

HRP Alliance in action:

Empowering researchers through
collaboration in Anglophone Africa



The HRP Alliance supports research capacity strengthening by bringing together institutions conducting research in sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). At the centre of the HRP Alliance are seven regional 'hubs' to empower and stimulate the research capacity of SRHR partner institutions, providing regional leadership through scholarships, training, fellowships and institutional mentorship. This story highlights the Anglophone African hub's successful collaboration with international universities, empowering young researchers by offering a joint Master's of Science programme with an internationally renowned university. As a result, students are becoming leaders in SRHR research, moving the needle for better understanding of critical SRHR issues.



Grantsmanship training certificates were awarded to trainees, December 2022, Ghana

The regional HRP Alliance hub for Anglophone Africa, housed at the University of Ghana School of Public Health (UGSPH), has become a cornerstone of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) research capacity building in the region. In its fifth year of operation, the hub implemented a landmark initiative, a joint [Master's of Science programme in Sexual & Reproductive Health Policy and Programming](#) in collaboration with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM). This programme showcases the hub's commitment to addressing pressing regional challenges in research capacity and leadership.

Regional challenges in SRHR research

"Before the collaboration with HRP Alliance, the region faced significant gaps in SRHR capacity. Despite the presence of practitioners, there was a shortage of professionals with the advanced skills necessary to lead and innovate in this critical field," said Kwasi Torpey, Dean of the UGSPH and Principal Investigator of the hub. Leadership was another key challenge; many lacked the capacity to drive transformative projects or influence policy. Moreover, while data on SRHR existed, it was underutilized for advancing programme implementation and policy development.

Joint master's programme: A targeted response

Leveraging on years of support from the HRP Alliance, the hub at UGSPH partnered with LSHTM to develop an online joint Master's of Science programme (MSc) in sexual and reproductive health policy and programming tailored to meet regional needs. "The partnership with the London School was a competitive programme. They were looking for a partner in Africa to implement SRHR training in the region. The work that we had done with the hub allowed us to be competitive. Our application proposed the idea to co-develop an MSc for reproductive health policy and programme. We developed some modules and we have scholarships for 50 people every year for over a period of three years," said Torpey. The programme combined rigorous academic coursework with practical applications in SRHR, offered through flexible delivery modes, like online training modules. This approach ensures accessibility for working professionals while maintaining high academic standards.

The hub built on the foundation it had in research capacity strengthening, particularly in Sierra Leone and Ethiopia, by identifying candidates from these countries for the joint MSc programme. The hub



had already engaged with and trained individuals in SRHR research, creating a pipeline of qualified candidates who could benefit from this joint programme. Through the scholarships provided by LSHTM, the hub ensured that individuals could continue their education, further developing their expertise in SRHR research methodologies, policy development and programme leadership. Furthermore, this new programme allowed the hub to shift its focus to support international HRP Alliance fellows at the doctoral degree level. To date, the HRP Alliance has been able to support 26 master's and PhD fellows from eight Anglophone African countries to complete their postgraduate research degrees at the UGSPH.

Building on past achievements with a vision towards the future

The joint MSc programme has been built on years of investment by the HRP Alliance in developing a critical mass of skilled researchers in SRHR, which has resulted in high-quality research outputs that contributed to evidence-based policymaking and programme implementation. Several alumni have acquired key roles in academia and government institutions.

Follow-up is key, according to Torpey. "Maintaining a close relationship with the trainees has really

benefited and ensured continuity. They are not gone after the graduate training; we were able to use their expertise for other SRHR research projects. One of the master's students was just promoted as head of reproductive health service in the government of Ghana. One former student is now managing a whole health facility. He was also part of data analysis and leadership training," he said.

The programme also demonstrated the power of partnerships. By leveraging LSHTM's global expertise and the hub's regional knowledge, the collaboration provided a holistic educational experience that bridged theory and practice. This synergy enriched the learning environment and set a benchmark for similar initiatives.

Lessons learned and broader implications

Tailoring training programmes to address specific regional needs proved critical to the young researchers' success. To this end, the hub has organized six courses since 2017 for a total of 125 individuals. The lessons learned from the MSc programme also led to the provision of additional short courses to other individuals in the region, including SRHR researchers and ministry of health staff. For example, the hub organised a grantsmanship workshop to provide training on



Grantsmanship workshop group picture with participants, December 2022, Ghana



“The HRP programme has been instrumental in shaping my doctoral studies and has ultimately been a very crucial launchpad for my career as a researcher.”

Helen Habibata Habib



Emefa Modey Amoah from the UGSPH hub, leading secondary data analysis training for HRP fellows

essential fundamentals of grant writing to over 35 participants from the region, including the HRP PhD fellows.

The true impact of this strategy is made evident by those participating in these courses. “I had the opportunity to interact with other students from other hubs at the statistical analysis training workshop (offered by the HRP Alliance) in Geneva, Switzerland (in 2019). Their feedback on my research substantially shaped and improved my work. The oversight and direction from supervisors at the UGSPH hub who had previously worked on HRP initiatives that were related to my doctoral thesis ([quality of care for adolescent maternal care](#)) was an essential resource,” said Helen Habibata Habib, an HRP Alliance PhD Fellow.

Habib reflects on the support she got from the HRP Alliance to conduct her PhD: “The HRP programme has been instrumental in shaping my doctoral studies and has ultimately been a very crucial launchpad for my career as a researcher. The structure and resources of the programme have made a distinct difference in completing my studies and being able to transition into real-life work as an early career researcher.”

The success of the work of the HRP Alliance, including this innovative joint MSc programme, offers a framework for replication in other regions. By prioritizing regional needs, building strategic partnerships and incorporating flexible delivery methods, similar programmes can enhance research capacity on SRHR.

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