

January - June 2025 | Volume 22 | Issue 20



Consortium for Advanced Research Training in Africa



# CARTA News

The Newsletter of the Consortium for Advanced Research Training in Africa

**Celebrating Milestones and Pioneering New Research Frontiers**

## Welcome Note

By Christopher Odhiambo -  
Professor, Department of Literature, Linguistics,  
Foreign Language and Film Studies,  
Moi University, and Chair of the CARTA Board  
of Management



It is my pleasure to welcome you to this edition of the CARTA newsletter, an opportunity to reflect on our progress and look ahead to the evolving journey of our consortium.

We are delighted to announce that in March 2025, we welcomed to the CARTA family the eleventh cohort of PhD fellows, comprising 20 brilliant minds drawn from our African partner institutions. This latest cohort represents both continuity and renewal, an embodiment of our foundational mission while embracing innovation and expanded horizons. Their diversity, in both research interests and institutional affiliations, exemplifies our vision of cultivating a critical mass of well-trained, networked, and globally engaged African researchers.

A key strategic focus for CARTA has been the strengthening of our mentorship model. We are especially pleased to welcome fellows from the Somali National University. This is an important milestone that reflects our expanding regional footprint and commitment to supporting researchers in fragile states. Through mentorship from Makerere University, the SNU scholars will be supported in advancing their academic pursuits, careers, and contributing meaningfully to the research capacity of their institutions. The core of this cohort and the addition of two fellows from Somalia was made possible by the renewal of the long-standing support of the Swedish International Development Cooperation (Sida). We appreciate the company of Sida in this CARTA journey and praise the long-term investment that has contributed to CARTA's sustainability through the years.

We are also proud to highlight a new partnership with the Oak Foundation, focused on the prevention of sexual violence against children (PSVAC), an urgent

area of public health and social concern. On behalf of CARTA, I extend our deepest gratitude to the Oak Foundation for supporting three fellows in cohort 11. Your generous investment enables the scholars to conduct transformative research that will inform policies and interventions aimed at protecting vulnerable populations across the continent.

CARTA's influence on institutional practices continues to grow. More Vice Chancellors (VCs) and senior university leaders are taking active roles in shaping supportive environments for early-career researchers. This growing alignment between leadership and research development is essential for long-term sustainability and systemic change in African higher education. The commitment of our institutional leaders was clearly demonstrated during the CARTA VC and heads of research institutes' meeting in May this year. We appreciate the time and brain power invested in the discussions and look forward to making progress with the recommendations and institutional plans.

CARTA is currently engaged in a participatory and collaborative process of developing its new strategic plan. This new phase will innovatively shape our future direction, deepen our impact, reinforce institutional capacity, and renew our commitment to nurturing a new generation of African research leaders. As we chart this new chapter and review our strategic priorities and training curricula, I extend my heartfelt appreciation to all those who make CARTA's success possible. Your continued dedication and collaboration are the backbone of our progress and a testament to the shared vision that drives this consortium forward.



# A Warm Welcome to Cohort 11

By Gerald Omumbo, CARTA Communications Officer



In March 2025, CARTA welcomed 20 exceptional PhD fellows into its growing network of scholars. These early-career faculty members, drawn from leading African partner universities and research institutions, were selected through a rigorous and highly competitive process, standing out among 175 applicants.

Notable in this cohort is the collaboration between Makerere University in Uganda, a long-standing CARTA partner, and Somali National University (SNU) in Somalia. Through this partnership, two fellowships were awarded to SNU, marking a vital step toward building research capacity in regions with strong growth potential emerging from instability. With mentorship and institutional support from Makerere, the fellows are embarking on doctoral journeys that promise to amplify regional collaboration and impact.

Cohort 11 is supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation (Sida) and the Oak Foundation, with the latter supporting 3 of the 20

fellows. Oak has embarked in a new partnership with CARTA to nurture research talent in the area of prevention of sexual violence against children (PSVAC). We are excited about this partnership and look forward to a growing and strong collaboration with Oak.

Cohort 11 fellows' research areas tackle pressing challenges at the core of African communities. Their projects seek to produce evidence that is locally rooted, globally significant, and poised to improve outcomes and shape policy and action across the continent. Their work holds promise to strengthen health systems, advance equity, and unlock homegrown solutions for sustainable development. Learn more about these inspiring individuals below or visit our website.



**Adeola Williams**

*University of Ibadan, Nigeria*

**Research Focus**

Integrating oral care into mental health care



**Miles-Dei Olufeagba**

*University of Ibadan, Nigeria*

**Research Focus**

Genetic diversity, population structure, and molecular characteristics of hemoglobinopathies



**Elizabeth Abe**

*University of Ibadan, Nigeria*

**Research Focus**

Periodontal microbiome imbalances linked to adverse pregnancy outcomes



**Funmilola Wuraola**

*Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria*

**Research Focus**

Genetic testing of breast cancer patients



**Ochuko Orherhe**

*Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria*

**Research Focus**

Pharmacogenetics and modeling to optimize hydroxyurea treatment for sickle cell disease



**Winifrida Mponzi**

*Ifakara Health Institute, Tanzania*

**Research Focus**

Community-based financing of house improvement for malaria protection



**Christabellah Namugenyi**

*Makerere University, Uganda*

**Research Focus**

Service delivery and dual management of HIV and hypertension among older people



**Justine Okello**

*Makerere University, Uganda*

**Research Focus**

Rift Valley fever prevalence, virus characterization, and transmission patterns in Northern Uganda



**Amina Hussein**

*Somali National University, Somalia*

**Research Focus**

Kangaroo mother care on mother-baby bonding and satisfaction with newborn care





**Gallad Hassan**  
Somali National University, Somalia

**Research Focus**  
Integration of community-based surveillance with health facility systems in Somalia



**Fanuel Bickton**  
Kamuzu University of Health Sciences, Malawi

**Research Focus**  
Framework for exercise-based rehabilitation of people with HIV multimorbidity in Africa



**Cyril Chironda**  
Agincourt, South Africa

**Research Focus**  
Trends in chronic diseases, patterns of multiple illnesses, and related risk factors over the past decade



**Lydiah Wanjiru**  
University of Nairobi, Kenya

**Research Focus**  
Complex epidemiology of Rift Valley fever using a one health approach to assess virus strains, vector spread, sero-surveillance, and climate-related outbreak patterns



**Nichodemus Kamuti**  
University of Nairobi, Kenya

**Research Focus**  
Characterizing causes, tissue effects, and socio-economic impact of livestock myiasis in Kitui County, Kenya



**Mary Kubo**  
University of Nairobi, Kenya

**Research Focus**  
Early chronic kidney disease detection and management among hypertensive and diabetic patients



**Molly Mercy Jerono**  
Moi University, Kenya

**Research Focus**  
Cost and effectiveness of school-based sexual violence prevention programs in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya, to inform policy decisions



**Patani Mhango**  
Kamuzu University of Health Sciences, Malawi

**Research Focus**  
Improving child sexual abuse reporting in Blantyre by understanding barriers and co-designing local solutions



**Razak Mussa**  
Kamuzu University of Health Sciences, Malawi

**Research Focus**  
Community-based strategies to prevent sexual violence and improve protection and access to sexual and reproductive health and rights for street-connected children in urban Malawi



**Pierre Munezero**  
*University of Rwanda*

**Research Focus**

Genomic diversity and conserved vaccine targets of respiratory syncytial virus in patients with acute respiratory infections in Rwandan hospitals



**Solange Nikwigize**  
*University of Rwanda*

**Research Focus**

Risk factors of sexual violence among children in Rwanda

## Supporting Emerging Research Talent to Prevent Sexual Violence Against Children

By Ann Waithaka, Senior Communications Officer, APHRC, with contributions from Helena Duch, Head of Evidence and Solutions Sub-Program, Oak Foundation

Sexual violence against children (SVAC) is a global pandemic. One in five girls and one in seven boys experience sexual violence before the age of 18 (UNICEF, 2024) necessitating urgent, evidence-based responses. Yet in Africa, where the risks are equally high, reliable data remains scarce and the issue is often obscured by layers of stigma, underreporting, and weak systems. This knowledge gap has real consequences. Without localized evidence, interventions remain blunt and policy responses are delayed or ineffective.

For the Oak Foundation an organization with a long-standing commitment to establishing a safer, fairer, and more sustainable world, investing in African-led research is not just strategic, it is essential. The Foundation was formally established in 1983. Early grants were made in Denmark to organizations supporting single mothers and torture victims (1983) and in Zimbabwe to groups supporting vulnerable children and families, primarily at community levels (1984).

In the early 1990s, the organization increased the number of annual grants awarded and hired staff to

run substantive grant programs. Over the years, Oak's programming has expanded to encompass seven global priority areas including one that has become central to its mission: the Prevent Child Sexual Abuse Program.

"The Prevent Child Sexual Abuse Program was set up 20 years ago, because we believe that child sexual abuse is preventable," says Helena Duch, Oak Foundation's Head of Evidence and Solutions sub-program. This fact drives our commitment to end child sexual abuse online and offline. The program's support spans survivors, changemakers, and researchers, bringing together data, accountability, and leadership to accelerate action at all levels."

The Foundation's latest partnership with CARTA marks a bold step forward. By investing in doctoral training for researchers focused on Sexual Violence Against Children (SVAC)-related themes, Oak is supporting two urgent needs. One, to build a stronger evidence base to tackle SVAC, and two, to strengthen African-led research capacity to ensure solutions are relevant, grounded, and sustainable.



“While much of the existing evidence on SVAC prevention comes from high-income countries, the problem is global,” a representative of Oak shares. “To be effective, solutions must be contextually appropriate and locally led. That is why we are providing support for emerging African research talent, and CARTA offers an ideal platform to do so.”

As a long-standing leader in doctoral training and research capacity strengthening in Africa, CARTA equips early-career researchers with skills, expertise, and resources to conduct high-quality, policy-relevant research. The fellows benefit not only from rigorous academic support but from networks that foster peer learning, mentorship, and cross-country collaboration. This model matters.

Through this partnership, Oak is supporting three fellows in CARTA’s eleventh cohort: Molly Mercy Jerono, Razak Lewis Mussa, and Solange Nikwigize. These early career researchers are based in Kenya, Malawi, and Rwanda, respectively. Each of them brings lived experience, academic rigor, and a commitment to tackling SVAC in their communities.

Their research will explore critical yet under-studied areas, evaluating: cost-effectiveness of interventions, preventative community-based strategies, and risk factors of sexual violence among children.

Oak’s engagement goes beyond funding. It is an intentional, strategic investment to build a pipeline of researchers who can influence systems and inform policies.

The Foundation recognizes that to accelerate progress, data must be actionable, institutions must be strengthened, and leadership must be local. Oak Foundation is not just investing in individual PhDs, it is investing in the future leadership of the SVAC field and creating systems for sustainable, African-led solutions.

“To end sexual violence against children, we need vibrant research ecosystems that are rooted in the regions they serve,” Oak notes. “We have seen this in action.” For example, a parenting program evaluated by our partners in Tanzania showed a 67% reduction in sexual violence among girls. That is the power of evidence when it is locally generated and effectively applied.”

The challenge of SVAC is complex and far-reaching: political, social, and moral. It is often underreported due to stigma and fear, despite its staggering scale. However the public appetite for change is growing and the time to act is now. As Oak and CARTA look ahead, the hope is that this partnership can spark a broader movement. Oak Foundation is calling on the broader research and funding community to treat SVAC not as a niche concern but as a central development challenge. The Foundation’s message is clear: if you care about health, education, gender equality, or economic development, SVAC must be on your agenda.

By supporting African researchers to generate evidence, engage policymakers, and influence programming, Oak is working toward a future where all children can grow up safe, supported, and free from harm.



Picture Depicting Safe and Happy Children.  
Source: AI-generated

# Community Engagement Must be Part of the Journey to Research Leadership



**Adesola Olumide**

**CARTA cohort 3 graduate and Consultant Community**

**Physician at the Institute of Child Health College of Medicine University of Ibadan**

Community and Public Engagement (CPE) is gaining momentum as a vital component of ethical and impactful research, particularly within the African context. In this conversation with Topistar Karani, Communications Officer at APHRC, CARTA graduate Adesola shares her CPE journey, highlighting how genuine collaboration with communities enriches research outcomes, fosters trust and ensures relevance.

Drawing from her award-winning “Gown and Town” project, a community engagement project involving adolescent health stakeholders to identify enablers and barriers to senior secondary school retention in Oyo State, Nigeria, Adesola reflects on the power of participation, the importance of listening, and the need to move beyond tokenistic approaches to true partnership in research.

## **Q: What drew you to Community and Public Engagement as part of your research journey?**

As a community physician with a special interest in adolescent medicine and health, I recognize that community engagement is fundamental to both our work and research. I was drawn to CPE because I was interested in improving my competencies and acquiring additional knowledge about contemporary methods of working with community members to enhance health research and care. These elements are central to effective people-centric practice and meaningful health outcomes.

My clinical work and research involve engaging with key members of the community, including religious and social leaders, and community gatekeepers, to obtain community buy-in for health programmes, research projects and dissemination of study findings.

Through CARTA we receive foundational training on the relevance and practice of community engagement in research, but I felt that there was more to community engagement than what I knew at the time. I was eager to learn more and in 2019, when CARTA shared a CPE grant call from the Developing Excellence in Leadership, Training and Science in Africa (DELTAS Africa) initiative, I immediately jumped at the opportunity.

Applying for the grant and implementing the CPE project would serve as a casestudy that would be useful in sharing my learnings with others (colleagues and students).

Another motivation stemmed from the observation that terms like community engagement and community participation are often used loosely. In many cases, what is described as engagement comes across more as tokenism than genuine involvement. I wanted to deepen my understanding, ensure I approached CPE the right way, and be equipped to support others in doing the same. Ultimately, my goal is to contribute to building a strong community of researchers with meaningful experience in CPE.



**Q: Do you believe CPE is vital in the African research landscape? If yes, why?**

CPE in research means actively involving community members at every stage, from idea generation to implementation and dissemination. It is about building trust, gaining community buy-in, and improving our understanding of local issues. More importantly, it empowers communities to define problems, suggest solutions, and take part in improving their health outcomes.

CPE is vital in research, more so in the African context for several reasons. First, the community is an integral part of the African context. The village or community is often responsible for decisions about participation in research and utilization of research findings. It is important for researchers to understand how best to interact with the community as part of the process of undertaking community-based research.

In Africa, community members are often eager to participate in research. Unfortunately, communities have sometimes been taken advantage of by researchers, leading to mistrust. Researchers have a responsibility to maintain and respect the trust of the communities they work with. CPE plays a key role in achieving this by fostering open dialogue, ensuring mutual understanding, and involving communities meaningfully in the research process, from design to dissemination.

By collaborating closely with community members from the outset, defining research questions together, and engaging throughout the implementation, researchers gain a deeper appreciation of community members being the true custodians of local knowledge. Researchers need to approach this process with humility, willing to learn from the community rather than exploit it. Additionally, CPE ensures that research is people-centred, grounded in the priorities, knowledge, and experiences of those it aims to serve, and helps keep researchers accountable. It is a privilege for community members to allow researchers to enter their lives, ask them all manner of questions, and write about them. It is a privilege we must never take for granted.

**Q: What approaches did you use to ensure meaningful engagement with the community in the 'Gown and Town' project, and what lessons can be applied to enhance CPE?**

Implemented between 2019 and 2020, the project was intended to engage with both in- and out-of-school adolescents, school owners, teachers, and parents in Oyo state, Nigeria to identify locally relevant enablers and barriers to senior secondary school retention. Our aim was to offer solutions to promote retention and provide adolescents with the opportunity to present these findings at a stakeholders forum called "Education is a Vaccine".

We used three main approaches: a data walk activity with 15 teachers and adolescents, community mapping with 12 teachers, and a photovoice exercise involving 17 in-and out-of-school adolescents. Photovoice participants subsequently presented their findings with the aid of the pictures taken at the stakeholders forum with Oyo state Ministry of Education officials, school owners, teachers, parents, researchers, and adolescents. In addition to pictures, community maps developed by teachers were also displayed at the stakeholders' dialogue. This helped draw attention to the need for stakeholders to intensify efforts to encourage retention and minimize school dropouts.

**Q: What are some of the common challenges African researchers face when trying to implement CPE, and what kind of support makes a difference?**

One of the major challenges I have observed is the inadequate understanding of what CPE truly entails and how to implement it effectively. There are numerous articles and opinions about CPE, but not all of them are accurate or universally applicable. If an early-career researcher (ECR) were to rely on these flawed examples, they might end up adopting misguided approaches and miss the core purpose of genuine engagement.

Another difficulty lies in the scarcity of well-documented CPE initiatives from the African context. I think researchers who have successfully implemented CPE in Africa should be supported to document and disseminate the process and outcomes.

They can publish in regular journals but other avenues should also be utilized. This would provide much-needed guidance for ECRs seeking practical and context-relevant examples to inform their work.

Meaningful CPE requires dedicated resources, yet with current budgetary constraints, ECRs are often forced to prioritize core research activities and allocate little or nothing to CPE. CPE experts in Africa should come together, review various projects, and determine what percentage of the total research funds should be allocated to CPE for this to be meaningful. This kind of framework already exists for monitoring and evaluation, and the same can be done for CPE. This way, funders and ECRs view CPE as an integral part of the research and not an optional add-on if there are leftover funds.

**Q. How can we better evaluate or demonstrate the impact of CPE in research, especially in contexts where outcomes may be intangible or long-term?**

While numbers are great, the biggest impact is not always in numbers but in individual success stories. In the Gown and Town study, I had objective indicators that measured the immediate effects of the project but these have not been as successful at demonstrating impact as the stories have been.

Anyone who has worked with out-of-school young people appreciates how difficult it is for a student who has dropped out of school for as many as three years to return and, not just return, but to then succeed and be made a school prefect. This is a real and amazing impact. Recently, I learned that another one of the out-of-school young males who participated in the study had subsequently enrolled as an apprentice tailor, completed three years of training, and was now working as a tailor.

**Q. What opportunities do you see for strengthening the culture and practice of CPE across the CARTA network and African institutions more broadly?**

CARTA is equipping fellows to embed CPE into their research through several avenues. For instance, advertising CPE grants within the CARTA network has created awareness and opportunities. The program has also been organizing webinars where fellows who have implemented CPE share their experiences. These peer-learning platforms help demystify the concept and show practical ways to integrate CPE into research.

To further strengthen the culture and practice of CPE, I believe more sessions on CPE should be formally incorporated into Joint Advanced Seminar (JAS) 1 and 2. It would also be beneficial to involve representatives from organizations that fund CPE and have them facilitate sessions and participate in panels. This would not only build awareness but also highlight funding pathways.

Fellows should be encouraged to include CPE in their proposals. A powerful way to learn is by doing. Integrating CPE at the proposal stage provides a foundation for fellows to build skills and confidence in community engagement, even before completing their PhD. To support this, dedicated funding for CPE could be added to the existing research support grants, with fellows required to apply separately by submitting a clear CPE plan. This would necessitate dedicated CPE training sessions during the Joint Advanced Seminars to equip fellows with the knowledge and tools to develop strong, fundable plans.

For the broader network of African institutions, workshops on CPE during major conferences would be an effective way to raise visibility. The provision of small CPE grants, like the one I received, is also immensely beneficial. Finally, presentations and resources from CPE trainings and workshops could be made available on the CARTA website to support ongoing learning.



# CARTA Graduates Leading Institutional Transformation and Impact

By Gerald Omumbo, CARTA Communications Officer

As part of efforts to strengthen Africa's research and institutional capacity, CARTA supports faculty members of African universities and research institutes to pursue quality doctoral training locally. This investment in staff development helps partner institutions build and retain a critical mass of skilled researchers and academic leaders. Its holistic model integrates doctoral and postdoctoral training, leadership development, and strategic partnerships to embed sustainable research capacity within institutions. This comprehensive approach strengthens core institutional functions such as research, teaching, grant writing, and academic leadership.

Gains from these efforts are translating into tangible institutional impact, with nearly 100 CARTA fellows promoted or appointed to senior academic, research, and leadership positions across partner institutions. Notably, these advancements are evenly split between men and women, signaling CARTA's contribution to gender equity in academic leadership and reinforcing its role as a transformative force in African higher education.

## Rising to Institutional Leadership

CARTA fellows are increasingly stepping into roles that influence institutional direction, shape national policies, and contribute to global scholarship. Their stories offer compelling evidence of how sustained investment in individual capacity leads to systemic change.

Kudus Adebayo, at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria, exemplifies this transformation. He holds several influential roles that reflect both his academic expertise and growing leadership in research and institutional development. Within his institution, he is a Sub-Dean at the Institute of African Studies and represents it at the postgraduate college. He also leads research coordination at the newly established TETFund Centre of Excellence for Diaspora Studies at the university. Beyond his institution, Kudus is enhancing African academia by serving on the editorial board of the African Humanities Programme (AHP) Publication Series.

Nicole De Wet-Billings, serves as Senior Director of Academic Affairs at the University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa. She has also served as the Assistant Dean for Postgraduate Studies, Faculty of Humanities, and Acting Head of the School of Social Sciences. Drawing on her expertise in youth and youth development, Nicole is helping shape policies and academic support systems that centre student needs, particularly for young and underrepresented scholars, making the University a more responsive and inclusive institution.

From Kenya, Olivia Osiro has become a key figure in research ethics, serving as a member of Kenyatta National Hospital-University of Nairobi Ethics and Research Committee (KNH-UoN ERC). Her contributions help uphold research integrity and ethical oversight in national health and academic institutions.

Cheikh Faye currently heads the African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC) West Africa Office in Senegal. He also leads the Countdown 2030 Initiative at APHRC, a multi-institution collaborative tracking progress that aims to generate evidence to foster advocacy and accountability for women's, children's, and adolescents' health.

In Tanzania, Emmanuel Kaindoa heads the Environmental Health and Ecological Sciences (EHES) Department at Ifakara Health Institute, where he is driving interdisciplinary research and mentoring emerging scientists. As an adjunct faculty member at the Nelson Mandela African Institution of Science and Technology (NM-AIST), he plays a key role in shaping postgraduate research by supporting students to design impactful studies, align research with national health priorities, and secure competitive funding.

## Influencing policy

Appointed in early 2024 as Director General of Nigeria's National Agency for the Control of AIDS (NACA), Temitope Ilori, University of Ibadan, is leading a transformative agenda to strengthen the country's

HIV/AIDS response. She secured increased national budgetary allocation for HIV programs, introduced key performance indicators (KPIs) to improve accountability, and enhanced staff capacity through training in infection prevention, emergency response, manuscript writing, and international knowledge exchange. Temitope has also steered the launch of the Adolescent and Young People's Strategy to empower youth in the HIV response. With partner support, her leadership also bolstered diagnostic infrastructure and laboratory-based surveillance, advancing NACA's preparedness for both HIV and broader public health emergencies.

Another fellow, Stephen Wandera from Makerere University is a member of the World Health Organization Technical Advisory Group on the UN Decade of Healthy Aging. He is involved in shaping the development and standardization of monitoring frameworks and indicators used by nations to report progress on aging-related policies, health systems, and social care initiatives. His colleague, Frederick Oporia, is a member of the WHO Technical Advisory Group on Drowning Prevention. He has contributed to the development of the first-ever Global Status Report on Drowning Prevention. He also contributed to the development of Uganda's national drowning prevention strategy. His role supported policy engagement with the Ministry of Water and Environment and helped shape a multi-sectoral national response to water safety in Uganda.

Anne Khisa, in partnership with the Centre for Capacity Research at the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, developed new guidelines on improving research capacity, strengthening evaluation practice in Sub-Saharan Africa.

### **Securing Major Grants**

One of the tangible outcomes of CARTA's approach is our fellows' demonstrated ability to secure competitive external research grants, signaling both their research excellence and the enduring impact of CARTA's investments. Cumulatively, CARTA fellows have collectively mobilized an estimated **USD 45 million** in external research grants.

This funding is channeled into solution-driven research, transforming lives and systems. For example, at Makerere University, Charles Kato has secured over USD 5 million in grants to support research projects, including the establishment of a biosafety level 2 laboratory focused on infectious disease research and diagnostics. He also leads **The Emerging and Re-emerging Infectious Diseases (TERID) Research Hub**, valued at about USD 2 million, and one of the cornerstones of Makerere's research infrastructure. The hub aims to tackle the growing threat of infectious diseases in East Africa through research, training, and innovation.

In Kenya, Judith Mangeni has secured over USD 140,000 to support a five-year study evaluating the real-world impact of next-generation insecticidal nets for malaria control in rural Western Kenya. Her work contributes significantly to malaria control efforts by providing evidence to inform vector control strategies and policy in high-transmission settings.

### **Institutional Commitment**

The examples above are just a snapshot of the many ways CARTA graduates are driving institutional transformation and impact. Across Africa, more of our fellows are making significant strides in research, regional thought leadership, and global influencers. As they rise, they bring others with them, mentoring peers, strengthening research environments, and shaping the future of science and policy across the continent.

At the heart of these achievements is CARTA's unwavering commitment to institutional transformation. By fostering long-term partnerships, supporting evidence-informed leadership, and aligning training with institutional priorities, CARTA ensures that its investments not only elevate individual researchers but also strengthen the systems they work within. This steadfast focus on building resilient, research-driven institutions remains central to CARTA's vision.



# Influencing Policy and Practice in African Institutions

By Cavens Kithinji, CARTA Program Coordinator

CARTA is strengthening African universities by embedding proven, sustainable training models and enhancing institutional systems and processes. Through the integration of innovative and tested research training and support interventions into partner institutions' structures, CARTA ensures long-term impact on the research ecosystem. These institutional investments are designed to benefit generations of African scholars by creating research-conducive environments where they can thrive and address pressing development challenges. By mainstreaming best practices into standard university and research institutions' operations, CARTA ensures that research training and management interventions are not a one-off but become integral to the routine functioning of its partner institutions.

For example, CARTA's Joint Advanced Seminars (JASes), a structured, multidisciplinary PhD training series, have been formally embedded into doctoral curricula at institutions such as Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) and the University of Rwanda. Makerere University has adopted CARTA's pedagogical approach in cross-cutting, compulsory doctoral research courses, while the University of the Witwatersrand has integrated a foundational module,

based on CARTA's curriculum, into its PhD orientation program. At the University of Ibadan, key JAS components have been adapted into their Doctoral Academy program, reinforcing academic rigor. These transformations go beyond academic practice, they represent institutional policy shifts, now embedded in the institutions through senate-approved curricula and postgraduate handbooks.

CARTA has catalyzed other systemic reforms within partner institutions. Supervisor training programs have been cascaded across most African partner institutions. This has been recognized as essential for ensuring high-quality and accountable doctoral supervision processes. Universities that have been running these workshops are developing plans to institutionalize this training across departments, with elements incorporated into official supervision guidelines. To ensure university systems holistically support research and research training, CARTA has convened forums for academic, administrative, IT, laboratory, finance, library, and grants management staff to collectively examine and improve institutional efficiency in research and research training support.



*Participants during a Supervisors Workshop at the University of Nairobi held on February 4 - 6, 2025*

These capacity-strengthening efforts have been embraced by partner institutions, with some, like Moi University, Makerere University, University of Ibadan and OAU integrating them into annual departmental refresher trainings.

Another impactful intervention is CARTA's grant proposal writing training, which equips early career researchers with skills to develop competitive grant proposals. Offered as a way to enhance graduates research and research readership career, this has been widely appreciated and, in many cases, institutionalized, not only for PhD graduates but also faculty members seeking to enhance their research funding capacity. For instance, the University of Nairobi has developed institutional grant proposal guidelines based on CARTA's training model, while institutions such as Moi University, the University of Ibadan, and Ifakara Health Institute have conducted similar training sessions, contributing to a growing culture of research excellence across the continent.

These efforts are driven by faculty and non-academic members of the partner institutions. Over the past two and a half years, more than **1,319** university staff, including supervisors, research managers, administrators and other professionals involved in research management and postgraduate training, have been trained.

The institutionalization of CARTA interventions is a direct result of the combined efforts of trained Trainers of Trainers (ToTs), CARTA facilitators, and institutional focal persons.

Together, they have driven change by promoting awareness of the interventions across all university levels and creating engagement forums to foster institutional buy-in. While the process of integrating these interventions into formal university systems can be gradual, there is a steady and growing acceptance. This is largely because the interventions address real and persistent gaps in research and research training within partner institutions.

#### **CARTA Trainings & ToTs**

##### **CARTA Joint Trainings**

Institutional support: 681

Supervisory skills: 263

##### **CARTA Joint ToTs**

Institutional support: 51

Supervisory skills: 82

PhD training: 51

Grant writing : 23

#### **Institutional Trainings & ToTs**

##### **Institutional Trainings**

Institutional support: 123

Supervisory skills: 620

PhD students: 506

Grant writing: 124

##### **Institutional ToTs**

Institutional support: 129

Supervisory skills: 86

Facilitation of PhD training: 45

Grant writing: 101



The success of CARTA's model is further advanced through institutional mentorship and Inter-university collaboration. For instance,

- Makerere University is mentoring the Somali National University;
- Moi University has introduced PhD supervision training at the University of Eldoret;
- Kamuzu University of Health Sciences has extended CARTA interventions to all public universities in Malawi;
- Ifakara Health Institute has trained staff of the Nelson Mandela University and;
- The University of Ibadan is training PhD fellows of Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology.

The mentorship endeavours have further built institutional capacity and nurtured a culture of collaboration and peer support across borders that is at the core of CARTA's long-standing partnership.

Moreover, they have fast-tracked the adoption of effective models while allowing room for context-specific adaptation and policy development. The cascading effect of institutional mentoring is a testament to CARTA's vision of self-sustaining research systems across Africa.

By facilitating institutional ownership, cross-learning, and embedded change, CARTA is ensuring that its impact outlives its own existence. Universities are going beyond producing globally competitive researchers to becoming centers of sustainable knowledge generation, stronger governance, and leadership in doctoral education.

CARTA's work reflects a shift in African research capacity strengthening, from external, donor-driven interventions to home-grown, African-led transformation. Through its focus on shaping institutional policies and practices, CARTA is laying the groundwork for resilient research ecosystems that will benefit generations of African scholars.

## Deepening Commitment to Institutionalization and Research Excellence

By Gerald Omumbo, CARTA Communications Officer

Across Africa, the call to reimagine the continent's universities as hubs of globally competitive research is gaining ground. Building such institutions requires more than individual brilliance; it demands systems that nurture talent, leadership that invests in local solutions, and environments where research can thrive. It also calls for long-term commitment to strengthening the very foundations of doctoral training and institutional capacity.

CARTA responds to this need through a collaborative model that strengthens both people and institutions. It supports early career researchers to pursue high-quality doctoral training locally, while helping partner universities and research institutions build the systems, structures, and environments that make such training effective and sustainable. The goal is not only to develop individual scholars, but to embed a culture of research excellence across African institutions,

one that is driven by local leadership and grounded in Africa's development priorities.

That transformation depends heavily on institutional leadership. From the outset, CARTA has recognized that the active involvement of the Vice Chancellors and equivalent leaders in research institutions is crucial to achieving its objectives. Their role in shaping policy, allocating resources, and championing research-supportive systems is central to sustaining the program's impact. In line with this, CARTA holds the Vice Chancellors and Heads of Research Institutions Meeting every two years for strategic discussions, resolutions and progress review. This year, the program held the 7th convening on May 28, 2025. The virtual forum brought together executive leaders from partner universities, research institutions, funders, and CARTA focal persons.

The meeting was a strategic touchpoint for reflecting on progress, aligning institutional efforts, and reimagining CARTA's future within a dynamic and often challenging research landscape.

This year's meeting focused on reviewing program achievements, assessing challenges, and identifying actionable strategies to secure CARTA's future. Some of the positive impacts of CARTA's interventions highlighted at the meeting include steady growth in doctoral and postdoctoral support, increased peer-reviewed outputs by fellows, and expanding institutional ownership of CARTA approaches.

Additionally, several institutions reported mainstreaming JASes, adapting CARTA curricula for broader PhD training, and leveraging CARTA-trained faculty for internal research capacity building. In particular, new partnerships, such as the one with Somali National University, signal CARTA's ability to adapt and scale within diverse institutional contexts.

Amid these achievements, the partners reflected candidly on persistent challenges, including enrollment bottlenecks, funds disbursement delays, and the global decline in Official Development Assistance (ODA).

With these realities in mind, the meeting emphasized the need for innovative and collective fundraising strategies, alongside increased internal investment from institutions.



Through collaborative breakout sessions, partner institutions affirmed their commitment to positioning CARTA as a core element of their research and postgraduate strategies. Universities shared plans to institutionalize training and mentorship models, expand postdoctoral pathways, allocate budget lines for research development, and integrate CARTA frameworks into wider grant applications. These insights culminated in a series of concrete resolutions that will guide consortium-wide action.

### Key Resolutions from the 7th Vice Chancellors and Heads of Research Institutions Meeting



#### Strengthen Institutional Support:

Partner institutions committed to increasing internal financial and structural support for CARTA activities, including fellow support, training, and mentorship programs.



#### Track Fellow Progress and Postdoctoral Transitions:

Partners to enhance systems for monitoring doctoral completion and post-doctoral integration, reinforcing institutional responsibility in fellow development.



#### Institutionalize CARTA Innovations:

The consortium to scale key innovations, including JAS curricula, mentorship structures, and grant writing workshops across faculties and programs.



#### Integrate CARTA into Grant Proposals:

Institutions agreed to embed CARTA-trained personnel, methods, and curricula into broader research funding proposals to strengthen competitiveness and institutional sustainability.



#### Collaborative Fundraising:

CARTA and partners to jointly pursue fundraising opportunities, sharing intelligence and aligning proposals with CARTA's proven training model.



#### Promote Knowledge Sharing:

CARTA and its partners to document and disseminate best practices in institutionalization and sustainability to support replication and learning across the network.

## Advancing Governance and Strategy

On May 26 - 27, 2025, the CARTA Board of Management (BoM) held a two-day engagement aimed at strengthening the governance capacity of both new and continuing members. The convening focused on key governance issues, guided by the 2025 board appraisal process and the 2024 governance assessment. In addition, the Board worked to align CARTA's strategic priorities for the next phase with insights gathered from stakeholder consultations which started early in 2024. This engagement reflects CARTA's ongoing commitment to institutional learning and governance excellence.

During the BoM meeting, members deliberated on key governance matters. The discussions were critical in

steering CARTA forward as the program continues to strengthen African universities and nurture a pipeline of multidisciplinary researchers equipped to address the continent's pressing development challenges.

The strategic planning session capped the engagement, providing a platform for the Board to engage with emerging priorities and ideas generated by CARTA stakeholders for the program's next phase. Facilitated by the program co-Director and Executive Director of the African Population and Health Research Center, Catherine Kyobutungi, the session examined strategic cause-and-effect relationships and culminated in the drafting of initial strategy statements, laying the foundation for CARTA's 2026 - 2030 strategy.



CARTA Board of Management meeting, Nairobi-Kenya, May 2025

## Fellows News

### PhD Completions, Promotions and Appointments

The January – June 2025 period marked notable milestones with seven fellows completing their PhD, an international appointment, and two promotions to professorship. These achievements reflect the growing impact of CARTA-trained researchers in academia and global health leadership.

### PhD Completions



**Abigail Dreyer**  
**Cohort 7, University of the Witwatersrand**

**Thesis:** A comparative study of decentralised training platforms in undergraduate medical education at four South African universities



**Catherine Kafu**  
**Cohort 8, Moi University**

**Thesis:** Exploring media framing of abortion content on Kenyan Television: A focus on adolescents





**Emmanuel Nzabonimana**

*Cohort 10, University of Rwanda*

**Thesis:** Oral Health in Nyarugenge District of Rwanda: The Role of Mobile Application in Oral Health Education



**Farlane Lindiwe**

*Cohort 8, University of the Witwatersrand*

**Thesis:** Implementation evaluation of the Paediatric and Adolescent Scale-up Plan for 90-90-90 HIV outcomes in the inner City of Johannesburg, South Africa



**Lilian Njagi**

*Cohort 9, University of Nairobi*

**Thesis:** Latent Tuberculosis Infection among People Living with HIV in a Kenyan Population: Prevalence, Determinants, and Objective Treatment Monitoring Methods during Isoniazid Use



**Mary Ugalahi**

*Cohort 10, University of Ibadan*

**Thesis:** Presentation and Pathways to Care of Children with Blinding Eye Diseases to a Child Eye Health Tertiary Facility in Ibadan, Nigeria.



**Oluwatosin Eunice**

*Cohort 10, Obafemi Awolowo University*

**Thesis:** Sleep characteristics among In-school Adolescents in South-Western Nigeria: Pattern, Determinants and Association with Cardiometabolic risk factors

## Appointment



**Frederick Oporia**

*Cohort 10, Makerere University*

Appointed to the World Health Organisation(WHO) Global Alliance for Drowning Prevention in June 2025. Formed in 2023 in response to a UN General Assembly resolution, the Alliance brings together ten international experts to guide global and country-level action on drowning prevention. Its mandate includes drafting evidence-based guidelines for all UN Member States.

## Promotions



**Ijarotimi Omotade**

*Cohort 10, Obafemi Awolowo University*

Promoted to Professor in the Department of Obstetrics, Gynaecology, and Perinatology.

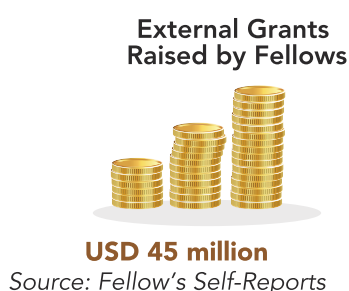
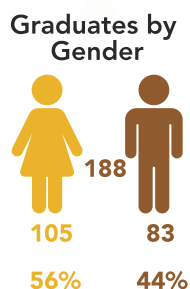
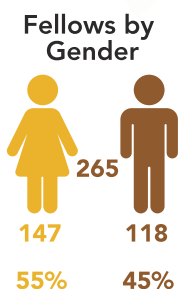


**Joshua Akinyemi**

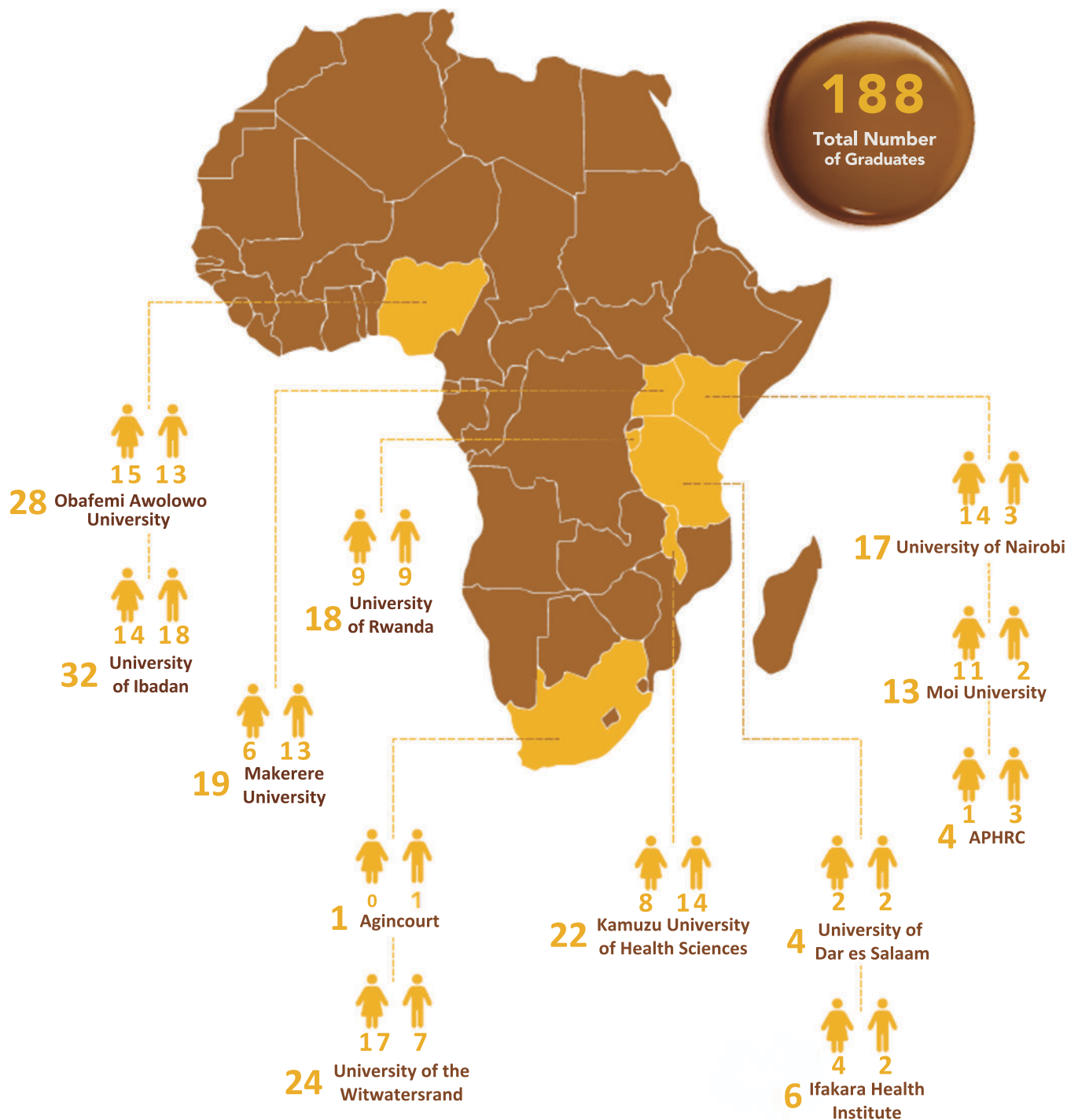
*Cohort 1, University of Ibadan*

Promoted to Professor in the Department of Epidemiology and Medical Statistics

## Early Career Researchers



## Graduates by Institutions



## Editorial Team

Gerald Omumbo | Ann Waithaka | Cavens Kithinji | Topistar Karani  
Marta Vicente-Crespo | Florah Karimi | Naomi Njenga | Angeline Wairegi | Deborah-Fay Ndhlovu

## Contact Us

Consortium for Advanced Research Training in Africa

Housed at:

African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC)

APHRC Campus, Kirawa Road (off Peponi Road)

P.O. Box 10787-00100, Nairobi, Kenya

Telephone: +254 (20) 400 1000, 266 2244, or 266 2255

Mobile: +254 722 205 933, 733 410 102

E-mail: [cartaenquiries@aphrc.org](mailto:cartaenquiries@aphrc.org)

Website: [www.cartafrica.org](http://www.cartafrica.org)



CARTAfrica



**African Population and  
Health Research Center**  
Transforming lives in Africa through research.

UNIVERSITY OF THE  
WITWATERSRAND,  
JOHANNESBURG



**100** 1922  
2022