



Strategic Plan 20/20

January 2015

MicroResearch 20/20 Strategic Plan

The absolute need for capacity building in research was recognized years ago by African nations. Lack of grant funds for small research projects is a major obstacle to improving research capacity in developing countries. As discovered with microfinance, a small infusion of capital can “prime the pump” to creative productivity. In a similar way, small research projects can hone research skills to unleash a culture of inquiry, and develop questions and solutions for local health problems. All this supports better local health outcomes.

Vision, Mission and Approach of MicroResearch

Our vision is to become globally recognized pioneers in training, mentoring and support of multidisciplinary community focused health research with a commitment to positive societal change.

Our mission is to improve health care outcomes with innovative community-based research that assures quality and integration of research into the fabric of the local health system and the community.

Our Approach

Our approach builds local community-focused health research capacity by training health professionals in East Africa to identify and initiate health research projects that address the health problems they have identified. Project ideas are investigator initiated and undertaken by an interdisciplinary team of East Africans who know and understand the local culture, context and health needs. The research projects are focused on local community maternal and child health problems. The solutions must be sustainable and appropriate for the setting. The goal is to develop a culture of inquiry among health care providers. We seek to nurture collaborations with other stakeholders who share our goals of improving maternal and child health outcomes, and support our approach through effective and transparent relationships built on MicroResearch core values:

- ***Passion:*** Deeply rooted conviction and energy for everything MicroResearch represents.
- ***Collaboration:*** Working collaboratively in multidisciplinary research teams of health and other professionals and stakeholders to deliver on our mission.
- ***Respect:*** Commitment to pursue the questions that matter and are identified by the people we serve.
- ***Innovation:*** Steadfast commitment to improving health in the developing world.
- ***Compassion:*** Demonstrated identification with community and human needs through the work of MicroResearch.
- ***Culture:*** Unequivocal pursuit of capacity building, human resource development and a healthy community.

MicroResearch Initiatives

Our initiatives are characterized by a focus on research capacity development, linkage, partnerships and networking at local, national, regional and international levels. We work

with local partners e.g. universities and research institutions who take as much ownership and leadership as possible for MicroResearch programs and projects.

MicroResearch initiatives use defined tools (workshop materials, curricula and grant management) and resources (including grant funding and volunteer coaches, teachers, reviewers, managers) to implement its programs and projects. Our short, mid- and long-term objectives can be enhanced through partnering with others who share our approach, values and goals. Finding support, including funding for MicroResearch activities at all levels, is crucial for long-term success.

MicroResearch initiatives are branded entities with distinct governance structures including training workshops, forums, publication process, *e-learning* modules etc. The label “MicroResearch” must consistently meet the highest standards for quality!

History of MicroResearch

Jerome Kabakyenga, Noni MacDonald and Bob Bortolussi conceived the MicroResearch approach in 2008, at the end of a capacity-building workshop organized by Healthy Child Uganda (HCU). Later that year HCU and the Canadian Child Health Clinician Scientist Program (CCHCSP) committed funds to help launch MicroResearch initiatives. Since then HCU, CCHCSP, the International Development Research Council (IDRC) of Canada, many other organizations as well as private donors have provided encouragement and support for MicroResearch to develop educational tools, a mentors network, and funds for seed grants.

Training workshops and other initiatives have been refined through insights of healthcare workers and teachers in East Africa at Mbarara University of Science & Technology (MUST, with workshops starting 2008), Makerere University (starting 2010), the University of Nairobi (starting 2011) and the Tanzanian Training Centre for International Health (TTCIH, starting 2012). To ensure MicroResearch meets the local needs, local faculty, local coaches and local experts participate in all MicroResearch initiatives. Workshop participant recruitment is always organized and driven by local MicroResearch leaders. The workshops focus on improving skills for:

- developing a research question
- grant proposal development and management
- pitfalls in research
- ethics in research
- research manuscript development
- pitfalls in presentations including abstracts
- technical report writing
- knowledge translation and policy development
- community engagement
- career development

The format for the workshops, with up to 30 participants from different disciplines, combines lectures and small multidisciplinary group interactions. Each small group (up to 8 per group) chooses their own research question and then, with skills learned from lectures, develops a research proposal overview during the two week workshop.

The MicroResearch approach is working! The 2014 article "MicroResearch: Finding sustainable local health solutions in East Africa through small research studies", (Journal of Epidemiology and Global Health) outlines the progress that MicroResearch initiatives have made in our first five years.

Background for Strategic Plan

In preparation for a new strategic plan, we conducted a SWOT analysis using an online survey of 60 East African MicroResearch leaders and recent Workshop graduates. The survey was also used to assess how research funds could be best used, and how the MicroResearch Program could be improved. Focus group discussions were held during MicroResearch Forums in Kampala (March 2013) and in Nairobi (November 2013). The survey and discussions brought forward ideas on how to enhance MicroResearch activities, and how to transfer MicroResearch leadership to East Africa, while maintaining MicroResearch high standards. The analysis and summary of each of these surveys and focus group themes were presented at the April 2014 strategic planning meeting.

The purpose of the April 2014 strategic planning meeting was to draw up a 5-year roadmap for the future of MicroResearch, "MR 20/20". With the support of IDRC, 20 participants took part in the meeting, including nine East Africans, Canadian Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) representatives and other leaders in maternal and child global health from Canada and USA.

The next step was to obtain feedback on feasibility for the planning ideas from key East African MicroResearch leaders. This was done with face-to-face discussion at three East African sites. With this feedback, the MicroResearch Advisory Committee (MRAC) set the priorities for the next phase of MicroResearch development outlined below.

MicroResearch 20/20 Strategies

Where do we want to go?

What will we look like in 5 years? How will we ensure sustainability? How can we enhance and exploit our uniqueness and our successes? How can we ensure that changes are consistent with our vision, mission and approach? These were the questions addressed through the MicroResearch Strategic Planning process, culminating in this report, "MicroResearch 20/20".

1: Identify stable support for MicroResearch.

Approach:

Transparency demands that all initiatives and planned expansion of MicroResearch must be built on a sound and prudent financial and resource plan. Collaboration with other groups and organizations demands that goals and values are shared, and that the relationship be win-win.

Initiative 1:

- Communicate the Strategic Plan to NGOs and Foundations that share the values and goals of the MicroResearch approach.
- Apply for funds to support MicroResearch initiatives, either alone or in collaboration with other global health organizations, with MicroResearch contributing to research capacity building through training, project support and mentoring.
- Assist African MicroResearch sites and African organizations to secure local MicroResearch support from their government or other potential sources by working with local East African MicroResearch leaders to develop information and promotional packages for their use.

When:

- Contact NGOs in 2015 to present rationale for their support for MicroResearch.
- Apply for grants as opportunities arise in 2015.
- Collaborate with others groups and organizations for grant opportunities in 2015.
- Develop MicroResearch promotional material in 2015 and continue to refine it annually thereafter.

Evaluation:

- More stable MicroResearch funding lines established by 2017.

2: Increase East African leadership in MicroResearch

Approach:

The key to long-term sustainability of MicroResearch in East Africa will be to increase local (i.e. East African) leadership and ownership of the MicroResearch program in East Africa.

Initiative 2: Promote local East African leadership of MicroResearch.

- Establish an East African MicroResearch Advisory Group (EA-MAG) to enhance local ownership of the MicroResearch initiative in East Africa.
- Identify and promote local leaders and leadership skills at regional MicroResearch forums.
- Increase the pool of MicroResearch local leaders.
- Identify and approach East African sources for local funding of the MicroResearch grants program (national and regional governments and NGOs).

When:

- The process to recruit local leaders to build the EA- MAG will begin in 2015, and is expected to be complete by the end of 2016.
- Identify local sources for funding (to begin spring of 2015).
- EA-MAG will communicate through electronic media and at the annual MicroResearch Forum as funds allow.

Evaluation:

Success of this strategy will be measured by accomplishments of action items, i.e. MR East Africa will be lead by East Africans no later than the end of 2017, and a steady local funding source secured by approximately the same time.

3: Develop a MicroResearch Network to support researchers in East Africa

Approach:

The MicroResearch approach will be characterized by a focus on developing the East African MicroResearch communities as a network that has local and regional relevance. We also hope to nurture collaborations with East African organizations and NGOs built on shared core values and mission. To accomplish this initiative will require effective communication and coordination with others in East Africa.

Initiative 3: Funding for an East African Coordinator and Forums

- Identify a source for funding of a full- time coordinator in East Africa.
- Identify the Coordinator's specific roles and responsibilities.
- With assistance from East African MicroResearch Advisory Group recruit a full-time East African Coordinator to:
 - oversee and moderate the LinkedIn MicroResearch network
 - establish and maintain MicroResearch directories, as requested by EA-MAG.
 - facilitate linkages among MicroResearch project teams (e.g. by distributing project list and team dialogue),
 - work with local East Africa MicroResearch leadership to garner local East African support for MicroResearch at national and regional levels.
- Identify East African and other sources for support for an annual MicroResearch Forum in East Africa so lessons learned can be shared more widely

When:

This Goal and initiative is a priority for 2015/16

Evaluation:

Measure the use of the LinkedIn network, the number of Forums, the number of projects interacting or linked together and teams working together from different areas. The East African MicroResearch Advisory Group and the MicroResearch Board will review the effectiveness of the coordinator at the end of year two and year four and oversee this progress.

4: Expand MicroResearch within East Africa and to other African countries

Approach 4:

MicroResearch activity has been focused in five centers in three East African countries; Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. Although NGO-funded, time-limited workshops have been conducted outside of East Africa, these have not been part of a formal MicroResearch program. The approach of MicroResearch within and outside of East Africa needs to be clearly defined.

Initiative 4A: Within East Africa.

- Develop a standard MOU template describing deliverables offered by MicroResearch and by host sites that will ensure clarity and transparency.
- Consider new MicroResearch sites/institutions within Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania and explore opportunities and options in Rwanda.
- Assess viability of possible new sites with advice from EA-MAG and MRAC.

- Develop alliances with organizations that work in these target countries and sites.
- Initiate applications for funding to expand MicroResearch sites, in collaboration with local East African and other organizations.

When:

- Confirm and/or renew MOU agreements with present MicroResearch collaborating sites in 2015.
- Explore new funding sources to enable support of current sites and expansion to new ones (2015/17).
- Funding stability must precede expansion.

Evaluation:

- By 2016, all participating MicroResearch African sites to have formal MOU agreements signed/renewed.
- By 2016, consider one new site, by 2017 a second new site if funds and resources support this. By 2020 MicroResearch infrastructure established locally in new sites, based on initial success of local site's MicroResearch projects.

Approach 4B:

MicroResearch may become a model for similar activity in other countries and regions. The MicroResearch “brand”, as described, may be used with institutions having a formal agreement (MOUs etc.) with MicroResearch.

Initiative 4B: Outside of East Africa

- If opportunities arise for MicroResearch initiatives outside of East Africa, consider them cautiously on a case-by-case basis with input from EA-MAG and MRAC.
- Consider non-East African sites, if external funding is fully provided and if participation may enhance East African MicroResearch interests as well.
- Guard the MicroResearch “brand”. Consider permitting elements of the MicroResearch model to be copied, provided the copies are distinguished from the MicroResearch “brand”.

When:

- Consider on a case-by-case basis as opportunities arise.

Evaluation:

- At the end of two and four years assess as part of an overall MicroResearch review.

5: Increase East African Guidance and Input to the MicroResearch Curriculum

Approach:

The key to long-term sustainability of MicroResearch in East Africa will be to increase East African ownership of MicroResearch initiatives including Curriculum development, content and educational approaches. East African input is essential for setting eligibility criteria to enroll in workshops and receipt of a Certificate; identifying objectives for workshops; exploring need for exams and/or practical components and for ongoing review of curriculum quality and requirements. The standards must be kept at a high level.

Initiative 5A: Curriculum Working Group (CWG)

- MicroResearch Curriculum Director to develop the mandate, membership and functions for a Curriculum Working Group (CWG) and its relationship to EA-MAG and to the MicroResearch Director,
- Identify source for support and funding for curriculum development,
- Establish resources to support the functioning of the CWG,
- Develop a strategy for CWG communication within and across sites,
- Develop a needs assessment for curriculum, including further e-modules, based upon input from MicroResearch Workshop graduates and EA-MAG,
- CWG to advise the Director on priorities for curriculum development,
- CWG to review changes to curriculum with the MicroResearch Curriculum Director.

When:

- Identify if and where new funding sources needed for CWG (2015) can be obtained,
- Needs assessment should be an initial step, discussion at a regional forum and through network communication (2015),
- Establish mandate and membership criteria for the CWG (2015/16),
- Recruit members to the CWG (2015/16),
- Curriculum Director to develop changes to the curriculum with input from the CWG,
- CWG to oversee evaluation of changes to curriculum (2015 and ongoing).
- CWG to work and meet electronically with an annual face-to-face meeting at the annual MR Forum when funds support this (2015 and ongoing)

Evaluation:

Success for this strategy will be measured by accomplishments of action items; securing funding sources, completion of a needs assessment, establishment of working group, development of new curriculum modules, development of an enhanced process to evaluate feedback from participants.

Initiative 5B: Expansion of MicroResearch Curricula Identify what value and need may exist for MicroResearch training integration into local institutions ('mainstreamed'). This has been expressed as one of the desirable goals.

- Once value and need is shown for Curriculum at local institutions, work with CWG to develop elements that can be integrated into the relevant local health care professional (HCP) curricula;
- Once long-term sustainability and need is determined, work with CWG to support growth in MicroResearch curriculum capacity:
 - a. Specialized course to 'Training of Trainers';
 - b. Specialized course for local mentors/coaches,
 - c. Development options for Workshop graduates who have completed their projects to further grow their research skills.

When:

- Identify value, need and priority in 2015;
- If agreed to as important, begin work on design of :
 - Specialized course to 'Training of Trainers' (end of 2015)
 - Specialized course for local mentors/coaches (end of 2016)
 - Development options for Workshop graduates who have completed their projects to further grow their research skills (end of 2017)
 - Common elements for different HCP undergraduate training in MicroResearch principles (end 2018)

Evaluation:

Success for this strategy will be measured by accomplishments of action items, and through review during annual MR Forums.

Conclusions

MicroResearch 20/20 lays out an ambitious plan for the next five years. Translating this ambitious plan into reality will be the immediate task.

- A plan is needed to ensure key partners are informed of the goals set by MicroResearch 20/20 and a strategy for garnering support
- A plan for periodic evaluation of progress on each initiative is needed to ensure MicroResearch 20/20 continues on an appropriate and sustainable path.
- Organizational structure must be reviewed and reassessed to ensure that form will follow function.

The MicroResearch strategic plan will only succeed with support from all involved. The MicroResearch concept is too important to fail; the way forward must be found.

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