UKRI GCRF ACCELERATE
ACCELERATE HUB HIGHLIGHTS
ACCELERATING ACHIEVEMENT
FOR AFRICA’S ADOLESCENTS

YEAR 1 (2019-2020)
April 2020
Evidence that empowers and supports African adolescents to thrive across multiple Sustainable Development Goals.
The goal of the Accelerate Hub is to generate evidence that empowers and supports African adolescents to thrive across multiple Sustainable Development Goals. Since inception in February 2019, we have achieved immediate ODA impacts, and worked towards longer-term policy and programming goals. Here we summarise highlights of adolescent input, early impacts, capacity-sharing and policy partnerships.
As a result of the COVID-19 crisis, 1.5 billion children and adolescents are now out of school or childcare. Globally, parents are looking after children under exceptionally stressful conditions. Evidence shows that rates of child abuse increase during periods of school closures associated with health emergencies.

In response to this crisis, the UKRI GCRF Accelerate Hub led a rapid collaboration between five agencies: the World Health Organisation, UNICEF, the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children, USAID and the CDC, to develop evidence-based resources for parents during the COVID-19 lockdown. These use robust evidence from a series of randomised controlled trials in Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe, conducted by the Hub’s Parenting for Lifelong Health team.

In 72 hours, the team, led by Prof Lucie Cluver, Dr Jamie Lachman and Prof Lorraine Sherr, produced a set of key resources: six sheets of ‘tips’ and a series of social media messages, addressing one-on-one time, positive instructions and praise, structures and routines, preventing and responding to problem behaviours, managing stress and talking about COVID-19. A team of global volunteers is translating these into 70 languages, to allow reach across ODA countries. A letter in The Lancet accompanied the release of these resources.

These resources were reviewed and endorsed by all five global agencies, and immediately released onto the WHO’s COVID-19 website, UNICEF and the Global Partnership’s websites, and shared across USAID, CDC, UNICEF and WHO country offices.
A week since publication (April 2) our resources have already been adopted and shared by governments, UNICEF and WHO country and regional offices and faith-based agencies to several million families in over 150 countries. Government scale-outs of the resources include Paraguay, Bangladesh, France, Colombia, Romania, Iceland, Thailand, Germany, Vanuatu, Montenegro and Brazil. The Global Partnership to End Violence and WHO have initiated a public-private partnership with Saatchi and Saatchi for a global media campaign around the resources.

The existing infrastructure and funding of the UKRI GCRF Accelerate Hub allowed us to act swiftly in a global crisis. Professor Helen Fletcher, UKRI’s Director for International Development, said: “These tips are a fantastic resource for parents and carers all over the world. It is a fantastic example of researchers and experts around the world sharing their knowledge and on-the-ground insight to quickly respond to a crisis situation.”


UNICEF website: www.unicef.org/coronavirus/covid-19-parenting-tips#1


Internet of Good Things www.internetofgoodthings.org

Early Childhood Development Action Network website: https://mailchi.mp/ecdan/covid19

More languages: www.covid19parenting.com

SEXUAL VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROGRAMME IN THREE AFRICAN COUNTRIES

“Sexual health, HIV and sexual violence are often taboo topics among parents and their teens. By integrating these topics into the evidence-based ‘Parenting for Lifelong Health (PLH)’ Teens programme and applying collaborative social learning approaches, families learn how to discuss these topics – often for the first time.”

Anna Booij: Technical Programme Specialist, Clowns Without Borders, South Africa

The Accelerate Hub worked with USAID, PEPFAR (The President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief) and regional NGO, Clowns Without Borders South Africa, to merge two adolescent interventions: a parenting programme to reduce violence and substance use and improve family budgeting, and a sexual violence prevention programme.

The programme was completed in 2019 and is currently being rolled out in Ethiopia, Botswana and South Sudan, reaching nearly 180,000 families and teens. There are plans to roll it out to five more PEPFAR countries. The Parenting for Lifelong Health Programme has also been included as one of only two PEPFAR-approved parenting programmes for use in Africa with 9-14 year olds, by the PEPFAR Country Operational Plan Guidance (p175).

ACCELERATE HUB
COMMENTARY IN PRESS
IN THE LANCET GLOBAL HEALTH

This commentary is co-authored with colleagues at the UN Development Programme and African Union. It highlights the need to find development accelerators and their synergies if we are to maximise the Decade of Action to reaching the Global Goals. It introduces the UKRI GCRF Hub as an interdisciplinary and cross-sector initiative, and South-North academic leadership.

DEMONSTRATION OF CONCEPT PAPER INCLUDED IN UNAIDS GLOBAL AIDS UPDATE

The Accelerate Hub has published a demonstration of concept paper: “Improving lives by accelerating progress towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals for adolescents living with HIV: a prospective cohort study” in the Lancet Child & Adolescent Health. The study aimed to test the UN Development Programme’s proposed approach of development accelerators—provisions that lead to progress across multiple SDGs—and synergies between accelerators on achieving SDG-aligned targets in a highly vulnerable group of adolescents in South Africa. This demonstration of concept paper suggests that the UN’s accelerator approach for this high-risk adolescent population has policy and potential financing usefulness. It showed that provisions are associated with progress across multiple SDG goals, even for a vulnerable group, and that combination of two or more accelerators delivers increased benefits.

The paper’s found that safe schools, parenting support and cash transfers were effective accelerators and that all three provisions together were associated with greater benefits across more Global Goals. We have developed and shared a policy brief and the findings have been included in the UNAIDS Global AIDS Update 2019.


PARENTING SUPPORT IN A CONFLICT SETTING – SERVICES INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL WORK PLAN FOR SOUTH SUDAN

The SUPER study (Scale Up of Parenting Evaluation Research) is evaluating the impact of the Parenting for Lifelong Health (PLH) programmes in 28 countries. In South Sudan, an evaluation was completed by Accelerate Hub early career researchers (ECR) Roselinde Janowski and Sam Bojo with 205 families. It found that the programme has achieved reduced violence, emotional abuse, and physical violence; and enhanced positive parenting, parental monitoring and parent self-efficacy.

The team used this evidence to engage with the South Sudan Jubeck State Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Development, which has now included the programme in its National Work Plan. The findings were also used to persuade the USAID 4Children Programme to continue funding this programme in Juba.

ROAD SAFETY FOR ADOLESCENTS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Traffic accidents are one of the top three causes of death in Zambia, mainly affecting pedestrians and cyclists who are predominantly young people. Working with UNDP colleagues and the Zambian Ministry of Local Government, Accelerate Hub researcher Dr Mona Ibrahim (seconded to UNDP), co-wrote a road safety proposal in Zambia which included adolescents as a major target group. The $1.2 million project, which has now been funded by the UN’s Road Safety Fund, aims to reduce pedestrian and cyclist fatalities in Lusaka by 66% over the next three years by improving road safety measures and boosting non-motorised road transport.

IDENTIFYING VIOLENCE ACCELERATORS WITH THE WHO AND GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

The Global Partnership is supporting countries to implement the WHO ‘INSPIRE’ framework – a recommended package of programmes to reduce violence against children. Many countries however are struggling to implement the full package due to limited resources, and have requested that Accelerate Hub identify ‘accelerators’ that can prevent multiple forms of violence. Working directly with WHO and the Global Partnership, Accelerate Hub merged data from two studies to provide a dataset large enough to test for impacts of incidence of even rarely-reported forms of violence such as sexual assault. Analyses found that improved parenting and food security could significantly reduce sexual abuse, crime involvement, transactional sex, physical abuse, emotional abuse and community violence victimisation. Accelerate Hub Director Lucie Cluver and ECR Will Rudgard are now co-authoring a paper with WHO and Global Partnership to share findings, which will also be directly incorporated into the Global Partnership’s country-level support.

NO ABUSE +51%

GOOD MENTAL HEALTH +33%

HIV CARE RETENTION +22%

SCHOOL PROGRESSION +34%

NO COMMUNITY VIOLENCE +20%

NO VIOLENCE PERPETRATION +34%

NO HIGH-RISK SEX +19%
WE ARE NOW IN THE DECADE OF ACTION FOR THE SDGS

- with a need for acceleration and efficiencies to achieve the Global Goals by 2030. This crisis in delivery could make or break the next generation. Africa’s adolescents are the world’s fastest growing population group, reaching half a billion by 2050. They represent huge potential and future capacity, but are amongst those most left behind by the SDGs – an excellent case for investment. Achieving a range of global goals for adolescents in African contexts will have far-reaching effects.

NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US!

The Accelerate Hub actively hosts adolescent engagement activities in multiple African countries, which have included Sierra Leone, Uganda, Kenya and South Africa to date. These groups have been composed of diverse groups of young people, including young parents, adolescents living with or closely affected by HIV, and adolescents living in contexts of poverty and precarity. Aware that adolescents are experts in their own lives and contexts, Accelerate Hub has been hard-at-work with teen advisory groups (TAGs) to learn about the issues that are important to them, and hear how they want to participate in research.

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The Year 1 meeting for the Accelerate Hub was held in January 2020 in Cape Town, South Africa. The aim of the meeting was to concentrate on first wave deliverables, to focus on early career researchers, and to incorporate teen advisory group input across the Accelerate Hub.

The gathering was attended by 80 participants from 10 countries. Day one, chaired by Prof Larry Aber and Dr Isang Awah, included 15 presentations of studies across the Accelerate Hub. Study reports were shared from research conducted in Tanzania, South Africa, Cameroon, Sierra Leone, Ghana, Zambia, and Malawi. Discussions were informed by policy considerations from UNICEF and interaction with the adolescent advisory component of the Accelerate Hub. Day two, chaired by Dr Mona Ibrahim and Dr Justina Dugbazah, included 11 presentations with a focus on upcoming research and issues of safeguarding and governance. Day three, chaired by Dr Anne Makena and Prof Kevin Marsh, examined methodology in detail, and focused on the needs and enablers for early career researchers. The meeting also allowed for satellite meetings of work packages to explore more depth and detail. Attendance by GCRF staff was also helpful to provide a two-way insight and conversations on guidance and aspirations. The meeting enabled participants to take stock of progress to date, clarify next step planning, network, to ensure adolescent perspective input at early stage planning, as well as a full briefing on safeguarding and ethics to guide the next year. The enormous breadth of the endeavor was apparent and many country teams were able to network and share measures, methods and insights.
BUILDING CAREERS FOR EARLY-CAREER AFRICAN RESEARCHERS

Our 43 early-career researchers (ECRs) have completed training needs analyses; joined training workshops on statistical analyses, presentation skills, policy engagement; and are being mentored to develop their career plans and next steps. Nationalities from the African continent include Zimbabwean, South Sudanese, Sudanese, Zambian, Swazi, South African, Malawian, Ghanaian, Kenyan, Nigerian, and Cameroonian, as well as others globally — British, Brazilian, American, Spanish, Italian, Israeli, German, Canadian, Belgian, Chinese and Belarusian.

One of our goals is to increase the number of PhDs for early-career researchers. This year, six of our early-career researchers have won externally-funded scholarships for their doctorates: Samuel Bojo (South Sudan), Nontokozo Langwenya (eSwatini), David Chipanta (Zambia), Kathryn Roberts (UK), Kopano Monaisa and Siyanai Zhou (Zimbabwe); and Diana Ocholla (Kenya/South Africa) is starting an MPhil this year.

Siyanai Zhou, first-year doctoral student at Department of Statistics and AIDS and Society Research Unit, University of Cape Town, received an award for his presentation at the 8th Southern African AIDS Conference in Durban on June 14, 2019.
Policy and provider partnerships are at the heart of impact. From inception, we are working with governments in Africa, regional NGOs, UN agencies and donors. Together, we identify policy needs, develop research, share evidence and plan scale-up of services.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT: ZAMBIA SOCIAL PROTECTION STUDY

Accelerate Hub ECR David Chipanta is investigating the impact of ‘social protection plus awareness-raising’ on the uptake of HIV services and other SDG outcomes in four districts of Luapula Province in Zambia. In February, he presented his base-line report to a meeting of more than 30 representatives from government, UN agencies, donors, adolescents and people living with HIV. Stakeholders were surprised by the number of disabled people in the study (and therefore the local population), and the evidence that participants have less access to HIV services than other groups. Government officials pledged to include follow-ups and expansion of the study in their HIV-related proposal to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS and TB.
POLICY ENGAGEMENT ON LIVELIHOODS RESEARCH, KENYA

The ‘Aspirations’ trial is investigating the impact of unconditional cash transfers and an aspirational intervention on 8,000 households in western Kenya. In November, the Accelerate Hub team conducted a ‘policy engagement’ roadshow with stakeholders – to share early findings and find out what they wanted to know from the next stage of the research, which will focus on adolescents.

The team met with key national government departments including the Social Assistance Unit, Social Protection Secretariat, and the Siaya Ministry of Education, as well as agencies such as World Bank and UNICEF. Stakeholders were particularly interested in seeing randomised trial results for vulnerable sub-groups, such as women and girls, and wanted more evidence about the ‘cash plus interventions’ approach. The team will return to share findings and discuss their policy implications with stakeholders later in the year.

SHARING EVIDENCE WITH THE GLOBAL FUND AND NATIONAL AIDS COUNCILS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

A series of policy briefs have been written and shared with the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria country offices to support programme planning. The briefs, based on Accelerate Hub research papers, examine the barriers and opportunities to adolescent HIV treatment and retention in care. Alexandra Plowright, Technical Advisor for the Global Fund, who advises countries on services for young women and girls, commented: “Huge thanks for these policy briefs – they are excellent – really useful and in a great and useable format for the countries.” Country teams will be able to use the briefs in developing funding proposals and they will also help the Global Fund review and assess the proposals against key evidence.

WORK WITH WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME (WFP) ON HIV SENSITIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION

The Accelerate Hub is building a new partnership with the World Food Programme’s Central and Eastern Africa Office and Headquarters. As a starting activity, Accelerate Hub researchers co-authored a policy brief with World Food Programme, illustrating how WFP can support HIV sensitive social protection – and how it can contribute to its mandate of achieving ‘zero hunger’, but also extend to other Sustainable Development Goals. The brief has been distributed to eight World Food Programme country offices and their government partners.
NEW PARTNERSHIP WITH THE UNDP GAMBIA ACCELERATOR LAB

Led by Dr Mona Ibrahim (Accelerate Hub UNDP secondee) and Omar Jagne (UNDP Accelerator Lab Lead), we are working with the Gambia Accelerator Lab to conduct rapid experiments of innovations with the potential to improve multiple SDG outcomes for adolescents. We have worked together on combining waste management with 3D printing methods and on using mobile technology and social media to improve access to jobs for unemployed youth. The two teams joined a workshop in New York in February 2020 to plan next steps, within the context of a wider GCRF-UNDP partnership.

INFLUENCING POLICY TO TACKLE YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

An Accelerate Hub randomised controlled trial on youth unemployment led by Dr Kate Orkin with South African and American research partners has identified two cost-effective interventions that boost young people’s employment chances: a skills audit helps young people identify and feel confident in their own skills; and a certificate summarising these enables them to share this information with a potential employer. Both interventions have increased young unemployed people’s likelihood of finding employment, and helped them find better quality jobs with higher earnings and more formal contracts. Researcher engagement with a local authority in South Africa has influenced the inclusion of a similar work-seeker support package in their 2019-24 Economic Growth Strategy. If implemented, this is likely to reach an estimated 40-60,000 recipients by July 2020.

EVIDENCE FOR HEALTH SERVICE PROVIDERS ON ADOLESCENTS LIVING WITH HIV

The Accelerate Hub’s Mzantsi Wakho study (Dr Elona Toska, University of Cape Town) gave a workshop at the Paediatric Adolescent Treatment for Africa Summit in 2019, on Resilient relationships for adolescents & young people living with HIV. This was attended by ±200 government healthcare provider teams from Cameroon, DRC, eSwatini, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

STRATEGIC STAKEHOLDERS PANEL MEETING @ UNDP HEADQUARTERS

The Accelerate Hub’s Strategic Stakeholders Panel met in the UNDP offices in New York, on 16 September 2019. Chaired by Dr Mandeep Dhalwal (Head of HIV and Health team, UNDP) and Professor Larry Aber (New York University), the group included key UN agencies, donors and organisations working with adolescents in Africa. It engaged key stakeholders in the planning and delivery of the Accelerate Hub, and laid the foundation for the next step of evidence-based policy and services for adolescents.
Thank you to our Independent Advisory Board for expert advice from across the region: **Professor Nkandu Luo**, Minister of Fisheries and Livestock, Zambia; **Dr Samson Kinyanjui**, Head Training & Capacity Building KEMRI & Director, Initiative to Develop African Research Leaders (IDeAL), Kenya; **Mr Kaumbu Mwondela** (Chair), Managing Partner Mwondela Legal Practitioners, Zambia; **Ms Rayan Abdelmutaal Ahmed**, Leading expert in the management of humanitarian aid and advocacy driven partnerships, Sudan; **Mr Kola Aina**, Partner, Ventures Platform Fund – Pan-African Venture Capital, Nigeria; **Dr Maru Mormina**, Independent Ethical Advisor, Ethox Centre, University of Oxford, UK; **Professor Claire Heffernan**, Director of LiDC, PI of the UKRI GCRF Action Against Stunting Hub, Royal Veterinary College and London School of Tropical Hygiene, UK;