

# CARTA News

The Newsletter of the Consortium for Advanced Research Training in Africa



## GENDER INCLUSION

### What's inside this issue?

Inclusivity and flexibility aren't just great for women, but they are also great for science!

- 02** Gender inclusion: Our CARTA story
- 06** Research-intensive universities in Africa? A model of how to build them
- 08 - 09** Photo Gallery
- 11** CARTA Alumni watch

# Our CARTA story of gender inclusivity

By Eunice Kilonzo, CARTA communications officer

Gender norms and the intersection of academic and the biological timelines have prevented women from engaging in higher education in a substantive way, meaning that the number of women in science is lower than it could be.

Their slow and uneven entry means women continue to be under represented in research and development. It is thus not surprising that statistics from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics shows only three in ten scientists in Sub-Saharan Africa are women.

This limits their scope and opportunity to contribute to innovation on an equal basis with men. It may also affect the overall quality of research given that the different perspectives women bring to any project is missing. Moreover, with few women occupying decision making positions in academic and research institutions, their scientific role in prioritizing research agendas is severely circumscribed, research shows.

CARTA has developed a gender policy to begin to provide an answer to meet that challenge and redress some of the imbalance in how women are represented in science. At the core of the anchor of the African Population and Health Research Center capacity strengthening division is CARTA's gender policy which lends itself more to its female fellows who can take up the rigours of PhD course work alongside the biological timelines that often coincides with academic progress.

From its inception nine years ago, CARTA aims to ensure that access to rights or opportunities in higher education and research in Africa is unaffected by gender. There are benefits for this: gender equality contributes positively to economic efficiency and development. This is central to CARTA's mission to build a critical mass of research leaders able to lead world-class multidisciplinary research that makes a positive impact on population and wellbeing.

The consortium set up several interventions for doctoral research more equitable and recognizing the inhibitors that have traditionally prevented women from getting involved in

higher education. This is guided by the CARTA Position on Gender Equity which recognizes the importance of gender for development and that men and women experience barriers and opportunities differently. CARTA is proactive in identifying and addressing gender-related issues that may impede the progress of CARTA fellows. The cut off age for women is higher at 45 years compared to men at 40 years. This is mindful to the fact that socially constructed gender norms and roles have kept women away from higher educational institutions.

We are proud of what we have been able to achieve. We have recruited and enrolled more than 200 fellows since 2010 – all of whom were recruited from the staff of the eight African consortium member institutions. Of these 49 per cent are women.

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CARTA has mandatory month-long residential Joint Advanced Seminars (JAS) and workshops for all its fellows. This is where it gets interesting. CARTA provides airfare, travel insurance, accommodation and meals for breastfeeding mothers (alongside their baby minders) and fellows with infants (14 months and under).

This allows these fellows to actively participate in the workshops and meet their milestones in their doctoral/postdoctoral studies. So far, 15 fellows have benefited from this facility. Such

as Onyinlola Funmilola Folasade, Cohort Seven fellow from Obafemi Awolowo University in Nigeria said: *"I remember how I prayed and worked hard to win the competitive CARTA PhD fellowship. Fortunately, I was selected and I was supposed to attend the month-long Joint Advanced Seminar 1 at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda in 2017. My excitement however, turned into worry; I had just had a baby, what would I do? Would I go to Kampala? As if they had anticipated my concern, I received an email from the secretariat inviting me and other breastfeeding fellows to submit names and passport biodata for both their babies and caregivers. A pleasant surprise: CARTA would pay for their flight and upkeep while at Makerere University!"*

An external independent evaluation in 2015 of CARTA by Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) indicated that it is a successful model in both supporting women researchers and in promoting an appreciation of gender as a determinant of health and development. CARTA fellows and researchers, the evaluation shows, considered gendered issues within their own research and practice. It is also reflected in the training of women doctoral fellows and mentoring programs. These practical interventions have seen our fellows attract and win internationally competitive research grants, between 2017 and 2018 female fellows won competitive grants worth nearly \$1.5 million half.

Inclusivity and flexibility aren't just great for women, but are also great for science! The number/diversity of people contributing to the body of knowledge is an asset for a well-rounded corpus, because it means that research questions are being framed based on interest, knowledge and context – which can only lead to a more comprehensive/holistic understanding of key challenges in population health and wellbeing.

# Gender equity in doctoral research

By Alphonsus Neba, Deputy Program Director- Research Support Management, The African Academy of Sciences

That the continent needs to nurture the next generation of globally competitive health research leaders and scientists, is not in question. A critical mass of new scientists and leaders will drive a health research agenda that is relevant to their local communities, and set health research strategies, policies and priorities in pursuit of Africa's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Developing Excellence in Leadership, Training and Science (DELTA) Africa supports Africa-led development of world-class researchers and scientific leaders. This includes 11 collaborative teams such as CARTA, all of which are headed by world class researchers and span 54 institutions across the continent. Our support ensures investment in research infrastructure and offers training fellowships and mentorship.

At the core of DELTA Africa is recognition of the need for gender diversity, the important role women already play in science, and the even greater contributions they can make if adequately supported and enabled. We recognize that women face gender-related challenges that can limit or exclude their full participation in research careers. These limitations can sometimes lead to the false narrative that they are less competent, thereby compounding barriers to achieving their potential.

Enabling inclusivity and equity of the genders brings a diversity and richness of views to the scientific and health research discourse, because globally they confront a disproportionate burden of health and other social challenges. DELTA Africa is determined to promote robust gender diversity interventions to leverage the impact of its program, and are proud –of our overall gender ratio of 475 women: 517 men among Masters and PhDs students. Of the 78 DELTA Africa-sponsored CARTA fellows, 49 are women.

Gender mainstreaming and diversity, therefore, is integral to all the programs of The African Academy of Sciences (The AAS). DELTA Africa has incorporated these priorities into a framework of risk profiling and management, monitoring and evaluation, and delivering support to key partners and stakeholders, including grantees. Gender diversity is reflected in program design and communications to reinforce the important role of women and other minority groups in science. Applicants are required to demonstrate their intended strategies to achieve gender and diversity balance. Moreover, the Academy offers training for management of gender and diversity hiring and gender-sensitive human resource policies such as maternity and paternity leave, and re-entry grants. These interventions are vigorously pursued by management before, during, and after the awarding of grants; milestones are monitored and tracked to ensure compliance.

Targeted training is offered to women applicants to improve their ability to write effective grant applications, and women participants with small children have access to onsite childcare to enable conference and workshop attendance. Other interventions include incorporation into symposia agenda discussions of gender and diversity issues, and consideration of unconscious bias in supervision and mentorship



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training. These approaches recognize the essential role that supervisors and mentors play in influencing and building the careers of women and other minority groups in science. DELTA Africa is committed to continuing to explore and implement innovative ways to improve its diversity for the benefit of science.

DELTA Africa is a program of The African Academy of Sciences (The AAS) being implemented with the support of Wellcome and DFID to train and develop world class researchers and research leaders in Africa. At The AAS, DELTA Africa is implemented through the Alliance for Accelerating Excellence in Science in Africa (AESA): a funding and agenda-setting platform of The AAS and the African Union Development Agency (formerly NEPAD).

# What has been the experience



**Oluwaseun Taiwo Esan,**  
**Cohort Eight Fellow from Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria**

CARTA favors gender equality and I am a beneficiary. I had accepted that perhaps I would not be able to pursue my ambition of a PhD because I had children, including a baby well beyond the age of 40. But because of the CARTA model, I have been able to develop my voice in the world of research. And being part of CARTA has also helped me amplify that voice, and join a chorus of other women research leaders. Together we are able to join forces to mentor young women and others who may not have access to such an opportunity. I am exceptionally proud of being affiliated with some of the other CARTA fellows, who are breaking new ground such as Folusho Balogun (Cohort Five from the University of Ibadan) who is an emerging authority around cervical cancer research. This is very encouraging. Together we are ensuring that women greater visibility and representativeness in decision making in the health sector.

**Chimwemwe Kwanjo Banda,**  
**Cohort Six Fellow from University of Malawi**

As a young woman, I have multiple roles that I have to juggle, including family, career and social responsibilities. I have faced a lot of judgment at the personal and societal levels, from people questioning why I am choosing to advance my studies instead of focusing on my family and raising kids. There was really an internal battle for me as to whether to pursue a PhD. When I responded to the CARTA call for fellowship, I was intrigued that the recruitment age for women was higher; to me it spoke to the real interest that the consortium has in ensuring that women can benefit from opportunities in higher education, while also pursuing their personal ambitions of family and motherhood.



**CARTA**



**51%**  
men

**Olufunmilola Abimbola Ogun,**  
**Cohort Seven from the University of Ibadan**

I am a physician, a surgeon, a teacher, a researcher, a mother, a wife, a daughter, a sister, a counsellor, a homemaker, a community leader and a friend. These are only a few of the roles that define me as a professional woman in academics in the Africa of today. The African woman has traditionally borne the major burden of nurturing the 'bedrock of society' from within the confines of her home and the benefit of receiving any form of education outside the home is only a recent privilege for women in many parts of our continent. While I enjoyed the privilege of early education and the opportunity to attend some of the best schools within my community, pursuing post-graduate and professional specialist training has not come easy. It has taken sacrifice on the part of virtually everyone in my family to see me through. Through the CARTA program, I have had an opportunity to meet several researchers from universities across Africa. Moreover, as a CARTA fellow, I enjoy various forms of support within my training institution as well as opportunities to visit other universities to attend training workshops aimed at building advanced research skills.



# of our women researchers?

## **Shepelo Getrude Peter, Cohort Eight Fellow from the University of Nairobi**

It was nearly two years of trying to get funding for my PhD and every opportunity that came my way required that I leave my home country and register in another country. I could not take up these opportunities as I had young babies to take care of. Apparently, to the opinion of my male counterparts, that was not a genuine reason for not taking up those opportunities and this put a lot of pressure on me. It was not until I came across the CARTA PhD fellowship advert. I thought to myself: truly someone is concerned about female researchers and the unique challenge they face of balancing between family and doctoral studies. There are a lot of expectations of women in work and academia that they should just deal with the logistics of parenting and not acknowledge what it means to be both a mother and a scholar. This fellowship allows me to study from my home institution. This kind of flexibility is an important motivator for women researchers to pursue doctoral studies. I have only to look at my own cohort: we are 16 women out of 26 fellows. This shows that being responsive to the particular needs of women can reap benefits not only for the women themselves but also for science as a whole.



## numbers



**49%**  
women

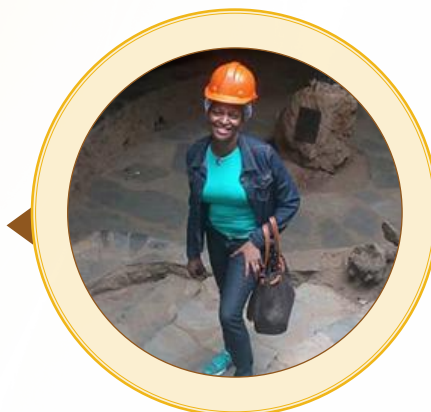


## **Kellen Joyce Karimi, Cohort Seven from the University of Nairobi**

Support in research and training through fellowship and mentorship are fundamental to the development of Africa-led initiatives for improving health. The opportunity to pursue my PhD research through the CARTA fellowship was a dream come true. The cut off of age 45 for eligibility for the CARTA fellowship for women acknowledges the competing needs we have. As women, we are tasked with the larger responsibility of raising a family. But through CARTA, that responsibility is balanced against the value of women in research leadership, and supported. So women who are attending the month-long Joint Advanced Seminars (JAS) are able to bring their babies and caregivers with them, so they do not miss out on the valuable learning.

## **Macellina Yinyinade Ijadunola, Cohort Six Fellow from Obafemi Awolowo University**

Three years ago, I told someone that I wanted to go back to school, to enrol in a PhD program. My friend said, "You are over age 40! And a medical doctor with a fellowship? Your bread has enough butter...you are looking for strawberry jam; no one will offer you a PhD scholarship." He was wrong. Being accepted into CARTA has offered me more than a PhD. This fellowship has provided the foundation and support for me to achieve my desire at an age where, offers don't get to you. CARTA's gender-responsiveness policy is second to none in Africa. My doctoral journey at CARTA is unique and different. Most importantly it is not a lonely journey; we walk this road with other women academics and draw on each other's experiences of balancing schooling, work and home. I think our male colleagues also become more gender-sensitive and responsive. We grow together and achieve together, encourage each other, offer helping hands, share data and information. We are bound by a common goal: to graduate and succeed.



# Research-intensive universities in Africa? A model of how to build them

By Sharon Fonn, CARTA Co-Director

Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for 13.5 percent of the global population but less than 1 percent of global research output. In 2008, the entire African continent produced 27,000 published papers: the same number as The Netherlands.

There are some areas of improvement. A 2014 World Bank study showed that the quantity and quality of sub-Saharan Africa's research had increased substantially in the previous 20 years. It more than doubled its annual research output from 2003 to 2012. And it increased its share of global research during the same period. But Africa's overall research record remains poor. Part of the problem is that the continent has failed to meaningfully invest in research and development, contributing less than 1 percent of the global budget to this sector. Nor do African governments spend a significant percentage of their gross domestic product (GDP) on research.

Another issue is that sub-Saharan Africa depends greatly on international collaboration and visiting academics for its research output. In 2012, southern Africa produced 79 percent of all its research output through international collaborations. In east Africa the number stood at 70% and in west and central Africa at 45 percent. Intra-African collaboration, meanwhile, is extremely rare. Collaborative output among local researchers was at a scant 0.9 percent in west and central Africa to 2.9 percent in southern Africa.

Limited government funding for universities lies at the root of these challenges. It is here that one of the solutions must be found. It's time for African universities, governments, and development partners to take action by fostering the development of research-active universities on the continent. The model we have developed through CARTA provides evidence that invigoration of the African academy in Africa by Africans is possible.

## Action plan

Three interlinked actions are crucial to bolster African higher education. The first is the differentiation of the continent's higher education system. Some universities must become research-intensive, their resources focused on graduate training and research.

Second, new funding mechanisms must be created for these research-intensive universities. Finally, new accountability systems must be put in place to ensure high standards. There must also be room for new institutions to enter the system.

One particularly compelling reason to differentiate research-intensive universities from those focused



Sharon Fonn, CARTA Co-Director

on undergraduate teaching is that sub-Saharan Africa's population is set to double by 2050. This will create continued demand for higher education. That, in turn, necessitates appropriate training of faculty with advanced degrees. It is this cohort who will be needed to staff the new universities and maintain high standards across the higher education system. Research-intensive universities are the best place to train such people.

## Funding and accountability

New funding mechanisms will be needed to support research-intensive universities. Firstly, these institutions should commit their own resources to research. And secondly, African governments must increase their support for research in general. They must also provide targeted funding for research-intensive universities: money that is over and above the currently available operational funds and tuition income.

Governments can foster research collaboration through joint basket funding for research to support regional multicountry collaborative research, with complementary investment by regional and continental bodies, bilateral and multilateral development partners, and philanthropic foundations. These funders should designate a portion of their investments in Africa to support research-intensive universities.

At the same time, citizens, private corporations, and alumni should create Endowed Chairs at research-intensive universities, and partnerships with non-university research entities should be encouraged and promoted. The CARTA initiative, working with its northern partners, has drawn on some of these funding sources and created partnerships that have enabled it to bolster the continent's research capacity. Some of what it's done could be replicated.

We've enrolled more than 200 PhD fellows since 2010, all of whom were recruited from the staff of the African consortium member institutions. We've

also worked with more than 160 PhD supervisors to revitalize PhD supervision, and worked with more than 570 university staff to make our member institutions more supportive of research. Our PhD fellows and graduates have produced 579 peer-reviewed publications and 36 have won post-doc awards or grants to do post-PhD research. They have raised more than USD\$9 million to support their PhD research. CARTA has invested more than USD\$1.4 million in infrastructure at member institutions and has developed an interdisciplinary seminar program to promote high-quality graduates.

The funding mechanisms we suggest could empower research-intensive universities on several fronts. They'll be able to attract leading researchers, create infrastructure, and develop support systems for research. This is also a way to bring African citizens in the diaspora back to replicate their research programs on the continent. The research-intensive universities will provide a base for training younger researchers, thereby creating a virtuous cycle. Output via research publications will increase. Internationally competitive researchers will remain on, or return to, the continent. Grants will be generated. All of these factors are critical to ensuring long-term sustainability.

Designated research-intensive universities mustn't be allowed to become complacent. There must also be room for upcoming, high-achieving universities to enter the space. We propose ongoing peer review every three to five years. Accountability and transparency will be key. The review function could be entrusted to a supranational body with wide representation. Universities that have previously been designated as research-intensive could lose their designation depending on their research track record.

## An appropriate base

There's no doubt that while universities in sub-Saharan Africa have been marginal to global knowledge production, they have started to turn the corner.

But challenges remain. This is particularly true for universities that aspire to become research-intensive. Working with African universities to effectively make this transition could transform sub-Saharan Africa's higher education landscape.

This piece is based on an article that appeared in *The Lancet*. It was co-authored with Laban Peter Ayiro, Philip Cotton, Adam Habib, Peter Mulwa Felix Mbithi, Alfred Mtenje, Barnabas Nawangwe, Eyitope O Ogunbodede, Idowu Olayinka, Frederick Golooba-Mutebi and Alex Ezech.

*Reprinted from the Conversation Africa*

# We support our African partner universities to adopt and localize CARTA innovations: this is how we do it

By Florah Karimi, CARTA Program Manager (Institutionalization and Scientific Quality)

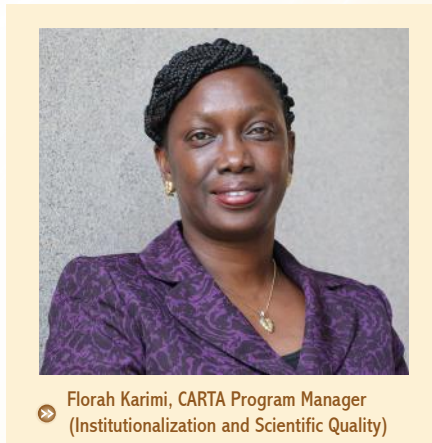
There are three strategic thrusts of the CARTA program to respond to the need for African universities to enhance quality academic and research capacity within the region: doctoral and postdoctoral training; institutionalization of CARTA innovations at partner institutions to achieve long-term sustainability; and securing the future of CARTA graduates. Over the nine years of CARTA's existence we have made extensive progress in that second thrust: mainstreaming CARTA innovations in partner institutions. Below, I highlight some of their impressive progress.

## Advanced Research Seminars

CARTA understands the need to enhance its PhD fellows' knowledge, competencies and attitudes in research, to build their ability to think critically about how research can be used to be transformative in the way systems are built and programs delivered for improved health and wellbeing. CARTA's four cohort-based residential Joint Advanced Seminars provide participants with the necessary exposure they need to the management and analysis of data; presentation of data and findings; and enhancement of their professional growth.

Partner universities are adopting and adapting the four-level seminar for their PhD degree programs beyond their participation in CARTA: an exciting development and opportunity to ensure rigor, discipline and high levels of performance for all of their PhD students.

More specifically, and through institutionalization grant awarded last year, Obafemi Awolowo University (Nigeria) is conducting a project entitled "Interventions towards Strengthening Research Training in Obafemi Awolowo University (ItSTRETO)" the focus of which is the strengthening of doctoral training at the institution. University of Rwanda (Rwanda), under a similar grant, is carrying out a project entitled "Intra-university Collaboration for Advanced Research training at the University of Rwanda (ICARU)," aiming to develop a pre-doctoral research methodology course adapted from CARTA Joint Advanced Seminars (JAS).



Florah Karimi, CARTA Program Manager (Institutionalization and Scientific Quality)

This year, CARTA has awarded institutionalization grants to two other universities to support them in mainstreaming aspects of the JASes into their institutional systems. The University of Malawi (Malawi) will be reviewing its overall PhD curriculum in Health and Population Sciences to see where to incorporate JAS components into that curriculum, while the University of Ibadan (Nigeria) will be mainstreaming a training program on reference management, literature searching and effective literature review to advance research and strengthen doctoral training programs in population and public health for the institution.

## Supervisors' Training

Partnering institutions understand the value of training supervisors to ensure they are providing the best possible support to their CARTA fellows, which will then extend to other PhD fellows within their institutions. The joint supervisors' trainings are also an opportunity for networking, thereby broadening the pool from which individual partner universities are able to identify supervisors for their PhD students. Two partner institutions – the University of Nairobi and the University of Malawi – have hosted such trainings, drawing expertise from the combined experience of all the participating institutions.

Makerere University in Uganda is also implementing an institutionalization grant to strengthen capacity both for doctoral training and supervision. This model gives CARTA

PhD graduates the opportunity to facilitate supervisor training workshops, essentially paying forward all of the learning they received as fellows in the program.

## Faculty and Administrative Staff (FAS) Workshops

A fellow's journey through his or her PhD can be stalled or diverted by ineffective administration. Too often, however, administrators are unaware of the effect of their systemic inefficiencies on the achievement of their students. Another benefit of the CARTA model is the quiet upskilling of institutional administrations, which provides a strong and professional foundation for universities to meet the needs of all students, not just CARTA fellows. These FAS workshops are an opportunity for faculty from multiple disciplines plus finance and grant management officers, registrars, directors of postgraduate studies, librarians and others to develop a holistic approach to their support of doctoral programs.

## Collaborations

CARTA recognizes the value of collaboration among partner institutions to support doctoral training programs; developing collaborative grant proposals; and carrying out collaborative research projects. CARTA has also provided four opportunities to senior faculty members for visiting fellowships. Congratulations to :

- Bernard Thole from University of Malawi, who visited University of Nairobi;
- David Kariuki from University of Nairobi, who visited University of Malawi;
- Ademola Ajuwon from University of Ibadan (Nigeria) who visited University of Malawi;
- Ngianga-Bakwin Kandala from University of Northumbria (UK), a partner of northern partner institution University of Warwick (UK), who visited the Medical Research Council (South Africa), which has links with the University of Witwatersrand (South Africa).



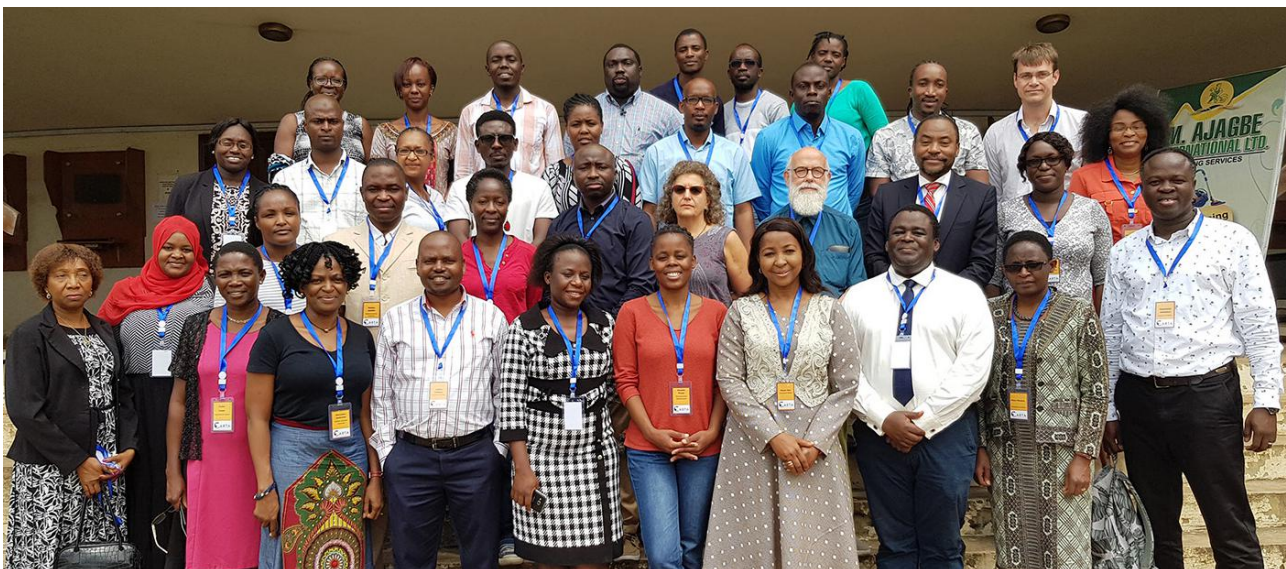
## Photo Gallery



⊗ L-R: Cohort Eight fellow Getrude Shepelo from the University of Nairobi, Nino Künzli the chair of the northern partners of CARTA, Deputy-Director Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute Basel with Thomas Fürst who is the post-doctoral scientific collaborator, Swiss TPH and Christine Mbindyo Cohort Eight fellow while in Italy, June 2018, during the annual summer course by the European Education Programme in Epidemiology.



⊗ Participants of the 8th Faculty and Administrators' Staff Workshop in Blantyre, Malawi in July 2018.



⊗ Cohort Six fellows and the facilitators at the month-long residential Joint Advanced Seminar (JAS) 3 held at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria from July 30 to August 24, 2018.



⊗ Oluwaseun Akinyemi, Cohort Four Fellow, was on August 1, 2018 appointed the Sub Dean (postgraduate) of the Faculty of Public Health, University of Ibadan.



⊗ Research Electronic Data Capture (REDCAP) three day Regional Training for 35 fellows, from Cohort Seven and Eight, was held in Nairobi, Kenya from May 8-10, 2018.





➤ CARTA secretariat, partners, and funders were at the Obafemi Awolowo University, in Nigeria for four meetings: Inaugural Focal Persons Meeting on September 16, the 9th Partners Meeting on September 17-18, 17th Funders and Board of Management Meeting and the 18th Board of Management (BoM) Meeting both held on September 19, 2018.



➤ Communications Officers of the 11 programs of the Developing Excellence in Leadership, Training and Science (DELTAS) Africa in June 11-12, 2018 during the Community and Public Engagement Capacity strengthening workshop at the African Academy of Sciences Offices in Karen, Nairobi.



➤ Our fellows who were among the participants of the 2018 CARTA Graduate workshop in Nairobi, Kenya from October 1-6, 2018. The workshop equipped the post-doctoral early career researchers with skills to develop a successful and substantial proposal for a personal award to support their research or a research grant or large project that they will lead.



➤ We are pleased to welcome Dr. Marta Vicente-Crespo to CARTA, to serve as one of the two program managers.



➤ Ground-breaking ceremony for the upcoming APHRC Training Center on November 14. The training facility, scheduled for completion November 2019, will be home to young and upcoming experts seeking to strengthen their research skills.



## CARTA fellow's invention patented in Nigeria



An invention designed and constructed to help people with disability exercise by a CARTA Fellow has been patented by the Government of Nigeria. Cohort One Fellow, Taofeek O. Awotidebe Adedoyin from the Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), Ile-Ife, Nigeria alongside his co-patentee, Prof. R.A., developed a cardio-pulley device that works by improving muscular endurance and strength and aerobic exercise capacity.

He said: "In the advent of chronic non-communicable diseases and proliferation of diseases of lifestyle, many medical experts have recognized the importance of exercise and physical activity in the prevention of such diseases." The simple pulley system—developed from his doctoral study—has modified braking system to provide resistance during graded upper body exercise training. It requires no hi-tech equipment and its production is relatively cheap. The Cardio-pulley device is also portable, easy to use for individuals of all ages and could enhance regular exercise practice and adherence.

However, factors such as lack of time, low self-efficacy, health issues including musculoskeletal disorder, hip/knee arthritis that may subsequently deprive individuals from regular weight-bearing exercises. Hence, upper limb exercises using the cardio-pulley become good alternative regimen for such individuals. The design and construction of the device was supported by CARTA who provided full sponsorship of his doctoral study where he graduated with a PhD in Exercise Physiology from the University of Ibadan in 2015. In September, the graduate from the Department of Medical Rehabilitation, College of Health Sciences at OAU, won an International award (Excellence Award in Physiotherapy) in recognition of his contributions to knowledge in physiotherapy and patient care. He was awarded by the Indian-based Venus International Foundation.

## We showcased how our research can tackle Sustainable Development Goals in Africa

By Kato Charles Drago, Cohort Three graduate from Makerere University; and Adeniyi Francis Fagbamigbe, Cohort Two graduate from the University of Ibadan

This year we were named among 25 early career scientists by the African Academy of Sciences (AAS) Affiliates Program, which recognizes exceptional young African scientists under age 40 who are charting new paths in academic and research excellence.

Our four-year engagement began with a three-day seminar offered by the University of Oxford in August 2018 at Pembroke College. It was a great introduction to the initiative, which aims to provide an international platform for African researchers to network, share their ideas and successes, and seek meaningful collaborations to scale our work and its potential impact.

For Francis, the turbo talk showcase of affiliate research was the highlight because it provided a window into other people's research as well as a chance to identify potential future collaborators. His own contribution explained how biostatistics can be an accountability mechanism for countries as they work to attain the health-related SDG targets.

"I talked about my work on biomarker research and how we are moving it forward to aid the design of better diagnostic tools and drugs to fight neglected tropical diseases," he said. Francis also noted how his CARTA training also served him in communicating his research in a simple but comprehensive way to a multidisciplinary audience.

Charles said that learning how to take an interdisciplinary approach to sustainable development was the most intriguing exercise for him, as it "enabled further reflection on how my



Left: Kato Charles Drago  
Right: Adeniyi Francis Fagbamigbe

research can contribute towards good health and wellbeing as a component of Africa's achievement of the Sustainable Development agenda."

Affiliates were also given the chance, on the final day of the seminar, to interact with some senior scholars, including APHRC's own director of Research Capacity Strengthening, Dr. Evelyn Gitau. Other participants included: Prof Louise Richardson, vice chancellor at Oxford University; Kevin Marsh, a professor of tropical medicine at Oxford University and the director of The Africa Oxford Initiative (AfOx); Prof Nelson Torto, executive director of the African Academy of Sciences; Allan Pamba, a regional vice president at GlaxoSmithKline (GSK); and Berhanu Abegaz, a distinguished visiting professor at the University of Johannesburg.



# CARTA Alumni Watch

By Ojo Melvin Agunbiade, CARTA Postdoctoral Fellow, Aging and Development Unit, APHRC



» Ojo Melvin Agunbiade, CARTA Postdoctoral Fellow, Aging and Development Unit, APHRC

Africa is facing an explosion in the size of its older population. By 2050, the continent will be home to more than 100 million people over age 60. How to ensure that the voices of those older people are heard in the design and implementation of health strategies will be critical to social development. This is particularly relevant to exploring the sexual and reproductive health needs across the life course, especially among populations where childbearing is no longer a consideration. For my postdoctoral research, I am seeking deeper understanding of how culture, aging, sexuality and care provisions within and outside the medical systems interact.

My doctoral research -- Socio-cultural Constructions of Sexuality and Help-seeking Behaviour among Elderly Yoruba people in urban Ibadan, southwest Nigeria -- was a critical first step. My thesis focused on cultural

interpretations of the intersections between aging and sexuality and the possible implications on help-seeking within and outside the medical systems. I further explored the contestations around the body, sexual rights and how these interpretations shape aging experiences and wellbeing within an urban space among the Yoruba people in Ibadan Nigeria.

Working with Dr. Isabella Aboderin at APHRC, one of Africa's leaders in aging research, I am examining in greater detail issues of vulnerability, social protection, and resilience in old age.

I hope my research will critically build and refine existing theoretical and methodological approaches to be more inclusive and participatory in accounting for the relevance of older people in the development agenda within sub-Saharan Africa.

Since May, I have been exposed to new research areas within broader issues around vulnerability, resilience and social protection in later life. As such, I am co-analysing a qualitative data on a Social Pension Scheme among Older People in Urban Slums in Nairobi, Kenya. I am also co-facilitating a scoping review on the concept and social practice of generativity in later life in sub-Saharan Africa. My involvement in these projects with Dr. Aboderin has been an eye-opener. We are also working to develop a research framework to scope and understand further the breadth of sexual and reproductive health issues in old age within the region.

I have successfully published a paper drawing on my PhD thesis, titled **'No Sweet in Sex': Perceptions of Condom Usefulness among Elderly Yoruba People in Ibadan Nigeria**, in the *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology*. This was followed by an essay published in *The Conversation* on [How Africa's largest city is failing its older people](#).

Since joining APHRC as a post-doc, I have also benefited from a number of travel grants to participate in global conferences, thanks to the Society for the Study of Social Problems through the Lee Scholars Fund. I co-presented three papers at the 68th Annual Meeting of the Society for the Study of Social Problems in Philadelphia, USA.

In early December, I represented APHRC at the 15th International Urban Health Conference in Kampala, Uganda, presenting another paper that emerged from my PhD research. I will continue to explore my research interests in 2019, and hopes to strengthen my skills in mixed methods research and systematic reviews. I see my post-doctoral fellowship as an opportunity to pass on what I myself have learned, mentoring and encouraging other young researchers to enter the fascinating field of gerontology. More than ever, the multidisciplinary approach to aging and wellbeing is critical to Africa's development and continued growth.

*Melvin was a Cohort Three fellow based at Obafemi Awolowo University*

## CARTA Graduates



60

have completed their PhDs and graduated

# CALENDAR of events



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