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“Researcher Spotlight: Dr Marleen Temmerman, Director CoEWCH

“If you don't have partners in the world, you don't move. It's really global health, but global is also local. So you need to specifically think globally and act locally”

A newly inducted member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the US National Academy of Medicine, Professor Marleen Temmerman's multifaceted career embodies a passionate commitment to women's health and rights. In advancing the cause of maternal and child health, she stresses on advocacy and policy improvements as the need of the hour.

Professor Temmerman's career trajectory exemplifies her commitment to translating research into tangible policy improvements. Her work with politicians and parliamentarians highlights her belief that research should serve as a compass, guiding policy decisions. According to her, "If you want to work and have your findings translated into policies, you need to work with all these other constituencies."

Professor Temmerman's insights resonate deeply with the regional launch of the Lancet Series on Small Vulnerable Newborns (SVNs) in Nairobi. The Lancet Series presents evidence-based interventions that, if fully implemented, can potentially enhance the survival and health of small vulnerable newborns who make up 20% of babies born in Sub-Saharan Africa. Hosted by AKU's Centre of Excellence in Women and Child Health, East Africa (CoEWCH EA), in collaboration with the Small Vulnerable Newborn Consortium, the event called for relevant actors to urgently prioritise action, advocate for, and invest in the prevention of SVNs to reverse the current trend, reduce SVN outcomes and ultimately save the lives of millions of babies. However, the complex nature of global health challenges demands interdisciplinary collaboration, transcending geographical boundaries and disciplinary silos. "Without partnerships, you don't get anywhere," she notes, recognising that true progress requires surpassing comfort zones and delving into diverse disciplines.

Additionally, Professor Temmerman emphasizes the need to revamp healthcare systems by prioritizing quality care for maternal and neo-natal health. Drawing from her experiences in Kenya, where outcomes remained suboptimal despite high antenatal care attendance rates, investing in the quality of healthcare is extremely important. Achieving better health outcomes often involve going beyond policy commitments, necessitating the development of robust mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation of progress.

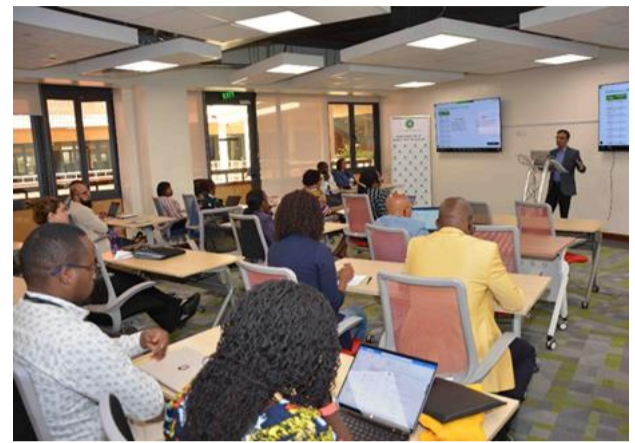
Read more on CoE-WCH's agenda on Small Vulnerable Newborns [here](#).

Insights from the Bi-annual Research Townhalls

The bi-annual research townhalls organized by the Research Office serve as a vital platform to provide an extensive overview of the University's research landscape. Dr Salim Virani, Vice Provost Research, emphasized the significance of these townhalls, highlighting their role as "listening posts" for refining research processes. Attended by over 200 regional faculty members, and research administrators, the townhalls offered a glimpse into the University's recent research endeavors and future prospects.

Research Townhalls were conducted for the Faculty of Health Sciences Pakistan at the Stadium Road campus, whereas a parallel hybrid townhall was held at the Karimabad campus for the Institute for Educational Development, Professional Development Centres in Chitral and Gilgit, and the Examination Board. Similarly, a hybrid Research Townhall for faculty and research administrators based in Nairobi, Tanzania, and Uganda took place at the Nairobi campus. Several crucial discussion points emerged in these listening posts, including fostering collaboration across entities within AKU, enhancing data representation, nurturing research staff, strengthening research focus areas for faculty, improving grant application success rates, and optimizing strategies for faculty compensation.

The townhalls play a significant role in fostering a culture of collaboration and transparency within AKU's research community. They provide a platform for the research community to come together, exchange ideas, and chart the course for nurturing the research landscape at AKU.



GoalKeepers 2030: Dr Fyezah Jehan Advances Global Goals Through Innovation



The Goal keepers 2030 brought together champions of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals in New York City. An assembly of global changemakers advancing the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, the Goal Keepers community convened to address the progress toward these vital objectives. Among the distinguished speakers, Dr Fyezah Jehan, Chair of the Department of Paediatrics at AKU Pakistan, provided insight into the power of innovation in paediatrics healthcare.

She emphasized the importance of innovative tools, probiotics, and the gut microbiome in nurturing the healthy growth of newborns. Dr Jehan explained the pivotal role of the microbiome, a vibrant ecosystem of bacteria residing in our digestive tracts, in ensuring the well-being of infants, especially those born prematurely. Her groundbreaking work reveals that supplementing the feeding

of newborns with probiotics containing Bifidobacterium can kickstart a baby's gut microbiome on the right trajectory. These probiotics, administered as a powder mixed with breast milk or through a dropper, hold the potential to revolutionize neonatal care, setting the stage for healthier lives.

Dr Fyezah Jehan heads a dedicated research team at AKU, which is leveraging genetic sequencing to understand the gut microbiome and its impact on maternal and child health. This research is part of a broader initiative by AKU to position itself as a leader in gut microbiome studies within Pakistan. Supported by funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, this project is a pivotal component of a multi-country platform for clinical trials focused on improving maternal nutritional status and foetal growth. Collaborating with study sites in Bangladesh, Senegal, and Zambia, Dr Jehan spearheads this project, ensuring a healthier future for newborns worldwide.

Read more about the project [here](#).

Strengthening Biosafety in Research: Insights from Dr Muhammad Zohaib

Manager of Biosafety at the Research Office, Dr Muhammad Zohaib held a talk on the role of Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBC) and the Biosafety Officer at the Journal Club series organized by the Center for Regenerative Medicine.

Dr Zohaib's delved into the essential roles played by the IBC and the Biosafety Officer in ensuring safe and ethical research practices. The IBC, a multidisciplinary committee, is responsible for rigorously evaluating and approving research endeavors involving biohazardous materials or Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs). Its primary objective is to ensure that all research activities align with regulatory requirements and ethical standards, fostering a safety culture within the research community. Throughout the session, Dr Zohaib explained the multifaceted functions of the IBC, which involves scrutiny of research proposals, the development and implementation of robust policies, procedures,

and protocols governing the safe handling, storage, and disposal of biological materials. He underscored the importance of collaborative efforts between the Biosafety Officer, IBC, and principal investigators in conducting thorough risk assessments and mitigating potential hazards. Moreover, Dr Zohaib emphasized the significance of comprehensive training courses for researchers and staff in biosafety practices and procedures.

Beyond its evaluative role, the IBC, in conjunction with the Biosafety Officers, also bears the mandate of ongoing monitoring and inspections. These evaluations serve to ensure adherence to established biosafety protocols within research facilities.



Dr Zohaib concluded the session by briefly demystifying the IBC application process and explaining the prerequisites for securing efficient approvals.

Dr Zohaib can be reached at zohaib.yaseen@aku.edu for more on Biosafety in research.

Navigating Grant & Funding Opportunities with Funding Institutional

The Research Office hosted a hands-on training session on Funding Institutional for the Department of Community Health Sciences at AKU Pakistan. A product of Elsevier, Funding Institutional provides an online database with over 27,000 active funding opportunities with information on over 7 million awarded research grants from a wide-range of funders worldwide.

The database connects researchers to the most relevant funding opportunities available, allowing for targeted searches. It provides actionable insights into the funding landscape, where research teams can carry out specialised searches, connect with their SCOPUS profile for relevant results, and save, track, and share opportunities within and across teams for increased collaboration and transparency.

Explore the platform [here](#).

