AFRICAN BRAIN AND COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT 2023

1st *hybrid* **KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE MEETING**

AfriBCD Knowledge Exchange Meeting 2023 Summary Report

November 2023

Taeko Bourque, Bosiljka Milosavljevic, Caylee Cook, Anna Blumenthal, Catherine Draper, Isabelle Blanchette, Sarah Lloyd-Fox

The first African Brain and Cognitive Development network (AfriBCD) knowledge exchange meeting brought together researchers and partners from around the world who are interested in conducting and supporting cognition research in Africa.

This report details some of the challenges and potential solutions for research in Africa, as discussed by members of our Community of Practice.

Thank you to Newnham College (Cambridge, UK) for hosting this event.

UKRI Economic and Social Research Council

SSHRC ≡ CRSH
Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council
Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines

AFRIBCD TEAM

CURRENTLY BASED IN AFRICA

CAYLEE COOK
AfriBCD Founder

JEAN-PIERRE AKILIMALI KANANE-MUZINGE
Goma Liaison, DRC Translator

CATHERINE DRAPER
AfriBCD Founder

BLAISE BALUME
Goma Liaison, DRC Translator

CURRENTLY BASED IN EUROPE

BOSILJKA MILOSAVLJEVIC
AfriBCD Founder

CHIKA EZEUGWU
Lead Ambassador

SARAH LLOYD-FOX
AfriBCD Founder

CURRENTLY BASED IN NORTH AMERICA

ANNA BLUMENTHAL
AfriBCD Founder

RUTH NOBOSSI
Volunteer, student liaison, translator

ISABELLE BLANCHETTE
AfriBCD Founder

LEAH CARAGOL
Volunteer, content creation

TAEKO BOURQUE
AfriBCD Head of Operations

PRESENTATIONS

Session 1: Cognitive Development

Experiences from the Global Scales of Early Development – What Can Be Measured Across Cultures and What is Not Working?
Melissa Gladstone, University of Liverpool, UK

Executive function in context: An observational approach
Chika Ezeugwu, University of Cambridge, UK

Brain Imaging for Global Health: Understanding Neurodevelopment in Rural Gambia
Laura Katus, University of Greenwich, UK

Studying Executive Function in South African Preschool Children: Lessons Learned
Caylee Cook, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa

Networking Opportunities: Cambridge & UK

Young Scientists for Africa (YoSA)
Clare Elwell, University College London, UK

Cambridge-Africa
Tabitha Mwangi, University of Cambridge, UK

Cambridge Global Challenges
Sara Serradas O'Holleran, University of Cambridge, UK

Session 2: The Role of Family and Community in Child Development

Evidence for Better Lives Study (EBLS): A Multi-Site Study of Early Parental Influences on Child Development
Claire Hughes, University of Cambridge, UK

Changing Trends of Parenting and Mental Wellbeing of Children: Implications for Parenting Interventions in South West Nigeria
Adebunmi Oyebisi Oyekola, University of Ibadan, Nigeria

Unleashing Learning Potential: How do Psychological Factors Shape Student Engagement in Challenging Educational Environments? – A Comparative Study of Adolescents in Southwestern Uganda Secondary Schools
Eunice Ndyareeba Murokore, Kyambogo University, Uganda

Session 3: Parenting Interventions to Support Development

Mazi Umntanakho: A Digital Tool for Social Emotional Development and Mental Health of Young Children
Catherine Draper, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa
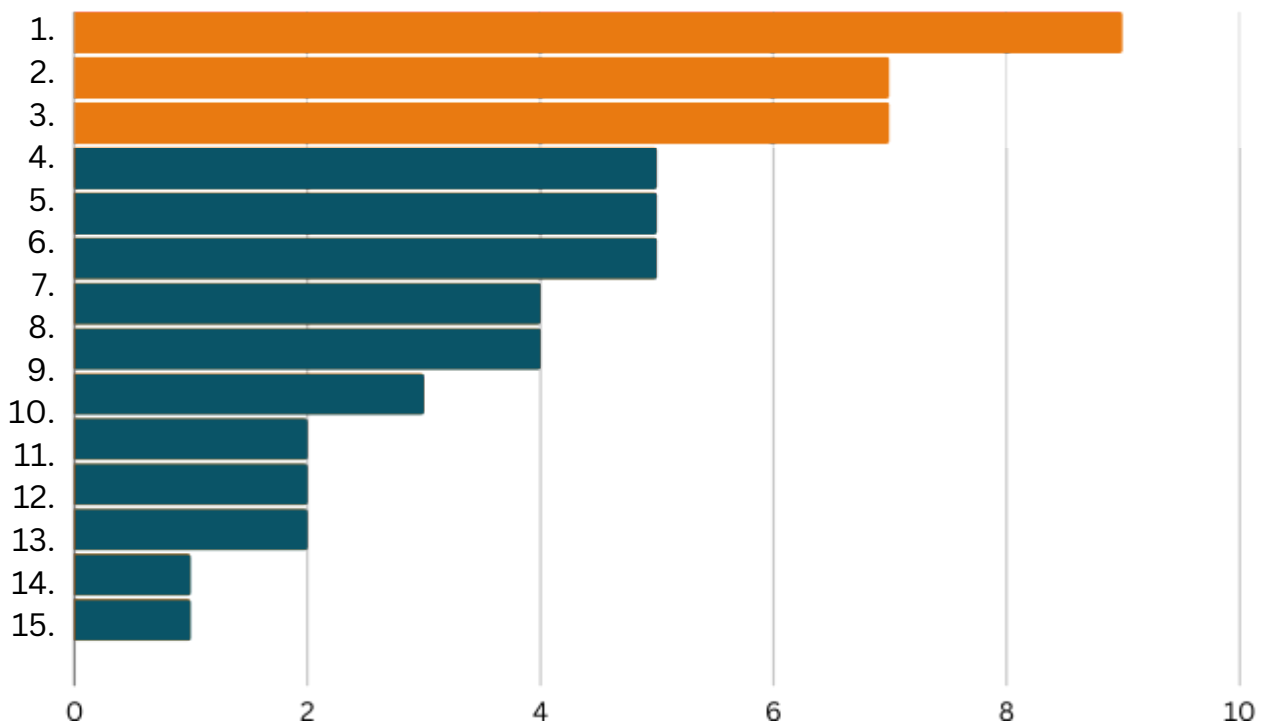
Parenting Programmes to Prevent Violence Against Adolescents: Reflections on In-Person, Digital and Hybrid Delivery in Tanzania
Joyce Wamoyi, National Institute for Medical Research, Tanzania

CHALLENGES

This list of challenges was compiled from in-person and virtual focus group discussions. Attendees (in-person and virtual) of the Knowledge Exchange Meeting were put in focus groups and asked to come up with a list of challenges that cognition researchers in Africa may face. Members of the AfriBCD Community of Practice were later asked to vote for their 'top 3' challenges. *Although all of these challenges are important, it will be helpful for us to prioritise AfriBCD network themes of work.
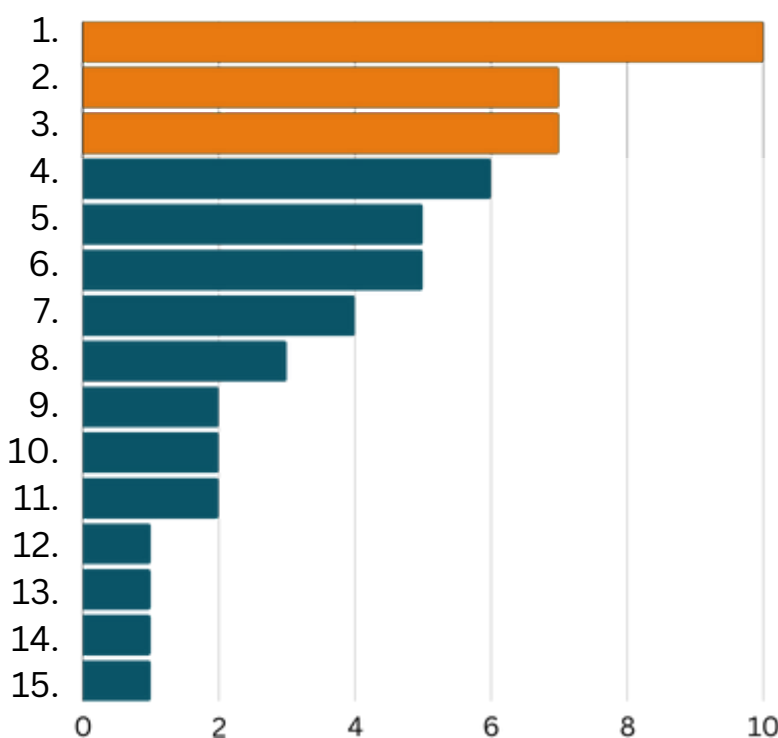
1. **Capacity building, infrastructure and sustainability for more diverse work contexts (relative to Minority World contexts)**
2. **Networking to build career path**
3. **Translation and contextualization of measures and tools and the time it takes to do this**
4. Identification of all available funding opportunities
5. Knowledge deficit relative to needs of country/culture/population for priority setting of funders
6. "Time" and "Access" Resource challenge (many researchers in Africa self-fund research)
7. Different power dynamics and skill capacity
8. Emotions, priorities, concepts, etc. are not the same across cultures
9. The idea that studies from certain countries must be validated by being compared with populations from the outside
10. Pathways to generate data sharing opportunities are not transparent, nor are the locations of open source datasets from Africa (or beyond)
11. Access to software and hardware
12. Differences in language and culture
13. Mismatched expectations and unintended consequences
14. Ethical dilemma for compensating participants
15. Trust of Majority country institutions sometimes called into question

SOLUTIONS

This list of possible solutions was compiled from in-person and virtual focus group discussions. Attendees (in-person and virtual) of the Knowledge Exchange Meeting were put in focus groups and asked to come up with a list of possible solutions that cognition researchers in Africa may face. Members of the AfriBCD Community of Practice were later asked to vote for the top 3 solutions they believe we should focus on at this time. *The top solutions do not necessarily align with the top challenges.

1. **Invest in building respectful partnerships (adequate time/funds for building partnerships, developing project ideas before the start of the project and maintain long term)**
2. **Increase knowledge of networking opportunities that cross borders (i.e. online networks) and create partnerships (i.e. through AfriBCD)**
3. **Funding for early career researchers and scholars 1 -2 years post PhD or following a career break**
4. Increase knowledge of freely available software tools and support, build up infrastructure through a roving researcher and hardware scheme (i.e. moves between Institutes/countries for training and data collection)
5. Prioritise bidirectional capacity building: Sharing knowledge and information between partners, avoid all knowledge coming from 1 partner.
6. Co-create funding agendas with varied partners in Africa – with greater transparency over who has contributed to changes in funding priorities.
7. Budget more time and money for optimising measurement tools by identifying funding opportunities
8. Work with communities to find culturally relevant examples / words to explain concepts.
9. Interview preparedness / mentoring / reverse mentoring for Majority World – applicants
10. Funding changes to allow for funding salary of PI not just staff
11. Remove mindset of "I'm coming to save Africa" and ask them "What do you think we should fund?"
12. Use existing protocols for best practice, signpost freely accessible datasets, share with AfriBCD network.
13. Have a clear set of outcomes, objectives, and expectations of each partner, set this out at the start but be flexible for change as the partnership grows.
14. Provision by place of work to support researchers dealing with barriers of living life in their context, and for writing up work and disseminating in journals and conferences for creating stronger networks and CV.
15. Focus on what measures are doing relative to context, not just in comparison to other countries.

NEXT STEPS

We are working with members of the Community of Practice to tackle these challenges and implement solutions. Below are some of the tasks we are currently focusing on:

Growing our Team:
We are pleased to welcome new members to the AfriBCD Team; these ambassadors and volunteers take on various responsibilities to help with our growing network. If you would be interested in joining our team, please fill out this form: AfriBCD Volunteer.

Expanding our network:
We are working on expanding our network and partnering with different organizations around the world to provide our members with quality opportunities.

Development and sharing of measures:
One of the main goals of our network is to facilitate research in Africa through sharing relevant resources and open-access materials. To contribute to this endeavor through sharing something you or your team has developed, or a great resource/organization you use, please send an email to connect@afribcd.org.

Workshops:
We will be hosting virtual workshops focused on skills development. Some upcoming topics include: building an academic CV vs. a resume, preparing for a post-doc, and neuroimaging in the field. To suggest a topic, please send an email to connect@afribcd.org.

"Coffee hour" chats:
We will be hosting virtual discussion sessions focused on informal networking and community building. These chats will be moderated by an AfriBCD team member and have a general topic to guide conversation. To suggest a topic, please send an email to connect@afribcd.org.

Research talks:
We will continue to host research talks on topics related to cognition in Africa. If you are interested in presenting your work, please send an email to connect@afribcd.org.

2023
AfriBCD
Knowledge Exchange
Meeting

Cambridge, UK

For more information:

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