. I have also learnt thematic data analysis using Nvivo.

Beryl Maritim  
University of Witwatersrand  
I have gained tremendously from the CARTA program. The research training has equipped me with the key writing skills (from ESE:O) that have helped me in manuscript writing. It has built my confidence in my abilities as a researcher in my institution.

Emmanuel Nzabonimana  
University of Witwatersrand  
Through CARTA, my research capacity has been boosted and this empowers me to provide better research supervision for students in my home university.

Patience Shamu  
University of Witwatersrand  
My writing has improved considerably. When submitting my protocol for review, I got great comments about the quality and how clear it was to follow through. I attribute it all to CARTA, through the clinics and ESE:O workshops. At my workplace, I am able to write better letters to stakeholders and when submitting my work for review, I receive minor corrections.

Aline Uwase  
University of Witwatersrand  
CARTA training has improved my grant research writing skills and I am happy to report that together with other cohort ten fellows from Rwanda, we have managed to secure a research grant. My research skills have also improved as I was able to progress well with my research. I can now confidently review a scientific paper and provide constructive feedback.
Enock Chisati (Cohort Seven Fellow, University of Malawi) was appointed to the Academic Standards Compliance Committee (ASCCo) to represent the School of Life Sciences and Allied Health Professions (SLAHP) of Kamuzu University of Health Sciences (KUHeS).

Sara Nieuwoudt (Cohort Four Fellow, University of the Witwatersrand) was appointed to the International Steering Committee for the International Social and Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) Summit, which will convene in Morocco this December. As part of the team seeking to raise the profile of the Global South, she helped to convene a 2-day webinar titled ‘The Africa Social and Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC)’ on March 22 - 23, 2022 and was a panellist on the topic of ‘SBCC Training and Practice in Africa: Lessons and Future Directors’ on the second day.

Stephen Wandera (Cohort two Graduate, Makerere University) was appointed to the World Health Organization Research Ethics Review Committee (ERC), effective May 2022.

Beatrice Maina (Cohort Six Graduate, APHRC) was promoted to Associate Research Scientist at the Center.

Margaret Abimbola (Cohort Nine Fellow, University of Ibadan) was promoted to Senior Lecturer, Department of Community Medicine, College of Medicine, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

Nomfundo Moroe (Cohort Six Graduate, University of the Witwatersrand) was promoted to Associate Professor in the Department of Speech Pathology and Audiology at University of the Witwatersrand.

Mphatso Kamndaya (Cohort One Fellow, University of Malawi) was promoted to Associate Professor at the Malawi University of Business and Applied Sciences (MUBAS).
Graduates by Institution

- Total Number of Graduates: 134

- AGINCOURT
- University of the Witwatersrand
- University of Nairobi
- Moi University
- APHRC
- University of Dar es Salaam
- Ifakara Health Institute
- University of Malawi
- Makerere University
- University of Ibadan
- Obafemi Awolowo University

CARTA in Numbers

- Graduates by Gender:
  - Female: (71) 53%
  - Male: (63) 47%
  - Total: 134

- Fellows by Gender:
  - Female: (129) 57%
  - Male: (98) 43%
  - Total: 227

- External Grants Raised by Fellows: US$23,184,934

- Total Peer-Reviewed Publications: 2523