



RESEARCH MATTERS

ISSUE 3

JANUARY - JUNE 2024

MESSAGE FROM THE UNIT DIRECTOR

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the latest edition of our biannual newsletter! We are delighted to bring you updates, insights, and stories from our vibrant community of researchers, participants, and partners.

As we reflect on the past six months, we are excited to share highlights from the work being conducted across our core research themes. From important studies in infectious disease and innovative vaccine research to new approaches in non-communicable disease prevention and control, our teams are making remarkable strides in areas that directly impact public health. You will find detailed reports on recent findings, collaborative projects, and the impactful work being done at the General Population Cohort.

A standout feature in this newsletter is our focus on community engagement. Effective communication and collaboration with our community are fundamental to the success of our research. In this issue, we delve into the strategies and initiatives that are helping us to bridge the gap between science and society. Our stories highlight the importance of involving stakeholders at every stage of the research process, ensuring that our work remains relevant and impactful.

As we look ahead, we remain committed to fostering a culture of collaboration, knowledge exchange and continuous learning. The coming months promise to be just as dynamic, with new projects, partnerships, and other opportunities on the horizon.

We are grateful for the support and engagement of our entire community, and we look forward to continuing this journey together.

Thank you for being a part of our research mission. We hope you find this edition of the newsletter both informative and inspiring.

Professor Moffat J. Nyirenda

UNIT NEWS



NEW UNIT DIRECTOR ANNOUNCED!

Professor Moffat Nyirenda, previously Deputy Director and Head of non-communicable diseases research theme assumed the new role on 1 April 2024, taking over from Professor Pontiano Kaleebu. [Read more.](#)



HONORARY OBE FOR OUT-GOING UNIT DIRECTOR

Professor Pontiano Kaleebu was appointed an honorary Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (OBE) by His Majesty The King, in recognition of his services to education and public health. [Read more](#)



ENHANCING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN RESEARCH WITH MICROSOFT AI GENERATOR

The Unit hosted a special seminar on “powering personalized care and public health innovation through artificial intelligence” in collaboration with Microsoft Research Accelerator, featuring renowned Director of Academic Health and AI Partnerships, Dr. Kenji Takeda. [Read more.](#)

607KWP SOLAR PROJECT LAUNCHED AT ENTEBBE RESEARCH STATION

The integration of a large-scale solar facility into its operational base has significantly reduced the Unit’s reliance on the national grid and continues to increase its potential to conduct clinical trials in a sustainable manner. [Read more](#)



RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS



ADDRESSING RESEARCH GAPS IN MAJOR DEPRESSIVE DISORDER

We throw the spotlight on a groundbreaking study that aims to uncover the unique genetic risk factors of Major Depressive Disorder in Africa. [Read more](#)

LAUNCHING NEW SEMINAR SERIES ON CLINICAL TRIALS

The clinical trials platform kicked off a four-part seminar series on practical issues in clinical trials with an inaugural session on patient, participant, and community involvement in clinical trials. [Read more](#)

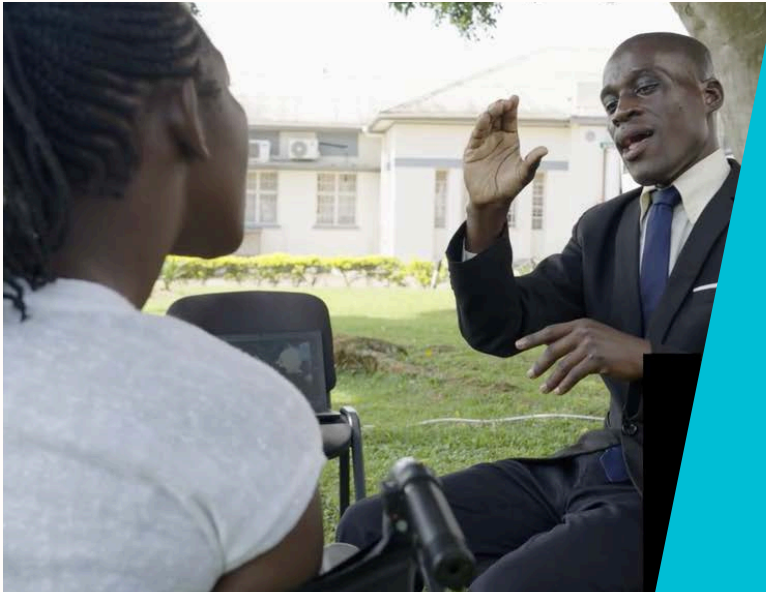


INFLUENCING POLICY FOR NEONATAL SURVIVAL IN UGANDA

Scientists on the OMWaNA trial engaged national and global policy makers on new evidence with potential to propel the national health system toward attainment of its goals. [Read more](#)



RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS



SHARING RESULTS OF STUDY ON RESEARCH INCLUSIVITY

The Disabled Youth Investigates study shared key insights on the effectiveness of a peer support methodology of involving persons with disabilities in scientific research. [Read more](#)



ENHANCING SAFETY AND TRUST IN IMMUNIZATION PROGRAMMES

Scientists conducting a phase one study on the candidate Rift Valley Fever virus vaccine ChAdOx1 RVF, built capacity among 27 health workers from six facilities in Southwestern Uganda to administer vaccines and manage side effects.

The training in comprehensive care sought to enhance the management of post-vaccination distress in health facilities.

[Read more](#)

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

CREATING PUBLIC AWARENESS ABOUT VACCINE EFFICACY AND EFFICIENCY DURING WORLD IMMUNISATION WEEK

In collaboration with the Uganda Virus Research Institute (UVRI), International AIDS Vaccine Initiative (IAVI), and World Health Organization (WHO), our vaccine awareness day successfully educated the public about the importance of vaccines.

Seminars by prominent experts highlighted advancements in HIV and measles vaccination, and a vibrant panel discussion addressed the future of community involvement in vaccination initiatives. [Read more](#)



HARNESSING THE EMABS COHORT

We bring you highlights of a collaborative meeting between Unit researchers and participants in the Entebbe Mother and Baby Study (EMaBs) cohort, which sought to collectively review the scientific findings generated by the cohort over time, and to collaboratively establish a framework for future projects. [Read more](#)





Enhancing global collaborative strategies for community-based health research at General Population Cohort Symposium



A symposium was held to discuss the importance of population health research, and to enhance utilization of Unit's General Population Cohort (GPC) resource.

The event brought together scientists and other stakeholders from the MRC/UVRI and LSHTM Uganda Research Unit, The London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, the Medical Research Council (MRC) Integrative Epidemiology Unit at the University of Bristol, ALSPAC at the University of Bristol, University of Oxford, University College London (UCL), Helmholtz Institute, and the Africa Health Research Institute (AHRI) in South Africa, to explore the challenges and opportunities in leveraging population cohort data to maximally advance scientific understanding of various health outcomes and inform evidence-based policymaking.

[Read more](#)

NEW RESEARCH!

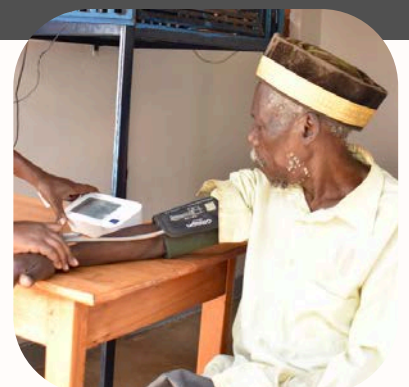


NEW STUDY TO ENHANCE ANEMIA IDENTIFICATION IN VULNERABLE POPULATIONS OF WESTERN UGANDA

The "Feasibility of using Point of Care Machines in Diagnosing Anaemia among Pregnant Women and Children (FoPA)" study will leverage a research cohort of over 22,000 participants in Kyamulibwa subcounty, south western Uganda to evaluate the effectiveness of point-of-care machines in identifying anemia. [Read more on our website](#)

NEW STUDY TO EVALUATE FAMILY CENTERED APPROACH TO REDUCING CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE

Scientists at the Unit have recently partnered with The AIDS Support Organization in Uganda, the University of California – San Francisco (USA), and the University of British Columbia in Canada to implement a study titled the "Family-Centered Approach to Enhance Lifestyle Change and Behavioral Modification for the Prevention of Cardiovascular Diseases among Adolescents and Their Families" (FaCe-D). This study aims to adapt and implement an evidence-based, family-centered intervention to evaluate its effectiveness in reducing cardiovascular disease risk among adolescents and their families in Uganda. [Read more](#)



KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE



ON HIV PREVENTION AND CURE AT THE IAS SOCIETY OF HIV SCIENCE ACADEMY

Dr. Sheila Balinda, a senior virologist from the vaccine research theme presented her latest research to the HIV Science Academy of the International AIDS Society (IAS) in Kigali, Rwanda, in 2 lectures "Viral Characterization: Preventive and Cure Strategies," and "The Power of mRNA Technology: Application to the Development of an HIV Vaccine."

BCG VACCINE RESPONSE IN TEENAGERS AT THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH TUBERCULOSIS CONFERENCE

A team of vaccine researchers led by Professor Alison Elliot, head of the Unit's vaccine research theme, presented study findings from the diverse portfolio of the concluded 'Population Differences in Vaccine Responses (POPVAC)' programme at the 2024 Ministry of Health National Tuberculosis and Leprosy Science Summit in Kampala, Uganda to facilitate awareness and policy action for better BCG vaccine response in teenagers. [Read more on POPVAC work](#)



HIGHLIGHTS FROM OUR LATEST PUBLICATIONS

In the past six months, our research themes have made significant strides in studies across various fields of infectious and non-communicable diseases research. This report highlights our key research outputs from January to June 2024.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Viral pathogens. Our team published 17 papers in top-tier journals, including a massive study on the weak antibody response to different vaccines in Ugandan populations and its effect on local vaccination policies, in the [Frontiers journal](#).

Vaccine research. Significant contributions were made in vaccine research, with 19 publications focusing on finding vaccines for infectious diseases such as Ebola, tuberculosis, HIV and HPV among others.

Non-communicable diseases. Noteworthy developments emerged from the five research focus areas in the theme, resulting in 24 papers in journals such as The Lancet and BMJ open focused on prevention strategies, treatment innovations and socioeconomic influences of cardiovascular diseases.

SYNERGIZED SCIENCE

Collaborative efforts between our viral pathogens and vaccine research themes led to innovative studies in understanding viral transmission dynamics, developing novel vaccine candidates and improving vaccine efficacy, resulting in 7 joint publications.

Partnerships with universities in Uganda, regionally and globally expanded our research scope, leading to 12 co-authored papers.

Special thanks to our funding partners and collaborators for your continued support, enabling us to achieve these milestones.

[Click here for the full publication list](#)

IN THE NEWS

Read the top stories about the Unit in the media in the first half of 2024

[HIV vaccine trial: Experts explain 'false positive' tests](#)

[Researchers Lead Community Engagement Meeting on HIV Vaccine Discovery](#)

[Breaking Barriers in research](#)

[Youths With Disabilities advocate for inclusion in research](#)

UPCOMING EVENTS



Event	Date
Commencement of the 'Analysing HIV Reservoir Kinetics and Host Immune Interactions among non-B subtypes in Uganda' Fellowship	July 2024
World Population Day commemoration	11th July 2024
Launch of the Crimean Congo Hemorrhagic Fever study	30th July 2024
Global week of NCDs commemoration	15th - 22nd October 2024
World Aids Day commemoration	1st December 2024