

The Path to Research Leadership in Africa

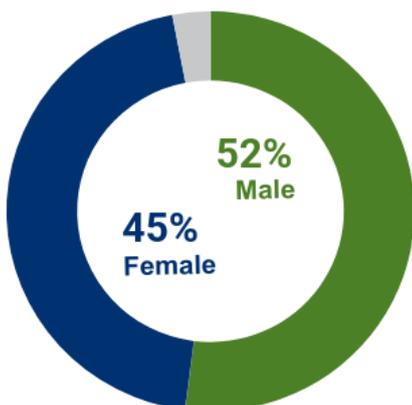
Wellcome and AESA support scientists and researchers to tackle big problems, fuel imaginations, and spark debate

This unique partnership supports the Africa-led development of world-class researchers and scientific leaders, shifting the centre of gravity for African science to Africa. Wellcome and AESA have jointly commissioned this research to explore the landscape of research leadership and associated training programmes available across Africa and make recommendations to all stakeholders on how they can play their part in developing the next generation and building the capacity and capability of current African research leaders. In the final section we make recommendations to funders, institutions, research leaders and researchers that they will need to consider to accelerate world-class research, foster innovation, build linkages with policy makers and promote scientific and research leadership in Africa.

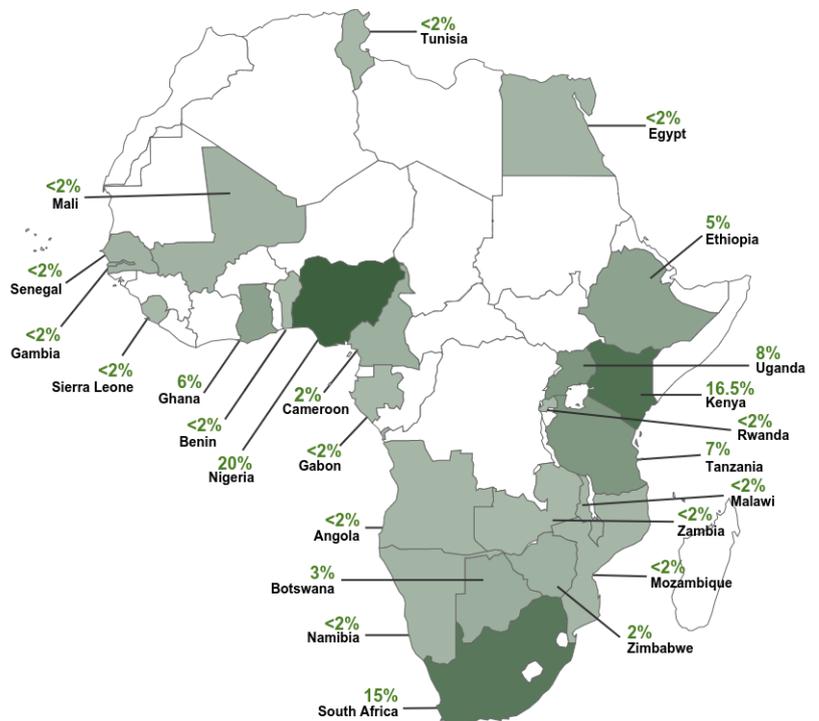
BACKGROUND

Our research used a mixed-methods, triangulation approach, sampling the views of a range of 330 stakeholders and individuals from 28 countries across Africa, via focus groups, in-depths interviews and an online survey consulting with research leaders, early and middle career researchers, research managers, senior management and funders. Current provision and future requirements were captured, as well as a range of perspectives on the path to research leadership.

Gender balance of respondents



African countries where online survey respondents were working



Current landscape

It was clear from our research that participants place strong emphasis on a wide range of competencies necessary for research leadership in addition to research expertise and skills. There is good qualitative evidence that leadership development is well understood as a pathway throughout a research career. However, provision of programmes mainly focussed on early career researchers (ECRs) with little provision for mid-career and research leaders. Only a small number of respondents (6%) reported knowledge of programmes across all three stages. The path to leadership was in some cases well-funded and resourced (see Table 1) but not well co-ordinated, signposted or easy to navigate, 40% were not aware of any institutional programmes. The training programmes reviewed mainly concentrated on the leadership of research or on leadership (and management) training but not both.

SUMMARY OF MAJOR PROGRAMMES

This table outlines five examples of academic research leadership and five leadership training and development programmes that are currently available in Africa. It is not an exhaustive list but is indicative of some of the options that are already established in these areas.

Table 1

ACADEMIC RESEARCH LEADERSHIP	DESCRIPTION
1 DELTAS Africa (Developing Excellence in Leadership, Training and Science), AESA	\$100 million programme supporting the Africa-led development of world-class researchers and scientific leaders
2 CIRCLE (Climate Impact Research Capacity and Leadership Enhancement), AESA	A UK funded programme to improve the skills and research results for early career African researchers in the field of climate change through 100 awarded scholarships
3 CARTA (Consortium for Advanced Research Training In Africa)	An African consortium to build and strengthen the capacity of African universities to locally produce well-trained and skilled researchers operating in nine African institutions and four research centres
4 FLAIR (Future Leaders African Independent Research)	Fellowships for talented African ECRs who have the potential to become leaders in their field. Awards are up to £150,000 across the field of natural science
5 AMARI (The African Mental Health Research Initiative)	The AMARI programme will build an Africa-led network of 47 researchers with expertise in substance use disorders
PROVIDERS WORKING BEYOND ACADEMIA	
1 Centre for Creative Leadership	A global provider focusing on creative leadership. They have a strong African presence working globally with over 3,000 organisations
2 Centre for African Leadership Development	This organisation provides leadership development programmes and capacity building. They have worked with over 100 organisations
3 CIDT (Centre for International Development and Training) Women in Leadership Course	A social enterprise working in over 140 countries worldwide focussing on capacity strengthening. They have developed gender programmes
4 PWC – Africa	An established global leader, PWC offers leadership training and consultancy within the African region
5 The Knowledge Academy	A global training provider with a strong presence in South Africa. They offer a number of leadership training programmes

Overall those consulted felt that the value placed on professional development was low and that the current leadership pathway was not strategic or driven by African context and needs. Additionally, institutions face difficulties on the selection of leadership programmes ensuring cultural and context relevance. They also need practical support to understand how best to deliver e.g. holistic approach, use of external training providers, secondment, costs, etc. Participants recognised that training focused on the leadership of research alone or through generic leadership development will not achieve the capacity building at the scale and pace needed to match pan-African research aspirations. The current pan-African work to address issues of trust and integrity; supporting financial good practice, building competency and developing standards provides a good exemplar and opportunity to develop African research leadership.



“Create a culture that we are always learning; a humility around our profession”

Future of African research leadership

Decisions made in Africa for Africa, will have tangible effects on the researchers as well as the research. African research leadership has unique characteristics: leaders must contribute to research globally, yet act as leaders locally. This emergent leadership in Africa is different to developments beyond Africa and requires research leadership to be relational, related to community and not self-serving, with an increasing emphasis and focus on societal impact.

CHARACTERISTICS, ASSOCIATED WITH A SUCCESSFUL RESEARCH LEADER IN AFRICA

Our analysis of the competencies required, has led to the articulation of an African Research Leadership model. This T-shaped model includes core depth of subject knowledge and research methodologies, which can be described as 'Research Expertise'. However, those consulted placed considerable emphasis on the breadth of competencies required for relational leadership; stretching from personal qualities to relationships with people and communities.

African Research Leadership (T Shape)

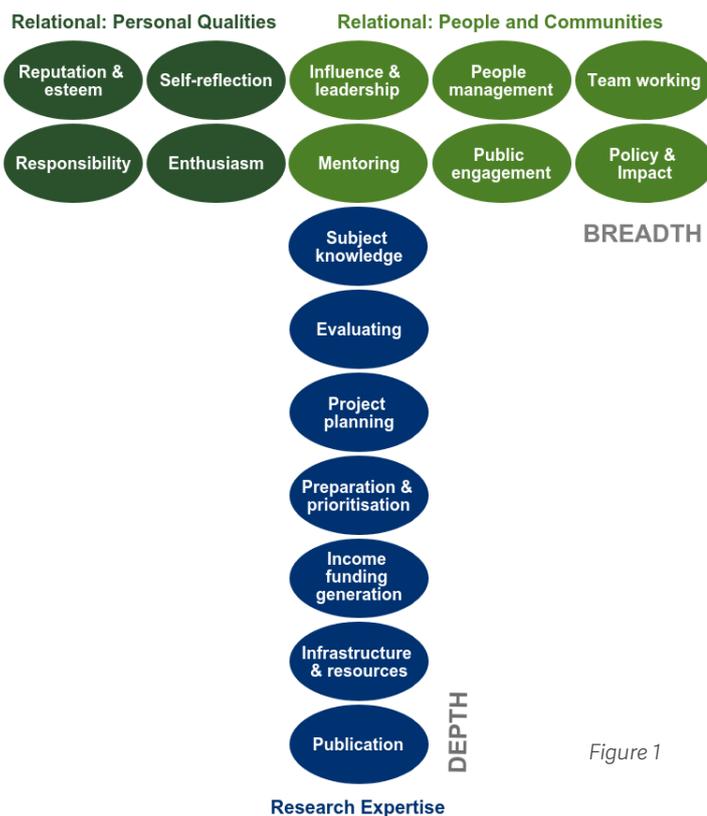


Figure 1

Research leaders in Africa look for the common good. Part of their central role is to challenge fellow researchers with new ideas and approaches to provide solutions to transform lives resulting in impact; from societal to community engagement, policy to publications and funding. Fostering research excellence should and will always be central to African research, there is also a strong performance management culture.

“Leadership is a process, a learning path, the more exposure one gets, the more chances to keep up and improve”

This research leadership model identifies and incorporates different gender viewpoints on the breadth and depth of competencies in the path to research leadership in Africa, enabling the development of gender inclusive programmes. The competencies listed here are taken from the leadership competencies outlined in the Leadership Lens on the Vitae Researcher Development Framework (www.vitae.ac.uk/rdf), which sets out the knowledge, behaviours and attributes of successful researchers and was used in the survey and interviews to explore competencies and challenges for research leaders.

“Institutional structures must provide equal and equitable support for researchers otherwise there will always be a gender imbalance . . .”

ENVIRONMENT

The model of accelerated leadership development provides a useful seven step process for leadership development that can be applied to institutional and funder support. This model, adapted for African research organisations, provides a useful self-assessment tool for institutional and funder research leadership development capability and capacity.

Leadership development requires a strategic approach with multiple interventions, of which training programmes play only a part. A rethinking of leadership development within the research environment through the integration of experiential learning, good mentoring and appropriate human resources talent management practices is required. It is helpful to consider research leadership development as a systems approach; a view which is substantiated by the institutional support identified by participants as good practice.

“It is about a combination of measures not one isolated measure or short-term initiative”

Seven step model of accelerated research leadership development

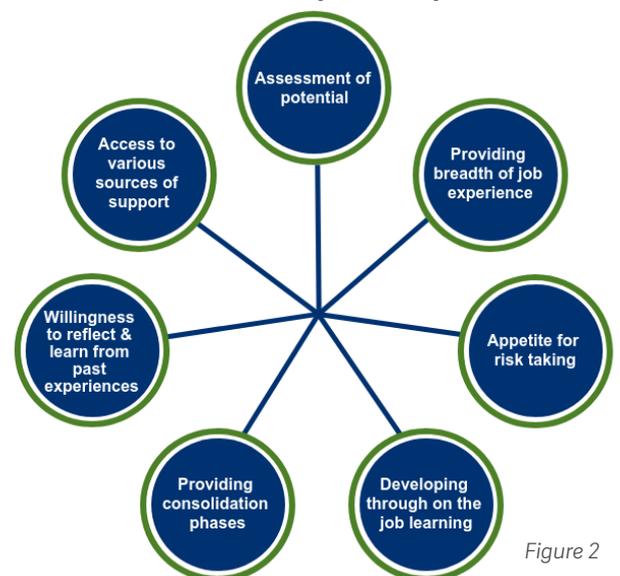


Figure 2

Adapted from Wichert Accelerated leadership development (2018)

To accelerate world-class research, foster innovation, build linkages with policy makers and promote scientific leadership in Africa, greater emphasis should be placed on the importance of investing in institutional, national and African capacity to accelerate sustainable research leadership.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INSTITUTIONS

Accelerated leadership - take a strategic approach to accelerated relational leadership development of their researchers, including processes for identifying leadership potential, formal and informal development opportunities at all career stages, mentoring and coaching support, researcher career pathways, gender equality initiatives, funding and resources

African Research Leadership - ensure all leadership development programmes integrate all aspects of the 'T-shaped' leadership model, i.e. research expertise, relational leadership and development of leadership competencies

Gender inclusion and diversity - give specific attention to how relational leadership development strategy and its implementation supports female researchers, given gender differences in preferred leadership styles, minority groups and any cultural specificities

Monitoring progress - set up monitoring processes to evaluate the effectiveness of their leadership development programmes and the outcomes. This should include regular feedback from researchers and their managers

Data and evidence - set up processes to collect and share ongoing data openly on the profile of researchers and their career paths, identifying and promoting role models describing their leadership development as incentives for other researchers

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ALL RESEARCHERS

Career development - take control at all stages of their career, using the 'T-shaped' model of leadership to reflect on their competencies with respect to relational leadership and research expertise, identifying where they need to develop these further and investing the time to do so

Personal and professional development - take advantage of all opportunities to develop leadership capabilities in both relational and research leadership through participating in specific development programmes, taking advantage of opportunities within their research activities and building their networks and research identity

Mentoring and networks - actively seek out mentors who can support them in the development of their leadership capabilities and widen their networks

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESEARCH LEADERS/MANAGERS OF RESEARCHERS

Relational leadership - provide opportunities for ECRs to develop their leadership capabilities alongside their research activities. This should include opportunities for example to apply for funding, access funding, broker international opportunities, attend and present at conferences, gain peer review experience, manage and supervise others, policy development, knowledge exchange, and get involved and/or lead public engagement activities

Personal and professional development - actively encourage ECRs to reflect on their leadership competencies and activities, for example, during progress meetings and more formally through appraisal processes, where appropriate.

Networks and mentors - use their own contacts and networks to facilitate the development of their ECR's networks and strengthen their relational leadership abilities

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUNDERS AND OTHER ENABLING NATIONAL AND PAN-AFRICAN ORGANISATIONS

Funding - consider the balance and profile of funding schemes to ensure there are programmes to support relational leadership development at all stages of the researcher career through specific calls and leadership development opportunities integrated into their terms and conditions of grants, particularly focusing on building gender inclusive research environment

African Centre of Excellence for Research Leadership - invest specific funding to catalyse the implementation of accelerated relational leadership development programmes in institutions, encouraging the sharing of good practice and creation of targeted leadership resources through the development of an African Centre of Excellence for Research Leadership, using a 'hub and spoke' model to maximise engagement

African Research Leadership - invest in a flagship Africa-led relational leadership development programme based on the accelerated leadership model to support Africa's rising stars, promote the importance of nurturing research talent and provide an exemplar model for institutions

Data and evidence - set up processes to collect and share ongoing data openly on the profile of researchers in Africa and their career paths, identifying and promoting role models and describing their leadership development as incentives for other researchers



This research was funded by Wellcome



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