



THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY  
Institute for Human Development

**STORIES/ENTRIES COMPILED AND SUBMITTED TO THE OFFICE OF  
RESEARCH (KARACHI) FOR POSSIBLE INCLUSION IN THE 2019 EDITION OF  
AKU'S RESEARCH MAGAZINE**

Improving Early Child Development and Wellbeing among Embedded Refugee and  
Other Marginalized Communities in Informal Settlements in Nairobi, Kenya

Influencing Systems for Improved Child Outcomes in East and Southern Africa: AKU's  
Contribution to the Realization of the Nurturing Care Framework for Low- and Middle-  
Income Countries

Harold Armstrong Estate Gift to Institute for Human Development to Support  
Transformative Approaches Child and Youth Development in Africa

Positioning the Aga Khan University: A Leader In and for the Developing World

## FEATURE

### THE INSTITUTE FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Improving Early Child Development and Wellbeing among Embedded Refugee and Other Marginalized Communities in Informal Settlements in Nairobi, Kenya



*A child going through fine motor skills assessment*

It is estimated that without bold societal action, over 250 million children under 5 years of age growing up in low- and middle-income countries would likely not reach their full developmental potential. Many of these children live in conflict zones, in transitional or permanent refugee contexts, and in diverse marginalized and informal settlements. Why should we be concerned? Children born and raised in these settings are particularly vulnerable due to exposure to extreme conditions of poverty, violence and other forms of social adversity. Interventions focusing on the first 1000 days of life have become a widely acknowledged global strategy for preserving developmental potential for the large numbers of children who would otherwise be at risk.

Aga Khan University is a global leader in research on such interventions. For years now, randomised controlled trials conducted in Pakistan have featured preponderantly

in the notable global scientific knowledge base on early childhood interventions. Today, the geographic base from which AKU is making its global contributions to intervention research has grown significantly to include the Coast Region of Kenya – where the Medical College, East Africa, has footprint health systems strengthening and other forms of applied research – and urban Nairobi.

At the Institute for Human Development, we are carrying out research in the informal settlements of Dagoretti sub-County, Nairobi, benefitting families of children under 2 years of age from refugee and native Kenyan households. The two primary goals of the project are: (1) to give vulnerable a strong start in life; and (2) to deliver interventions in close cooperation with the community to ensure that the content and methods of the interventions can easily be integrated into existing services/programmes long after our project has ended.

In the first phase, we conducted formative work, including a household survey and a comprehensive situational analysis of health and social services. We identified the community's needs in early child development, the range of services available, and the delivery structures for public and informal sector interventions. We gained key insights from this formative work which guided our next steps. First, we found that the community would be receptive to the use of community-health workers as delivery agents for the planned experimental. Second, we learned that we would need to engage refugee leaders extensively if we were to penetrate the refugee community sufficiently to gain the trust and the numbers needed for a rigorous study. Third, we wanted the intervention to be driven by the needs of the community and/or the realities on the ground, and we were able to identify, at least preliminarily, several component candidates for the intervention package – e.g., parenting support, economic empowerment, and nutrition education/guidance.

In the second phase, we will conduct a series of activities to develop and pilot-test an integrated “package” of interventions and its associated training curriculum. The main study will test the feasibility of implementing the intervention in community settings populated with native Kenyans and embedded. Families will be recruited into this phase of the project between late pregnancy and delivery, and will be followed for a 12-month period, as part of an intervention or non-intervention group. Additional funding will be sought to follow the families further into the future.

Senior Research Scientist Professor Amina Abubakar leads the team of 13 researchers collaborating on this project from three countries: Kenya, Canada, and Pakistan.

Trustee Dr. Julie Freischlag visits IHD field research site in Kawangware, Nairobi,



From left to right: Prof. Amina Abubakar, Ms. Meseret Belachew, IHD Director Prof. Kofi Marfo, Vice Provost Dr. Alex Awiti, President Firoz Rasul, Trustee Dr. Julie Freischlag, and Mr. Karim Sayani

## PROJECT INFORMATION

### *Principal Investigators:*

Kofi Marfo, PhD, Aga Khan University

Stephen Lye, PhD, University of Toronto, Canada

### *Project Funding (April 2017 – March, 2020):*

Grant: CDN\$2.0M

International Development Research Centre (IDRC)

Aga Khan Foundation Canada (AKFC)

### *Partnership Institutions:*

Institute for Human Development, AKU

Alliance for Human Development, Lunenfeld-Tanenbaum Research Institute, Toronto

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***INFLUENCING SYSTEMS FOR IMPROVED CHILD OUTCOMES IN EAST  
AND SOUTHERN AFRICA***

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*AKU's contribution to the realization of the Nurturing Care Framework for Low- and Middle-Income Countries*



Significant gaps in knowledge and practice remain in the field of early childhood development, compounded by poverty, stunting, diseases and instabilities in most developing countries. The effect is a limited scope of services for children hindering their overall developmental outcomes. In return, communities experience tremendous loss of opportunities associated with human underdevelopment. This phenomenon is especially dire among the low- and middle-income countries where millions of children under 5 years of age are at risk of suboptimal development.

With funding from Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, the Institute for Human Development is implementing a project to enhance evidence-based programming and catalyze a robust policy environment to prioritize investment in the early years of children's development. Under this initiative, IHD has recently developed a Policy Makers Course integrating content from two knowledge sources, the Science of Early Child Development (SECD) and the Nurturing Care Framework. The course is designed to deepen appreciation of the science of early human development and to convince leadership at the governmental, private sector, and philanthropy levels to invest appropriately in children, families, and communities. This is the surest way to *"boost shared prosperity, promote inclusive economic growth, expand equitable opportunity, and end extreme poverty."* (WHO, 2018)

The Institute recently conducted a high-level county leadership course for Siaya County Government in Kenya in collaboration with PATH and the County

Government. The three-day workshop brought together members of the County Assembly, journalists, County Executive Committees for Health, Agriculture, Education and Finance, Directors and Chief Officers of several line ministries. The forum provided a unique opportunity for learning and collective reflection and assessment of progress, gaps, and actions required for the county to mitigate risks for children so they can flourish.

The Policy Makers course content draws from SECD and Nurturing Care Framework. SECD is a knowledge translation and mobilization initiative designed to make current research accessible to those interested in learning about the impact of early experience on lifelong health and well-being. Beginning as a tool to help share the emerging science about early brain development, SECD now offers a suite of online and offline media-rich educational resources with examples of research and programmes from around the world. SECD was developed by Red River College (RRC) in Canada in partnership with the University of Toronto. The SECD International Edition was later developed by RRC in partnership with the Aga Khan Development Network and is now housed permanently at Aga Khan University within the Institute for Human Development beginning end of 2018.

The Nurturing Care Framework is a roadmap of action for governments and communities that builds upon state-of-the art evidence of how child development unfolds and of the effective policies and interventions that can improve early childhood development. It was developed through a consultative process by WHO, UNICEF and the World Bank in collaboration with the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn & Child Health, the Early Childhood Development Action Network and many other partners.

## **INSTITUTE FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**

### **Harold Armstrong Estate Gift to Institute for Human Development to Support Transformative Approaches Child and Youth Development in Africa**

When children growing up in resource-poor environments are able to start life optimally as a result of improved wellness in all areas of their development, they are better positioned for successful life outcomes, and society, in turn, stands to benefit ultimately. This statement poignantly captures the sentiments of the man behind a gift negotiated on behalf of the Institute for Human Development by Aga Khan Foundation Canada. Mr. Harold Armstrong had a desire to give “something” to the continent of Africa and he wanted it take the form of interventions that place each African child and youth on a trajectory toward successful life outcomes. The gift of CDN\$700,000 from Mr. Armstrong’s estate is earmarked to support the building of interdisciplinary collaborative research teams across the university to “incubate” projects to develop transformative child and youth development interventions.

The mechanism established within the Institute to build and support these teams is the IHD-Harold Armstrong Seed Grants (HASG) Programme. Under the programme, 6 interdisciplinary faculty collaborative teams and 2 full post-doctoral fellowships will be funded for one-year projects between 2019 and 2023.

*Faculty Seed Grants:* In consonance with the Institute’s operational framework as a virtual, interdisciplinary entity, the HASGs are designed to strengthen the ethos of faculty collaboration across fields/disciplines, organizational entities, and campuses. Consequently, only grant submissions involving collaborators from two or more fields/disciplines will be considered. Collaborations across entities and campuses will be highly encouraged. Faculty grants will cover research expenses only and will not exceed US\$30,000. The proposed research should demonstrate a convincing pathway to a major proposal, specification of appropriate funding competitions, and a clear framework for continued collaboration.

*Post-Doctoral Fellowship Grants:* Post-doctoral fellows will receive support over the course of one academic year to pursue research in any area of child and/or youth intervention. The support will consist of a monthly stipend plus a US\$18,000 research grant. The Institute sees post-doctoral fellowships as a strategy not only to prepare the next generation of researchers in child and youth development for the academy broadly but to build internal faculty strength in that field. As an illustration, HASG funds could be used to recruit and groom/mentor a promising post-doctoral fellow into a faculty position in child/youth intervention research if this is an area of critical need for any AKU entity and there is a funded line for it.

*Early Child Development (EDC) Workforce Strengthening:* IHD is gaining increasing visibility as a global knowledge hub in the field of early child/human development. Through its partnerships with the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation and Red River College, Canada, the Institute has developed strong leadership in ECD field building and workforce strengthening. Funds from

the Armstrong gift will support innovative continuation of the use of the Science of Early Child Development knowledge resource for professional development outreach.

PROGRAMME INFORMATION	TIMELINES				
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Programme information published; submission guidelines available	September				
Faculty collaborative awards		2	2	2	
Post-doctoral fellowships		1		1	

## POSITIONING THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY: A LEADER IN AND FOR THE DEVELOPING WORLD

Anil Khamis, Peter Gatiti, and Abdul Basit

14 February 2019

*The overall aim of the Aga Khan University will be to make clear and rational judgements as to which foreseeable future needs of the developing countries requires new educational programmes and, having identified those openings, to address them by the appropriate means, setting the highest standards possible whether in teaching, research or service.*

*Inevitably, priorities will alter with the years as time and history unfold, and the University must be able to adapt itself to change. But one thing will remain constant: the mission of preparing graduates, men and women, to play constructive, worthwhile and responsible roles on society. (The Chancellor His Highness the Aga Khan 1983)*

The debate on the role and function of higher education in development, particularly in the majoritarian world, has been ongoing for many decades. Mamdani (2011) of Makerere University, Uganda, considers the founding of many universities post-independence as mere symbolic structures, such as the country's flag, as opposed to contributing agencies to national development, promoting knowledge generation, and undertaking fundamental research relevant to their contexts.

Birdsall (1996) and others argue that the public good of higher education in terms of research and post-graduate training, supporting a country's entry into the knowledge society, and creation of skills to support innovation with greater efficiencies far exceed the private returns spent on individual graduates. Bowen et al (2018) demonstrate that the social and political return in terms of promoting peace and security, leadership of communities to be more self-sufficient, and supporting positive change come more from investment in higher education and that quantitative economic cost-benefit approaches cannot estimate such benefits with accuracy.<sup>1</sup> The World Bank's *Human Development Index* (2019) breaks with its past focus on increases to GDP to argue that higher investments in education and health lead to populations being more productive and yielding higher earnings for a country's workforce. However, it also acknowledges that efforts have to be outcomes-driven as opposed to focusing on inputs to encourage more experimentation and innovation.<sup>2</sup>

Universities and global decision-makers have been exercised to remain at the forefront of knowledge-generation and its application to developing countries and their society's needs and development. The United Nation's Resolution adopted at the General Assembly in 2015 established 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Accepting the challenge to remain 'in and of the developing world', AKU is now mapping its work – research, publication, programmes, and activities – along the SDGs with a particular focus on the health (SDG 3) and education (SDG 4) goals. The SDGs provide a useful framework to highlight AKU's contribution to knowledge-generation to address fundamental, holistic, and integrated human development.

The mapping has begun with four approaches: a bibliometric analysis of the scholarly contributions of AKU researchers; data and information collection via the SDG template tool; financial analysis of investments; and illustrative case studies. The bibliometric analysis reveals 216 and 17 publications

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<sup>1</sup> Bowen, H. (2018), *Investment in learning: The individual and social value of American higher education*. Routledge

<sup>2</sup> The World Bank (2019), *World Development Report: The Changing Nature of Work*  
<http://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2019>

for health (SDG 3) and education (SDG 4) respectively since 2015. Colleagues have published with world-leading universities who partner with AKU: the initial analysis shows that research interests span critical and fundamental questions: what is knowledge, how it is developing, its applications, and what new knowledge will be required in the light of changes in technology including machine learning and artificial intelligence. Contextual issues ranging from globalisation and changing geopolitical configurations and the new investment modalities are also discernible in the analysis. It is evident that AKU faculty and staff do not isolate themselves in the 'ivory tower'. AKU's financial contribution just to health with specific reference to academia, over the past three years, exceeds USD 300 Million annually including post-graduate training of faculty, student awards, and patient welfare. We are now engaged with systematic reviews, statistical analyses, and working with colleagues across the University to further position AKU as 'institution of academic excellence that is also an agent for social development.'<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.aku.edu/about/Pages/home.aspx>