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## Research Strategy 2019-2023 : Medical College and School of Nursing & Midwifery - East Africa

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**THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY**

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# **RESEARCH STRATEGY 2019 - 2023**

Medical College and  
School of Nursing and Midwifery - East Africa

# FOREWORD



This Research Strategic plan has been developed with full involvement of representatives of various stakeholders. The final consultative session took place in the last quarter of 2018 to build consensus on prioritizations of activities. The product represents our collective view of a vision and key initiatives required to advance AKU health sciences research in East Africa.

Building research capacity is a combination of weaving together core infrastructure, methodology support, research training opportunities, and success for competitive grant funding that protects time and provides the required resources to conduct the research. Research findings must then be synthesized and repackaged in a form that is readily consumable by service providers, policy makers and communities at large.

You will find elements of each of these areas described in this strategic plan and the initiatives that will move us forward and ensure we become effective contributors to the development of the health of the populations within which we operate. To be effective this plan must be owned by all of us and I would encourage faculty to embrace the plan and explore ways in which you are able to advance the plan through your individual engagement.

Professor Macharia and the Research Office will welcome your full participation.

**Robert Armstrong**

Professor and Foundation Dean  
Medical College, East Africa  
Aga Khan University



The Aga Khan University, School of Nursing and Midwifery, East Africa (SONAM EA) views research as a key tenant of academic best practice in nursing and midwifery education. Our curriculum incorporates a sharp focus on proper utilization of evidence-based research. In doing so, we hope to strengthen the nursing and midwifery workforce, and by extension the entire healthcare profession, to better prepare the region for future health challenges. We emphasize faculty PhD development and are continuously implementing support structures in academia, research and teaching & learning to promote innovation, mentorship and professional growth. Our faculty partner with student researchers in order to embed a level of appreciation, enthusiasm and preparedness for research within graduates' competencies.

We are delighted to join with our Medical College colleagues in the creation of this plan. Collaboration with local and international institutions offers an opportunity to scale up our research output and increase funding to support research activities. At SONAM EA, we are committed to advancing knowledge and highly value research in improving health outcomes across the East African region and globally.

**Dr. Eunice Ndirangu**

Interim Dean  
School of Nursing and Midwifery, East Africa  
The Aga Khan University

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# ABBREVIATIONS

AHCS	Academic Health Care System
AKDN	Aga Khan Development Network
AKF	Aga Khan Foundation
AKHS	Aga Khan Health Services
AKU	Aga Khan University
AKUHN	Aga Khan University Hospital Nairobi
CoEWCH	Centre of Excellence in Women and Child Health
COSTECH	Council for Science and Technology, Tanzania
DPH	Department of Population Health
EAI	East African Institute
ERC	Ethics Research Committee
GSMC	Graduate School of Media and Communication
IHS	Integrated Health System
JCIA	Joint Commission International Accreditation
MC	Medical College
MERL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning
MOH	Ministry of Health
NACOSTI	National Council for Science Technology and Innovation
NCD	Non-Communicable-Diseases
RC	Research Committee
REC	Research and Ethics Committee
RO	Research Office
RSU	Research Support Unit
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SONAM	School of Nursing and Midwifery
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
UNCT	Uganda National Council for Science and Technology
URC	University Research Council

# BACKGROUND

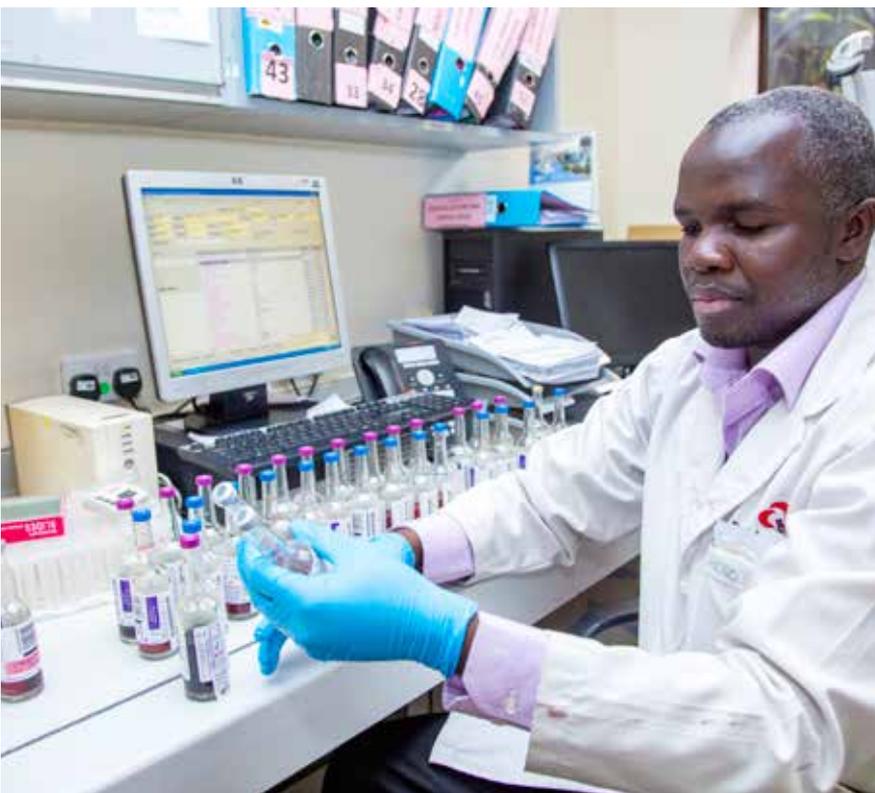
## HEALTH CARE IN EAST AFRICA

The five East African Community countries of Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi have a population of about 120 million that largely has similar health statistics and challenges. The Prevalence of non-communicable diseases, for instance, appears to be on the rise even as the region continues to struggle with the control of communicable diseases like respiratory infections, diarrheal diseases, malaria and HIV/ AIDS.

Under-nutrition characterized by stunting and underweight compound both acute and chronic illnesses and prevalence has not changed much over the years. Similarly, the prevalence of cancer, obesity and chronic disability from degenerative diseases is on the rise. The huge disease burden may be, to a large extent, attributed to many adverse social and economic factors, some that are grounded on cultural beliefs and high levels of unemployment. About two thirds of the population is rural and experience inequitable distribution of health resources, such as

health facilities and density of health professionals, compared to urban regions. Health indicators like maternal and neonatal mortality rates in East Africa are among the highest globally.

The Kenyan health care system is organized in five layers from community/household to national referral levels. Uganda and Tanzania have comparable levels of care from national to community levels. The health sector development commitments are captured under the National Health Sector Strategic Plans with effort made to align with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Both underline importance of multi-sectoral approach for health development. Achievement of equity, cost effective interventions, strengthening of human resources and other systems related inputs require partnership with stakeholders and creation of an enabling environment for private sector participation. In effect, there is considerable scope for innovative engagement within health systems in the region.




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*The huge disease burden may be, to a large extent, attributed to many adverse social and economic factors, some that are grounded on cultural beliefs and high levels of unemployment.*

# AKU MEDICAL COLLEGE AND SCHOOL OF NURSING AND MIDWIFERY IN EAST AFRICA

Though not formally constituted, an AKU Faculty of Health Sciences in East Africa was announced on August 13, 2007 by the Chancellor of the Aga Khan University, His Highness the Aga Khan in Nairobi. In his speech, he stated, “the mission for the Faculty is to educate and train doctors, nurses and allied health professionals to become effective leaders that combine humanism with science in their professional work while applying their critical thinking abilities and scholarship to address the healthcare problems of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the region.” Prior to establishment of academic programs in Nairobi in 2005, the Aga Khan Hospital ran as a private community Hospital without structured research infrastructure. This was a major hindrance to running of a post-graduate medical education program which is structured as course work and dissertation.

Departments had no research-experienced faculty to provide required guidance and supervision for research. The acute need was addressed with creation of a Research Support Unit (RSU) in 2007 to coordinate research activities and pool methodology support across departments.

Under a Research Director supported by a Research Administrative Officer, the unit took the responsibility of coordinating Research Committee (RC) and Research Ethics Committee (REC) work until 2017 when a formal office with Associate Dean for research was established.

The respective mandates of the committees were to oversee scientific quality and ethical compliance of research projects respectively. In 2009, the REC received accreditation of the National Commission for Science Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) upon fulfilment of its prescribed requirements in membership composition and processes. Research applications without prior external institutional appraisal by recognized entities may be subjected to internal review by the RC at the discretion of Ethics Committee to determine scientific merit. All trainees dissertation must however undergo review at departmental or/and RC prior to submission for ethics review. RC is also responsible for coordination of research methodology and dissertation supervision capacity building in the colleges. This latter role is likely to revert to the new Department of Population



Health in coming years allowing RC to focus more on scientific quality assurance.

In keeping with the overall vision of Aga Khan University in Africa, the AKU MC/SONAM are committed to producing health professional leaders through delivery of strong research programs, best practice in delivery of health services and partnerships with regional governments. Their campuses based in Nairobi, Dar-es-Salaam and Kampala have modern facilities for education and clinical services provision but research systems are not fully developed. With an expansive network of hospitals and outreach clinics in the region under the university and the Aga Khan Health Services, potential for research is enormous. Government field sites in Kilifi and Murang'a Counties are used for training of residents and population research. They serve to provide the university with necessary contact with communities for ensuring relevance of our scholarly activities.

AKUHN is the main teaching hospital for MC/SONAM and the regional hub for an AKU East Africa integrated health system (IHS). Among new developments of MC/SONAM is the recent establishment of Department of Population Health that will be the seat of research and methodological expertise. This

department will allow for faculty cross-appointments with clinical departments to engage in collaborative-multi-disciplinary research.

MC/SONAM capacity building, evaluation (e.g. Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning Unit-MERL) and research consultancies will be supported through the DPH. AKU Centers of Excellence including Women and Child Health, Cardiac Sciences, Oncology, Neurosciences etc., and university institutes with shared vision (EAI, GSMC and IHD) could be drawn in as partners in pursuit of transdisciplinary collaborations through the DPH. With the anticipated introduction of an undergraduate medical, nursing and allied health professionals training programs by 2022, the department will have developed requisite training and research infrastructure that would also support basic sciences faculty scholarship needs.

Establishment of large faculty-led research and capacity building projects capable of absorbing graduate, doctoral and post-doctoral programs will require well planned development within a well-resourced research system with support of multiple departments. In East Africa, DPH would be the natural link with the proposed AKU wide Institute of Global Health Development (IGHD).



*Among new developments of MC/SONAM is the recent establishment of Department of Population Health that will be the seat of research and methodological expertise.*

## ACADEMIC HEALTH CARE SYSTEMS (AHCS)

The most impactful health care organizations internationally have been those that have a very close working relationship between a university and the health care organization. These academic health centers have a range of governance structures but are all characterized by integration of the missions of patient care, education and research. Most often these relationships have been organized around a physical “Centre” but increasingly as the health system structures evolve, the “Centre” becomes a multi-site population-based network providing a range of settings within which patient care is delivered and education and research conducted. This occurs across the continuum from the individual/family/community to primary, secondary, tertiary and quaternary care levels. The focus is on the population as a whole within geographic boundaries and extends to prevention and health promotion.

Central to the success of these organizations is the building of a culture of inquiry and continuous learning. There is an organizational commitment and understanding that the best patient care comes from a structure that is continuously able to ask questions and provide answers that can then be applied to improve services. Education across the spectrum of undergraduate to continuing education linked to research capacity provides such an environment for continuous learning and improvement. This interaction between delivery of patient care services and the academic mission has become increasingly

important with growing focus on quality and safety of patients. There is a common framework of freedom to ask important questions, and ability to translate and apply what is learned to improve service delivery.

An AKU Integrated Health System (IHS) will have matured with strong integration of other AKDN entities. It is expected to demonstrate improved access to the population and close working relationship with other development partners for higher impact on the broader public health care system. Such would manifest in emergence of a culture of enquiry and commitment to continuing education within MC/SONAM and the health care services, ultimately enhancing standards of clinical and community care. By working closely with professional societies, state and non-state agencies and internal collaboration with the East Africa Institute and GSMC, the MC/SONAM will become an important resource for impacting on public health policy and practice in East Africa.

A multi-disciplinary working environment that engages across boundaries and supports innovative approaches to education, research and delivery of clinical services will also be created. A structured research mentorship program embedded within an Academic Health Care System (AHCS) provides opportunity for juniors to learn from seniors while tangibly contributing to communities within which they operate.



*A multi-disciplinary working environment that engages across boundaries and supports innovative approaches to education, research and delivery of clinical services will also be created.*

## AKU MC/SONAM EAST AFRICA ACADEMIC PLAN

The AKU vision is to become a global research university through enhancing of its research activities across campuses with focus on both clinical and population health sciences.

MC/SONAM-EA Faculty Strategy was recently developed to guide faculty-wide academic program development with the following objectives:

- i. Develop world class undergraduate and post graduate programs in Medicine, Nursing and Allied Health Sciences to offer well prepared high calibre of health care practitioners, scientists, policy makers and administrators to address the health care priorities and needs to reduce the burden of disease in Africa.
- ii. Prepare highly skilled faculty for educating the future generation of health professionals to meet the complex health needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- iii. Provide state of the art educational and research amenities to foster a highly stimulating intellectual environment. This will entail creation of a web-based learning, modern library with efficient information retrieval and appraisal, distance learning, suitable physical teaching and laboratory facilities, robust ICT (information interrogation, analysis and dissemination to promote best health care practices) and research laboratories and field sites.
- iv. Enroll a truly diverse student body that is culturally and geographically representative, whose members would strive to be lifelong learners and leaders applying best practices to impact the health of the communities in the region.
- v. Develop strategic alliances through partnerships within the AKDN, and with other universities and organizations to facilitate implementation of innovative FHS programs
- vi. Ensure academic rigor in all programs in keeping with the AKU Quality Assurance framework.
- vii. Actively seek funding sources and opportunities for sustainability of the programs.

In reference to Strategy 3, research advancement will be anchored around pre-defined Centers of Excellence and research priorities of the university and the region. This requires investing in provision of necessary infrastructure and core methodology support for basic sciences, clinical, health systems and population health sciences research while building strong bonds with internal and external stakeholders, including the public sector, to ensure optimization of resources and translation of findings to policy and practice. Growth of the different CoEs will depend on leadership and opportunities but all will be expected to have AKU-wide linkages. University-wide doctoral and post-doctoral programs will initially be established through a transitional graduate program arrangement that will engage reputable partner regional and overseas institutions.



*Growth of the different CoEs will depend on leadership and opportunities but all will be expected to have AKU-wide linkages.*

# RESEARCH AND GRADUATE PROGRAMS

Graduate programs will be established to develop high calibre health research faculty with multi-disciplinary research orientation across all AKU-EA campuses. Research culture will be disseminated throughout AKDN partners taking advantage of IHS to influence clinical and public health practice. Graduates will become agents for cultural change in the university and beyond. Research programs structured around health priority areas developed in collaboration with local and international partners will become the vehicle for providing evidence-based solutions to important local and global health problems. Research findings will be shared with policy makers and users in the region and beyond through efficient and sustainable systems for benefit of the population. Creation of Research faculty track will also be introduced to provide adequate time protection against clinical and teaching demands.

## Research Structures

The Medical College and SONAM research agenda in East Africa has a primary focus on the centers of excellence and research priorities of the larger university. The East African entities are in the process of developing strong and sustainable health research

capacity that will enable production and translation of relevant high quality knowledge across the continuum of health systems. The centers of excellence capture the critical areas of importance to the health needs and well-being of East Africans. The entities envisage increasingly investment in capacity development for core methodologies in basic sciences, clinical, health systems, and community health to support growth of research performance competencies in these areas. As put by Prof S Brownie – Dean, SONAM – “What distinguishes a university educator from a school teacher is the production of new knowledge through, mainly, research. A school teacher transmits already known knowledge, while a university educator must constantly create the knowledge he/she delivers to students. A professor must be a leader in his/her own academic field. He/she should publish books and articles in recognized academic journals. Research and publications are indicative of the quality and productivity of academic staff”.

A core staff compliment comprising research managers in Nairobi and Mombasa offices, a grants management officer, a research compliance officer and three administrative assistants (besides drivers and



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*“What distinguishes a university educator from a school teacher is the production of new knowledge through, mainly, research.”*

office assistants) works closely with university hospital administrative departments to execute the research mandate. The office has indirect accountability to the office of Associate Vice-Provost of Research and Graduate Studies. Administrative support structures are not as well developed in Tanzania and Uganda which have lower trainee and faculty population.

Over the years, research activities at AKUHN have increased; ranging from resident dissertations, SONAM projects, faculty intra & extramural funded projects, to collaborations with local and foreign institutions. Rise in recent PhD SONAM graduates and growing interest for PhD in the Medical College will require ongoing research mentorship and creation of different faculty career tracks to match interests. These for MC (including Clinician - Practitioner and Clinician - Researcher tracks) in the MC make it imperative for research support systems to be strengthened.

Increased research activities call for the need to ensure maintenance of quality and compliance with local research regulations and legislations. National bodies in the East African countries, such as Council for Science and Technology (COSTECH) in Tanzania, National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) in Kenya and Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCT) are the respective research regulators. Further, in Kenya and Tanzania close working relationship between medical colleges and the hospitals calls for compliance with

Joint Commission International Accreditation (JCIA) guidelines.

A strategic planning workshop was convened at Naivasha, Kenya between 29<sup>th</sup> September to 02<sup>nd</sup> October 2016 to deliberate on ongoing and future research development challenges. It was attended by representatives of the Medical College, University Hospital administration, AKU Centers of Excellence, School of nursing and midwifery, AKU Karachi research office, Institute of Human development and Research and Ethics Committees (see appendix). The workshop started with a review of performance of the MC/SONAM research program to date followed by a situation analysis using SWOT/PEST approach with exploration of internal and external environment within which research is undertaken. Discussions that followed were informed by presentations from the Deans of MC and SONAM, Chairs of research and ethics committees and representative of AKU Office of Sponsored Research, Karachi. Presenters identified challenges encountered over the years and opportunities that need to be tapped for growth in coming years.

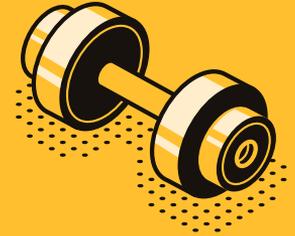
After allowing for ample time for engagement with the wider AKU community and harmonization with the EA Academic plan, a second workshop was held in December 2018 to generate short-term, medium-term and long-term priority activities.




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# SWOT ANALYSIS OF AKU MC/SONAM



## 1. Strengths

The regional AKU-MC/SONAM in East Africa is a research led, student-centered university with a clear vision to become a quality driven research hub in sub-Saharan Africa with global reach. The AKDN agencies, including AKU, have an excellent reputation across the region and globally. As part of the global AKDN and a global university, the AKU in East Africa also has access to rich information resources and expertise as well as access to field sites to nest its research operations. The highly specialized, experienced and expanding faculty with a large base of nursing and residency trainees provides a sound foundation for influential and context relevant education and research programs. The faculty has extensive professional and social networks that can be important for research collaborations, networking and exchange of experiences. AKU-MC/SONAM is a regional institution currently active in three East African countries including Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania with plans to expand its presence to Rwanda and Burundi. The University is also present in Mozambique where it collaborates through the Aga Khan Foundation in strengthening the nursing profession, and in implementation research through the Centre of Excellence for Women and Child Health. Through its tertiary JCI accredited teaching hospital in Nairobi, Kenya, the Aga Khan Teaching Hospital in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and the planned AKU hospital in Kampala as well as the two secondary Aga Khan hospitals in Kenya and a large number of primary health centers and clinics in Kenya and Tanzania, the University has a large footprint in the region. This creates a unique competitive advantage for faculty and students/residents through easy access to state of the art diagnostic infrastructure and patients with diverse disease patterns. The University offers quality library services (award winning library) which has a functioning Research Support Office and operates an electronic medical system. The University

also has commitment to institutional ethical framework that ensures that research activities and programs are in line with AKU internal and external regulations and policy and adheres to national government legislations.

AKU is an important driver of the AKDN Integrated Health System (IHS) in East Africa through established and new collaborations particularly with local government and other key stakeholders. This is of significant benefit in terms of gaining access to growing population health research/academic programming sites while simultaneously becoming a respected and indispensable partner within the national and regional health systems. Furthermore, as part of the global University, FHS in East Africa has multiple external partnerships and collaborations across the regions and globally with extensive opportunities for learning and faculty and student exchange.





## 2. Weaknesses

AKU- MC/SONAM in East Africa is a young University which is in the process of creating a fully functional research infrastructure. Ever since the AKUHN transformed into a university, most emphasis in allocation of resources has been placed on growth of tertiary clinical services provision. The pace of transformation has been even slower at Aga Khan University, Dar-es-salaam. A relatively small number of MC faculty has thus become overburdened with heavy clinical responsibilities while the nursing faculty has heavy teaching load. Interdepartmental and multidisciplinary collaboration has been developing rather slowly and efforts to build research capacity, in way of core faculty and support services, has been challenging thus hampering research ambitions. As a growing institution, AKU must place increased emphasis on increasing output of scientific research, use of its rich clinical data and effective mentorships structures. Low uptake of intramural seed funding (URC), disadvantage of private institutions in national research funding access, weak internal grant

management and support systems work against the institutional mission to become a research led University that would provide leadership in sub-Saharan Africa. While the Aga Khan hospitals provide comparatively large infrastructure and facilities, there is still limited infrastructure to support research. For example, the University has no clear policy and infrastructure on tissue management (bio-banking) as well as research facilities such as clinical research unit (CRU), wet lab, and animal lab. A narrow scope of research areas driven, to a large extent, by convenience rather than national need, limited official academic and research time, lack of research incentives and poor alignment of compensation as well as limited mentorship support to quality research applications, weak capacity to monitor/enforce compliance with research priorities further make a strong case for the University to place more emphasis on developing a strong internal research system and culture.

### Other important issues are:

- Our hospitals are highly disadvantaged by the lack of electronic medical record systems that busy faculty could exploit for publications
- Lack of clear institutional human resource policy for guiding recruitment and remuneration of research staff – and career structures.
- Weak support systems that have limited experience in research management (Finance, Supplies/ Procurement and Human Resources)
- Failure of Principal Investigators to budget for compassionate leave, staff insurance cover and other worker's related matters, present them with budgetary implementation challenges.
- There are few lawyers in Kenya with experience on matters related to research – e.g. sub-contracting, Non- disclosure agreements, Individual property rights, data & material transfers etc. AKU may be disadvantaged in grants contracts.
- Many external funders do not cover administrative overheads or salary time protection for research investigators
- Researchers need to be increasingly sensitive to unethical scientific publication.
- Plagiarism is on the increase hence calls for more rigorous scrutiny of submissions to avoid individual and institution embarrassment from recall of publications.
- Unlike developed countries, granting agencies do not provide a level of indirect and overhead financial support to allow investment in research infrastructure.
- Despite the significant opportunities of the AKDN, the University lacks defined structures for engaging sister agencies particularly in terms of collaboration on research and resource mobilization.



### 3. Opportunities and Trends

#### Internal:

- AKU resolve to be Research – led university
- Centre of Excellence Women and Child Health (CoEWCH) projects, a Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning (MERL) Unit provides a platform for inter-entity; inter-disciplinary research and learning.
- AKU is undergoing regional expansion in EA in space and programs;
- URC seed funding has been underutilized yet fairly accessible;
- EAI, GSMC, IHD, AKHS hospitals and Integrated Health System and other AKDN entities welcome collaboration;
- AKUHN tele-radiology links with outreach clinics;
- Other AKHS and AKDN programs with routine data that is suitable for “data mining”;
- Recruitment of research strong chairs of Medicine and Obs/Gynaecology as academic chairs supported by Vice Chairs;
- Establishment of a Department of Population Health with a research active Chair and opportunity to build core methodology support;
- AKU strengthening of primary care and family medicine fields aligns with national health sector strategies;
- AKU is well-resourced in modern medical diagnostics and patient pool to support research and translation to clinical policy and practice;
- International faculty leadership with global linkages to network for collaborations;
- Growing AKU alumni population to tap from for collaborations;
- AKU Karachi experience and structures to draw from;
- East African Community Research Council provides processes for regional research reach;
- MERL unit (Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning Unit), Centers of Excellence and Population Health Sciences proposal to provide platforms for research and linkage with field and clinical research;
- High regional penetration of communication technology favoring cost-effective innovations;
- AKU library well placed to support evidence based practice and research; and

- Senior faculty in influential positions locally and globally.

#### External:

- Commission for University Education (CUE) in Kenya and other regulatory bodies in EA requirement for PhD level faculty entry and defined scholarship for promotion;
- CUE expectation for graduate students to submit their work for publication before graduation;
- Growing global funding opportunities directed to Eastern Africa region;
- Double burden of diseases with rising NCDs and persistence of communicable diseases;
- Global consultancies targeting universities in the region on the rise;
- Increase in demand for technology based research proposals;
- Trans-disciplinary and trans-regional research favored by donor agencies;
- Global increase in peer review journals, especially online reducing publication time;
- Global trend towards personalized medicine due to genomics influence increased interest for entering diverse populations in data basis and clinical trials;
- Open access and publication fee exemption for low income countries availability;
- High impact journals tendency to levy publication fees reducing access to wider high impact dissemination;
- Population growth (dynamics and composition) posing unique challenges for exploration;
- Weak health care systems and strained resources;
- Health care financing, leadership and governance understudied;
- Low capacity for translational and implementation research in the region;
- Few entities with capability for complex data analysis;
- Region with heavy illness burden and few skilled researchers;
- Launch of National Research Fund in Kenya; and
- Harmonization on policies of key regulatory agencies in EA Community – Practice boards and university education commissions.



## 4. Threats

- Recruitment of faculty with strong research qualifications limited by the lack of university funding of research time, particularly in the Medical College, where the faculty practice model is heavily dependent on income from clinical services;
- In Medical College lower compensation for research and teaching compared to clinical services reduce faculty interest in research;
- Non-academic faculty tracks with academic-like ranking titles compete against need to sacrifice for academic titles attainment;
- Failure to adhere to strict requirement for publications in faculty promotion attributable to faculty recruitment and retention challenges;
- Other universities provide better time flexibility of research, consultancies and clinical services;
- Few faculty with strong research curriculum vitae reduce grant application competitiveness;
- Inadequate research space for working stations, storage and equipment;
- Extended university operation under letter of interim authority rather than being a chartered university reduces credibility and funding opportunities;
- Hospital perception of research as liability rather than asset for increased visibility and market share;
- High staff salaries in costing of FTEs and costs of diagnostics out-price grant applications; and
- The regional concept of the student as the principal investigator lessens the emphasis on the faculty member as a primary supervisor with active involvement in the entire process.



## OUR VISION

Attain excellence in health research with focus on improvement of health and wellbeing of population of the East Africa region.

## OUR MISSION

Through local and global partnerships, AKU MC & SONAM will create a robust health research environment to support an efficient and globally reputable research infrastructure to generate and facilitate utilization of research evidence to improve the health of the people of Eastern Africa.

## CORE VALUES

In achieving its mission, AKU will be guided by customization of the following organizational core principles to research:



### Quality

Commitment to conduct high quality research guided by international best ethical and scientific practices.



### Relevance

Prioritize use of resources on most contextually relevant research with highest potential to benefit society. Institutional, national and regional research agenda to be central in informing areas of focus.



### Impact

Commitment to engage in research and innovations with promise for improving the health and quality of lives of the population and not simply for academic reasons.

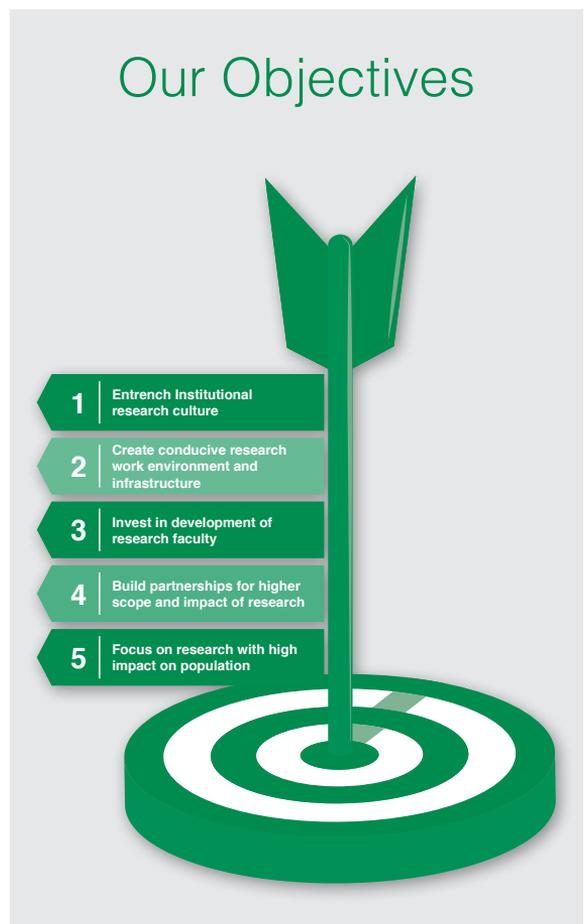


### Access

Commitment to avail research skills to all who desire to access with overall goal of demystification of research as a means of establishing an institutional cultural change that makes research central to its academic, clinical and community operations.

# STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

1. Entrench an institutional research culture in line with AKU's vision, mission and values. This should permeate through all cadres of staff to extent that practice in all sectors should be informed by best available evidence. There is a need to demystify research and for research to not be viewed as the mandate of faculty alone.
2. Build an efficient research infrastructure that will exceed expectations of research sponsors. This will support conduct of high quality research funded from intramural and extramural competitive grants with emphasis on skills that will lead to optimal impact on policy and practice. Competencies will be required in areas of ethics, research methodology, grants writing and management, data management, scientific publication, dissemination and translation to policy and practice. Besides strengthening of research administration support, there will be need for wet and dry research laboratories, small research animal facilities, efficient ICT support system, archiving, synthesis (systematic reviews) and dissemination systems. Strong legal support will be important to guide contracting, ethical dilemmas, intellectual property and material/data transfer.
3. Invest in research faculty development as foundation for research growth. This will target development of critical mass of clinician researchers and non-clinical research faculty with diverse competencies. Policy on structuring of doctoral and post-doctoral programs will help meet requirements of commissions for university of education requirements and form firm base for new knowledge generation. Prerequisite will entail recruitment of research talented/passionate faculty in clinical departments with time protection and clear promotion and incentive plans. Annual faculty performance will place high premium and rewards/recognition on research and innovations productivity to role model scholarship success.
4. Strengthen local and international partnerships for higher scope and impact of research findings. Research partnerships and collaboration at multiple levels will help build strong channels for knowledge exchange and use. Emphasis to be placed on social and economic determinants of health at institutional and community levels including health systems. Strong linkages between researchers, policy makers and implementers will be key to success.
5. Focus on research with high impact on the population of Eastern Africa and beyond. Research promoted at AKU would be strongly aligned with national health research priorities for relevance and impact. This will be achieved by building strong partnerships with public sector health policy makers, health institutions and communities.





## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1: Entrench institutional research culture

### Strategies/ Priorities

- Demystify research
- Promote applied research at AKU hospitals and improve access to funding
- Create demand for evidence based practice at all levels
- Provide time-protection for research active staff from common funds
- Increase research awareness in faculty and departments
- Entrench Joint Commission research provisions for Academic Medical Centres (GLD & HRP chapters.
- Leverage on URC grants to stimulate research
- Provide attractive incentives to researchers
- Structure research mentorship by senior colleagues

	Short term focus 2019- 2020	Medium term focus 2021- 2022	Long term focus >2023
ACTIVITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate synthesis of and access to research evidence; Research at AKU should be data driven and all communication to evidence based where information collected can be translated into a manuscript for publishing</li> <li>• Making research part of our daily life by habit and language.</li> <li>• Ensure that the metrics we use take appropriate account of disciplinary norms, while also transmitting best practice across disciplines and reflecting our ambitions as an institution.</li> <li>• Develop clear guidelines on the meaning of cross-department collaboration. Create a research communication and engagement strategy for undergraduate education programmes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performing Micro research which more than often requires low capital or no funding and encourages interdepartmental research therefore creating a culture of communication and an “incubator journal” that helps in preparing researchers to high impact journals</li> <li>• Support inter- departmental collaboration on both Clinical and Non- clinical research;</li> <li>• Establish Task Group on hospital clinical nursing research.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase research-rich core curriculum</li> <li>• Increase engagement of other health professional disciplines in research.</li> </ul>



## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2:

Create conducive research work environment and infrastructure

### Strategies/ Priorities

- Make clinical data readily accessible for research.
- Efficient research administrative support structure (grants writing, procurement, recruitment, contracts, material transfers, intellectual property, publication and dissemination).
- Streamline institutional research governance processes.
- Provide adequate office space and basic resources needed for research
- Create stable research field sites and communities of learning
- Improve efficiency in research supplies/ services pricing, procurement and recruitment
- Provide adequate dry and wet lab working spaces

	Short term focus 2019- 2020	Medium term focus 2021- 2022	Long term focus >2023
ACTIVITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand the research landscape and best structures for developing a governance structure that align with set out policies at AKU and promote inter- disciplinary team.</li> <li>• Hire short-term consultant to advise on research systems need, organization charts, policies, process mapping and templates.</li> <li>• Recruit and fill vacancies in the above services for research office.</li> <li>• Establish financial structure that supports infrastructure.</li> <li>• Establish clarity on financial incentives for research success.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide dedicated research space on campus (University Centre) and nearby facilities</li> <li>• Identify and target funding opportunities aligned with areas of strategic priority.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore field sites with international and local partners for example Moi University and AMPATH</li> <li>• Ensure that internal structures aligned with research themes, in particular our research institutes.</li> </ul>



## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3: Invest in development of research faculty

### Strategies/ Priorities

- Appropriate mix of clinical and research faculty in FHS and departments
- Faculty practice plan that incentivizes clinician researcher career track
- Provide research career development opportunities for faculty
- Ease process to access doctoral and post- doctoral training opportunities
- Avail research training opportunities
- Reorient mandate of Research committee to capacity building

	Short term focus 2019- 2020	Medium term focus 2021- 2022	Long term focus >2023
ACTIVITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement support structures and personal development processes that promote excellence in research.</li> <li>• Enhance and encourage mentoring and career development programmes for faculty and postdoctoral researchers.</li> <li>• Ensure that excellence in research, innovation and mentorship is recognized in internal promotions and recognition schemes.</li> <li>• Encourage and support strategic recruitment plans for key faculty positions within disciplines and in major research themes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognize and support faculty research and scholarship;</li> <li>• Implement processes to ensure that research and scholarship activity is appropriately weighted and rewarded.</li> <li>• Create a structured approach to careers development in research across the University. For example look at a post doctorate strategy</li> <li>• Further support Master’s and PhD programmes that develop strength in depth and breadth.</li> <li>• Reflect our major interdisciplinary research themes in our education offerings, publications and grant development.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce sandwich PhD research program that can entrench focused faculty research in departments (at least 1-2 faculty per department) with financial support from grants</li> <li>• Build academic capacity within clinical and non-clinical disciplines through identification of opportunities with succession planning.</li> </ul>



## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4: Build partnerships for higher scope and impact of research

### Strategies/ Priorities

- Position CoEs and Department of Population Health (DPH) as hubs for GSMC, IHD, EAI and other AKDN partnerships
- Strengthen collaboration with other regional and international research institutions and universities
- Create and use innovative channels to move research knowledge to policy and practice

	Short term focus 2019- 2020	Medium term focus 2021- 2022	Long term focus >2023
ACTIVITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a framework to evaluate research excellence across all areas that takes into account the diversity of AKU research strengths in the various institutions and themes.</li> <li>• Promote cross- entity projects with Institute of Human Development (IHD); MC/ SONAM, Graduate School of Media and Communications (GSMC); East Africa Institute (EAI); Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN)</li> <li>• Profile AKU research and innovation performance by discipline and, using this information, to improve performance and build overall thematic profiles</li> <li>• Create a functional Research dedicated website/space. Website would be a good outlet for everyone in the Aga Khan University Network to access information on funding calls.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Align faculty recruitment to support areas/ themes that allow external and internal collaborations in order to compete for larger funding opportunities.</li> <li>• Identify and build collaborative partnerships not only for programme implementation but also those that will help attract funding.</li> <li>• Universities that offer PhD opportunities in NCD and MCH fields to support CoE.</li> <li>• Promote faculty networks and strategic positioning in committees and task groups associated with MOH, EAC, WHO and other authorities where AKU can negotiate and enter into agreements, contracts and partnerships for programme support.</li> <li>• Strengthen AKU engagement in AKDN programmatic funding.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create university research institutes for specific need-driven themes</li> <li>• Establish efficient consultancy services</li> <li>• Provide leadership and role modelling for Academic Health Systems</li> </ul>

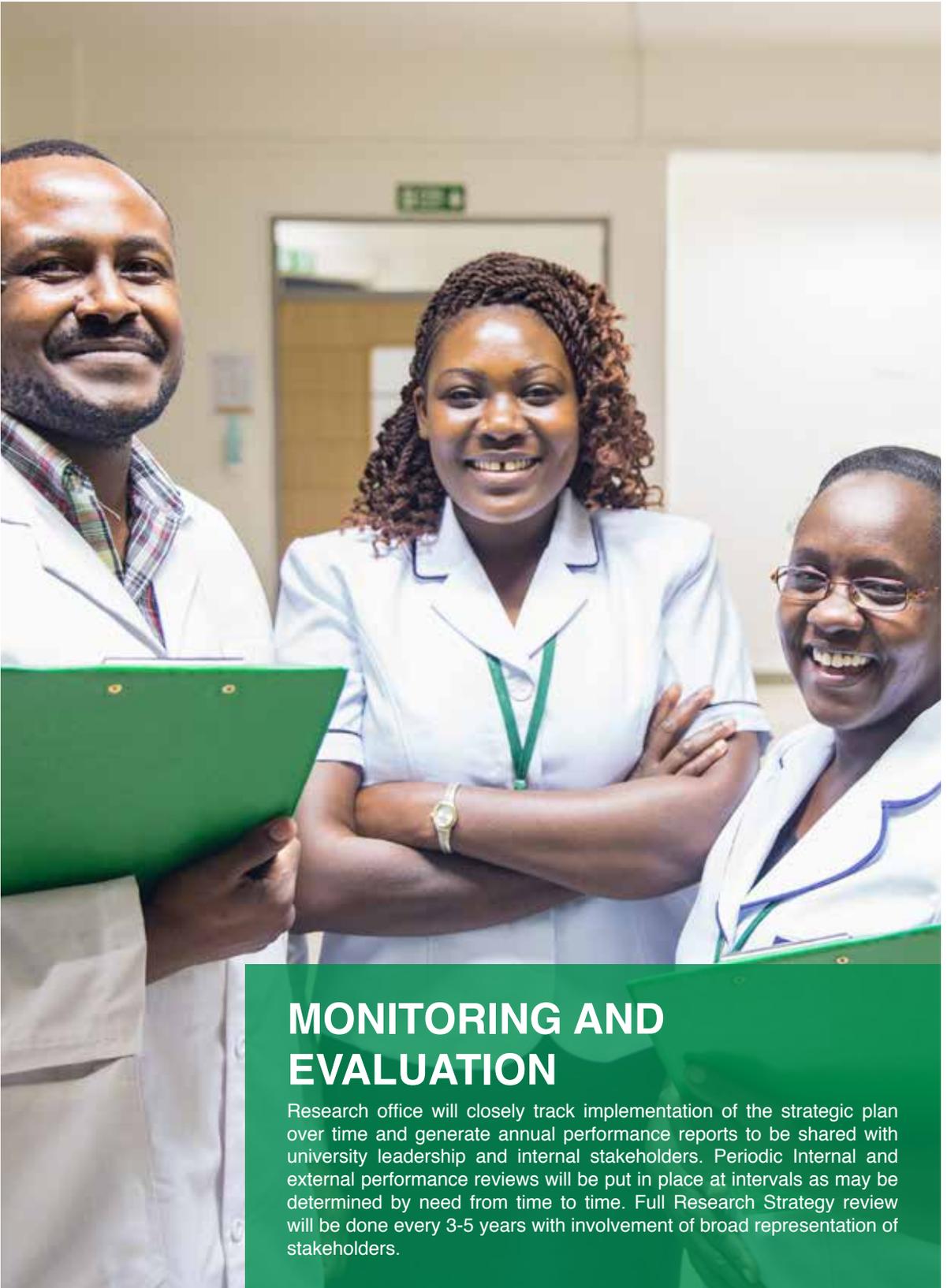


**STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 5:**  
Focus on research with high impact on population

**Strategies/ Priorities**

- Build capacity for translational and implementation research
- Strengthen channels of communication with community and government at national and county levels through Academic Health Systems Model
- Create mechanisms for engaging major professional associations and civil society
- Establish cross- departmental research interest groups with focus on national/ university priority areas

	<b>Short term focus 2019- 2020</b>	<b>Medium term focus 2021- 2022</b>	<b>Long term focus &gt;2023</b>
<b>ACTIVITIES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure professional services are integrated, fully aligned with and support faculty priorities and overall strategy on research with impact.</li> <li>• Encourage more faculty and trainees to take advantage of existing community infrastructure</li> <li>• Department of Population Health to take leadership in developing capacity for methodology and grants competitiveness for clinical and community based research</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expand recruitment of Non-Clinical Faculty in different disciplines – sociology, economics, statistics, demography etc.</li> <li>• Establish knowledge sharing channels with MOH and county governments to match need with research.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a think tank to regular review population health trends and needs that can inform new research capacity development strategies.</li> <li>• Demand driven expansion of AKU CoEs.</li> <li>• Membership in important national, regional and international decision making organs related to health and health research</li> <li>• High level contribution in Annual Research- to- Policy national and regional symposia.</li> </ul>



## MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Research office will closely track implementation of the strategic plan over time and generate annual performance reports to be shared with university leadership and internal stakeholders. Periodic Internal and external performance reviews will be put in place at intervals as may be determined by need from time to time. Full Research Strategy review will be done every 3-5 years with involvement of broad representation of stakeholders.

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