Impediments to Developing Social Science Research Capacity in East Africa

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MRC Social & Public Health Sciences Unit
Occasional Paper No 14
February 2005
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Cover Photo: Primary school classroom in Magu District, Mwanza, Tanzania, 1997, photo by Mary Plummer
Introduction

The inadequacy of research capacity in developing countries has been noted long ago (e.g. Jinadu, 1989), and the importance of developing multi-disciplinary research capacity in order to achieve development objectives is widely acknowledged (Nchinda, 2002, Lansang and Dennis, 2004). Building research capacity has therefore been a major objective of Northern donor countries and international agencies for at least two decades (Nchinda, 2002), yet limited capacity still persists. The main explanations identified in the literature are: inadequate resources for education at every level (Nchinda, 2002); the drain of expertise to the North (Ramsay, 2002), fuelled by vast differences in salary scales and the absence of stimulating research environments (Pang et al., 2002, Nchinda, 2002); dependence on research funding from the North (Jentsch and Pilley, 2003, Lansang and Dennis, 2004); inequitable access to the literature (Lansang and Dennis, 2004) and poor communication with, and support from, government ministries (Nchinda, 2002).

Lack of research capacity has been interpreted by some to result from the semi-colonial nature of much research in developing countries. For instance, in a polemical paper Costello and Zumla (2000) argue that a lot of Northern research investment is through ‘annexed sites’ in which field work is led and managed by expatriate staff, pursuing research questions generated abroad (Ramsay, 2002). From a radical perspective, developed country involvement in developing country research could be portrayed, like other aspects of development work, as ‘a tool of regimes that seek to perpetuate relations of inequality and dependence between the West and the rest...’ (Green, 2003:124). More generous analysts assume the good intentions of funding agencies and research partners, but nevertheless identify ways in which North-South collaborations have perverse consequences (Edejer, 1999). Three examples are: collaborative projects competing for the few senior scientists in the country at the cost of local research institutions (Costello and Zumla, 2000), collaborations leading local researchers to become isolated from their colleagues within the country (Edejer, 1999), and infringements of Southern intellectual ownership which sometimes prevent subsequent Southern publications in international journals (Jentsch and Pilley, 2003).

A related issue is the widespread assumption of Northern superiority in research capacity, with the North having the expertise and the South the need for capacity-building (Jentsch and Pilley, 2003). Since research funders determine the methodological standards required, these generally comply with those of Northern research institutions, which tends to confirm the inadequacy of Southern research skills.

Much of the literature on research capacity is specific to health-related research, with the main focus being on bio-medical research. Although lower research costs in the social sciences might make some of the issues less acute, very similar factors seem to apply to social science research capacity in developing countries. However, two interrelated factors might make the problems for social science research capacity more acute than for the medical sciences. The social sciences are far less prestigious and therefore less likely to attract the most able students, and there is a far less clear career path.

In East Africa the shortage of senior social scientists available to work on health-related issues is particularly apparent in the field of sexual health. Large scale HIV/AIDS research programmes in both Uganda and Tanzania have been unable to recruit local social scientists to senior posts, despite having trained local junior social scientists for over 10 years. Many, if not most, large scale social science projects are run by researchers from developed countries. Articles in international journals and conference
presentations concerning social dimensions of sexual health in sub-Saharan Africa are dominated by Northern academics, despite this being a highly sensitive cultural issue. For instance, one of the major academic debates about African sexuality in the last few decades, concerning Caldwell’s hypothesis of permissive sexuality (Caldwell et al., 1989), had been pursued almost entirely between Northerners.

Limited social science research capacity is potentially problematic at several different levels. In order to conduct research it can mean that ex-patriate, or non-local, researchers are required. This often creates language problems, since they rarely speak the local language fluently and have to rely on interpreters. Although anthropologists have traditionally made a virtue of cultural naivety, most social science research does not allow the lengthy immersion in local social life necessary to overcome its unfamiliarity to an ex-patriate. Furthermore, there can also be problems of mutual cultural incomprehension with local staff, which can greatly exacerbate management challenges. Whether research evidence tends to influence policy and practice in a linear way or through more diffuse mechanisms (e.g. Weiss, 1986), a shortage of good social science research means that service providers and policy makers have to make decisions on the basis of more superficial analyses. At national level inadequate social science capacity is self-perpetuating since the employment of Northern researchers restricts the experience local researchers can acquire, and there are not enough good social scientists to train the next generation. At the broadest level, limited social science capacity means that Northerners have a greater role in shaping academic interpretations of East African society. In as much as social science findings have any impact on the policy of national or international organisations, this restricted intellectual sovereignty could have knock-on effects on political autonomy. However, since research findings are much more likely to influence policy and practice if policy makers and practitioners are involved in the research from the outset (Lomas, 2000), ex-patriate-initiated research is less likely to have such practical application (Costello and Sumla, 2000).

Within East Africa Uganda has the largest and oldest university, Makerere (Kwisega et al., 2000), which makes any shortage of capacity in the country particularly striking. A needs assessment for Ugandan HIV/AIDS research in the early nineties identified many gaps in support and skills (Barton et al., 1993). Amongst them were shortages of social scientists with skills in qualitative research, e.g., anthropologists, sexuality research, interventional research or evaluation, general research project management abilities, or qualitative and quantitative analytical skills. The authors noted that ‘There is too much overseas direction of research, either by external investigators or donors, especially of moderate and large scale projects’ (p.15) and

‘One of the essential deficits facing planners and policy makers is the overall lack of personnel skilled in carrying out research… there is great need for a larger critical mass of indigenous Ugandan researchers.’ (p.10)

In a more recent overview of the social sciences in Uganda, Kwesiga et al. (2000) document the huge expansion in training of undergraduate and postgraduate social scientists since 1995. However, the doubling of student numbers has not been matched by a similar increase in staff, there are many unfilled posts and a particular shortage of post-doctoral staff. The publication output of Makerere University social science departments is limited and social scientists do not play a major part in national debates on development policy. A Population Council report on the training of population scientists in developing countries (Menken et al., 2002) was less forthright about the lack of capacity, but it concluded that population scientists are struggling to keep up with new techniques, older scientists are not being adequately replaced and limited resources restrict the training role of local academic institutions. The case study of Uganda shows
that research at Makerere is constrained by lack of funding, reliance on consultancies and the pressure of increasing student numbers, resulting in research that 'is not always done to a high standard, and provides few opportunities for publication.' (Menken et al., 2002: 98). Finally a study of Ugandan secondary school leaver and graduate career paths (Kirumira and Bateyanya, 2003) had two relevant conclusions: education is increasingly used for purely vocational purposes rather than personal development and enhancing civic capacity, and very few graduates are willing to work and live in rural Uganda.

Although several structural and economic factors perpetuating poor research capacity have already been identified, less attention has been paid to the detailed processes involved or, specifically, to social science research. A recent exception is a study of the relationships between partners in two health research collaborations (Jensch and Pilley, 2003), but the lessons learnt from Bangladesh and Thailand might not be applicable to Sub-Saharan Africa.

In order to explore the main factors underlying the poor capacity for health-related social science research in East Africa, the processes that perpetuate this situation and possible ways to improve it, the DfID HIV/AIDS and STIs Knowledge Programme funded a small-scale exploratory study. This initial research focused on researchers in developing countries; it is intended to complement this with a study that concentrates on the commissioners of research. While the research questions were addressed in relation to Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda, a particular focus has been Uganda, since the training of large numbers of social science graduates at Makerere University makes any limitation in social science expertise in the country particularly remarkable.
Methods

In-depth interviews were conducted with 29 professionals working in the field of social science research, either as researchers, research managers or in institutions facilitating or using research. Informal conversations were held with ten young, junior researchers, seven Ugandan and three Tanzanian, and a group discussion held with four of the young Ugandan researchers.

The profile of the interviewees is as follows:

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<th>No</th>
<th>Post</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>director and ex-director of large academic research programmes</td>
<td>1 Ugandan, 1 British, worked in Uganda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>heads of departments at Makerere University</td>
<td>5 Ugandan, 1 Tanzanian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>senior university researchers</td>
<td>2 Kenyan, 1 Ugandan, 2 British worked in Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>research associate, Makerere</td>
<td>Ugandan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>junior researcher</td>
<td>Ugandan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>director of independent research centre</td>
<td>Nigerian working in Kenya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>research staff in independent research agencies</td>
<td>4 Ugandan, 1 Kenyan, 1 USA working in Uganda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>directors of NGOs facilitating research</td>
<td>1 Ugandan, 1 Canadian working in Kenya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>junior staff in NGOs facilitating research</td>
<td>Kenyan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>senior staff in health-related government departments</td>
<td>Ugandans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>18 Ugandan, 4 Kenyan, 3 British, 2 North American, 1 Tanzanian, 1 Nigerian</td>
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Sixteen interviews were conducted in Kampala, eight in Nairobi, four in London and one in Dar es Salaam. Twelve were tape recorded, the others noted. A generic interview schedule for Ugandan interviews is reproduced as an appendix; this was modified for each interviewee and frequently unforeseen topics arose and were pursued in the course of the interview.

The findings have been structured according to analytical themes identified by the author throughout the course of this study. No interviewees provided data on all these areas, and the prominence each theme had in their interviews varied considerably. Where respondents’ opinions conflict with each other I have tried to represent this, and the different emphasis people gave to different factors is considered in the Discussion section. However, I have not attempted a detailed analysis of interviewees’ perspectives in their own right, for instance through discourse analysis, since the primary focus of this study is the cause of inadequate research capacity and possible solutions. Interviewee accounts were not systematically analysed by gender, but they were not obviously patterned in this way.
A draft report was circulated to those interviewed, who were asked to confirm that their views had been presented accurately and were invited to comment more generally on the findings. They were also asked if they wished to be identified. Four interviewees provided comments, and these were taken into account in this final draft.

The vast majority of interviewees were Ugandan or had considerable research experience in Uganda. For all of these interviewees their main experience of universities in Uganda was Makerere, rather than any of the other 15-18 accredited universities in the country, most of which focus primarily on teaching vocational courses rather than research. It can therefore be assumed that, unless stated otherwise, the findings below relate primarily to Uganda and to Makerere University.
Findings

Severity of the problem

With only six exceptions, all those interviewed thought there is a serious lack of social science research expertise in East Africa. It was widely stated that the few really good social scientists are greatly overworked and often overwhelmed with requests for collaboration. Two respondents who were identified by others as leading Ugandan social scientists said that, when they are offered work that they do not have time for, they are unable to identify more than one or two other social scientists whom they are confident could do it well. A member of staff at Makerere said that there are very few senior staff able to manage research and disseminate it, and the ex-director of a large Ugandan research programme said diplomatically that the quality of social science researchers in Uganda is ‘very variable’. The director of an independent research centre in Kenya illustrated the problem of research capacity by describing their recent attempt to recruit a senior African demographer or social scientist. Half of the 150 applicants who responded to an advertisement in the *Economist* were from India, and of the Africans the top six interviewed all had jobs in the North and were not prepared to move to Nairobi.

A senior Northern researcher who argued that there are many high calibre people in the Makerere Institute of Social Research (MISR) - ‘some pretty switched on people there, doing consultancies and that sort of thing’ - acknowledged that all the social science projects that he had been involved in in Uganda (primarily related to sexual health) were led by Northerners.

‘There weren’t any Ugandan social scientists at that sort of level. The highest level Ugandan social scientists that I had anything to do with were all, sort of, under my level. And there was the odd person who was on quite a senior level… but not interested in working in the sort of [rural] settings that I was working in.’

The ex-director of a large Ugandan research programme said that although there are a number of high class, internationally competitive, social scientists at Makerere, only a minority of research projects in Uganda are led by Ugandans.

All those who compared the social science capacity of different East African countries considered Uganda to be the best provided, Kenya next and Tanzania the worst off. Of those that disputed the general shortage of social science research capacity in East Africa, two acknowledged that there is, nevertheless, a serious problem in Tanzania. A senior Northern researcher observed that:

‘Uganda might be the only country that doesn’t have that kind of problem... I never had a real problem recruiting people in Uganda and I’ve had real problems recruiting people in Tanzania... For the job in [Tanzanian city], for example, we advertised three times in Tanzania, then threw it open to the rest of East Africa and had about ten short-listable candidates from Kenya and Uganda who we then had to choose from...’

Several interviewees identified a particular shortage of qualitative researchers and of health-related social scientists. A Kenyan who assured me that there are lots of good Kenyan social scientists acknowledged a shortage of expertise in qualitative research.
Sexual health has only recently been seen as a social science issue, and only a few academics at Makerere cover it in their courses. The only large, independent social research centre in Kampala, the Centre for Basic Research, has done virtually no research on HIV/AIDS, and the Network of Ugandan Researchers and Research Users (NURRU), which facilitates small scale research, does not have HIV or sexual health as one of its ten priority topics for research funding.

The vast bulk of social science research conducted in East Africa is commissioned by NGOs or government departments; very few research projects initiated by local researchers are funded. The director of a research-supporting NGO thought it is even more difficult to get research grants for studies in Africa than in the North. A few senior East African interviewees recalled a previous era when research funding was more accessible, but recent grants for academic research from funders such as SIDA or the Rockefeller Foundation have been for very restricted topics. Several interviewees said that the vast majority of research funding comes from the North, since even government department money is mainly from donors. A senior manager at the Ugandan National Council of Science and Technology estimated that 90% of research funds are from the North. The director of the research-supporting NGO pointed out that this leads to very unbalanced collaborations. It is usually Northern researchers who win the funding and then ask African researchers to join them, resulting in unequal relationships. Many interviewees perceived the majority of the research published in peer-reviewed journals to be led by Northern researchers, although some Kenyan respondents said that nearly all large social science research projects there are led by Kenyans.

The director of the research-supporting NGO observed that there is a particular deficit in writing skills. One reason is that researchers’ English is often inadequate and so in joint projects the Northern collaborators tend to do the writing, preventing African researchers from gaining experience. English skills are particularly poor in Tanzania, several respondents noted, due to Swahili being the language of teaching in primary school whereas it is English in Uganda and Kenya. This makes it more difficult for Tanzanians to write papers and to function at conferences.

Explanations for the problem

The main factors interviewees identified as causing and perpetuating poor social science capacity in East Africa related to the region’s under-development and global economic inequalities, although the factors were not always presented in these macro-structural terms. Some people also identified how certain features of East African researchers’ professional culture, for instance the tasks considered appropriate at different levels of seniority, or more generally their broader perspective on life, such as lack of confidence in political stability, contributes to the problem of research capacity. These perspectives were generally presented as part of a wider culture, and some explicitly linked the culture to structural factors.

Poor supply of undergraduates

A fundamental constraint on social science capacity is the poor education system in East Africa, at every level. The poor quality of schooling was so obvious to many interviewees that they did not refer to it unless directly probed. Junior researchers in Uganda described secondary schools with classes of about 60 pupils and highly unmotivated teachers who gave very little feedback on written work.
Poor schooling is exacerbated by students’ career aspirations, which are a product of developing country economic conditions. The junior researchers explained that nearly all secondary school leavers choose university courses for their perceived vocational potential: ‘The overriding thing is to be able to get a job; not do something you are interested in.’ Courses leading to the most lucrative careers are most popular and so require the highest exam grades, thus combining intellectual and economic prestige. The ranking of courses varies slightly, but at the top, in rough order, are: the law, medicine, mass communication (journalism), and engineering. One researcher recalled that when he left school the preferences for non-scientific leavers were: first the law, then social work, then education and after that the social sciences. Those doing non-vocational studies such as literature or music are assumed to have failed to get into more useful courses and are ridiculed by peers; intellectual stimulation is not recognised as a motivation. Most school leavers know very little about the social sciences and do not know that they can lead to a career, or that the jobs can be interesting. Career guidance in secondary schools has only just started. The hierarchy of vocational courses means that bright school leavers are unlikely to make the social sciences their first choice. Nevertheless, about 1,500 students graduate in a social science course at Makerere each year, and one junior researcher said that the social sciences now have a higher status than education.

Poor university education

Once at university, students’ education is limited by poor resources and inadequate staff input. Staff: student ratios are poor, with up to 250 students attending lectures and tutorial sizes being about 50 in first year only falling to about 30 in the third year. The junior researchers interviewed complained that at university they are ‘told to write, not taught to write’: their lecturers never commented on their writing style (e.g. structure or punctuation) and did not know how to write for publication themselves.

University libraries are poorly stocked; most books are 20-30 yrs old and very few journals are taken. A Northern researcher was scathing about Makerere’s libraries:

‘People I employed who got their degrees at Makerere told me: “There are no books.” The lecturers have notes, and they give their lectures, and their students pen that down, and they learn it all by heart, and they do exams… It’s a question of infrastructure. For the social sciences, the only books that I could find there were like 1950s books, although they’ve got old anthropology stuff in hard covers going mouldy in the MISR library, which nobody’s read since the colonial days. And nothing recent, because if there’s anything recent it gets stolen.’

Nevertheless, this interviewee thought that Makerere is probably better resourced than any other university in East Africa. Computing and internet facilities are also limited. In MISR there was no access to the web until two years ago, and now there is still only one computer with access. It is therefore very difficult to keep up to date with international literature.

The director of a research-supporting NGO observed that there is a very poor career structure within universities. At Makerere there has been a freeze on staff recruitment for several years, while in Dar es Salaam this has existed for over ten years, resulting in an ageing cohort of lecturers who are not being replenished. The few new members of staff remain junior researchers for many years. The lack of career progression means that there is little incentive to pursue one’s own research, since it will not affect promotion. Lecturers’ low salaries mean they take consultancies or have other side jobs (in Luganda
kyeyo) which compete with teaching time and effort. Frequently these kyeyo are unrelated to academia, such as running shops, small businesses or keeping hens. Low salaries and extra jobs have been a widespread problem in the Ugandan public sector for at least a decade.

Junior researchers said that they did not learn anything about research methods during their undergraduate courses.

Another limitation to social science capacity is the bias towards quantitative research, most staff at Makerere having little experience in qualitative research. However there have been recent changes, for instance in the Department of Population Studies several masters courses now teach qualitative research methods. The lack of qualitative researchers was explained as being, in part, a legacy of the rejection of social anthropology as a colonialist discipline. A senior sociologist at Makerere described the history of his department:

'It used to be a Department of Sociology and Anthropology. Then in the 70s when Idi Amin came the ex-patriate staff ran away. Then the Ugandans who stayed behind said: “Wait a minute, what is anthropology? This is a colonial thing.” So they removed anthropology. So we are trying to get it back.'

**Poor supply of post-graduates for further training**

At post-graduate level social science qualifications are seen as valuable: those with a masters degree have little difficulty getting employment, particularly in NGOs, for instance as evaluation officers, and a masters degree is a pre-requisite for consultancy work. However, departments at Makerere no longer have the resources to support bright graduates to do masters courses, and most social science graduates cannot afford to register for them. The university used to retain good graduates in teaching support roles as tutorial assistants, but the salary is now so low they get better pay administering surveys. The main destinations of social science graduates are: acting as research assistants administering surveys; working in NGOs (which have better salaries than university or government departments, and more security); teaching in secondary schools and working in public administration. However, many social science graduates are initially unemployed.

About 50 students each year register for one of the Makerere social science masters courses, in Sociology, Social Sector Planning, Public Administration and Management, International Relations or Women and Gender Studies. In the past masters courses were restricted to students with 2:1s or 1sts. Now under the more market-orientated system at Makerere they are entirely self-financing, and departments accept any graduates in order to make the course pay. Consequently selection is on the basis of ability to pay, rather than ability. Many masters students are already in employment and need a masters degree to pursue their career.

The main aspirations of those doing social science masters courses are to work in public administration (government jobs), civil society and social sector planning (NGOs), or academic careers. However, as a mid-level researcher explained, ‘There are very few openings for research’. The Makerere Institute for Social Research only has about 20 research staff, and the Child Health Development Centre about six social scientists. She argued that research capacity is being developed but it is not maintained because there are inadequate research posts. Another researcher noted that currently there are many opportunities for teaching jobs in the new private universities being opened in Uganda,
all of which have social science departments of some kind. However, in general the low salaries in academia lead few people to want to pursue this career.

Until recently few social science students regarded sexual health as a social science issue. A head of department explained: ‘Maybe a very small component [of postgraduates] do a unit on health, and then they discuss population issues – AIDS is one of those – but it’s not a major, major focus of training in social science.’ Sexual health was seen as a medical topic and dealt with in the Institute for Public Health and Medical Schools. However, some staff at MISR and the Department of Women and Gender Studies have now done research or short courses in sexual health, and masters level students now realize that there are jobs in the area, leading a number in MISR to chose HIV-related topics.

### Poor post-graduate training, supervision and support, and the impact of AIDS

Interviewees both within and outside Makerere were critical of its capacity to train researchers. A senior member of staff commented that one of the biggest limitations of African universities is their supervision of research, impairing the quality of PhDs. A researcher outside the university said:

‘The university is very weak. We can characterize it as a teaching university rather than a research university. So for that reason they come out of university….and look at research as something very technical…they just want to go into careers at a desk.’

Amongst the poor university facilities described above, the lack of access to journals is particularly important in restricting the development of research capacity at post-graduate level. As one junior researcher said: ‘We still have problems with getting hold of journals, knowing their style, knowing how to write: that is a weakness.’

Another problem, relating to several others, is the individualised nature of departments and lack of collective activities. Probably primarily due to staff’s reliance on individual research consultancies and the lack of departmental resources, there does not seem to be a great deal of collegiate support within departments. Several junior researchers, and the director of an NGO supporting research, commented on how there is no one to train staff in writing skills and few people who have already published from whom to seek advice. ‘They are limited on that kind of support here,’ said a head of department. ‘She observed that senior staff rarely co-author papers with junior staff, which would help develop the latter’s skills. ‘She attributed this to ‘the culture of individualism. It’s something that is just coming up now, that staff should co-publish. It’s something that has not taken a lot of root.’ In her department there was no formal system to support junior researchers, but she was planning to introduce the practice of each senior colleague adopting a promising junior researcher to mentor them.

Furthermore, there does not seem to be an established practice of passing draft papers to colleagues for constructive criticism. A head of department commented that one would need to know one’s colleague very well to do this, and the director of the research-supporting NGO thought that in most Makerere departments only 1% of colleagues would have time to provide such support to help a colleague get something published.

‘I’ve heard a lot of comments by the vice-chancellor of Makerere encouraging lecturers to ‘Please publish, please publish your research’. But I think it’s like a political speech, you know, ‘Please produce for food security!’ The
implements have not been given, the land has not been given, somebody just says ‘Increase food security’.

Consequently, as one junior researcher said with feeling, ‘it takes time to start publishing’.

A practice condemned as counterproductive by the director of an independent research centre is ‘gift authorship’, that is giving collaborators much higher status authorship than their contribution to a publication deserves. “Gift authorship” to me has not been good for Africa. It doesn’t do justice to their career or for the next people who recruit them.... I think it has done more harm than good,' he said, because it reduces researchers’ incentive to develop their analytical and writing skills. He also felt that ‘it is very patronising’ (see Boerma, 1997). The only other interviewee who commented on this, the director of a research-supporting NGO, thought that medical journal conventions on authorship often do not sufficiently acknowledge the role of local researchers. For instance fieldworkers who do not contribute to drafting the paper are not co-authors.

Three Northern research managers with experience in Uganda all attributed inadequate research capacity primarily to macro-economic factors. However, they also identified features of local professional culture that are unhelpful. One noted the expectation that local researchers will collect data but ex-patriate researchers will write it up. Another observed how researchers are reluctant to read the literature even when they have access to it, perhaps because they are unaware of how one’s data should be interpreted in the context of others’ research findings.

Two commented on the excessive importance some African researchers tend to attach to their formal qualifications, which they referred to as ‘credentialism’. Once they have got a masters degree such researchers are said to be reluctant to do their own fieldwork, or sometimes even to go into the field to supervise a field team. This means their junior colleagues are left to get on with data collection with little quality assurance or opportunity to develop their skills through constructive supervision. This has particularly important implications for qualitative research which requires either senior staff to collect data, or junior staff to be very closely supervised.

A more positive view from one mid-level researcher, who argued that there are plenty of highly trained social scientists in Uganda and Kenya (but not Tanzania), is that MISR offers great opportunities for researchers to collaborate with others around the world, which greatly develops their skills. This view was strongly contested by a research director.

A further important reason for limited research capacity in Uganda, according to one interviewee, is the decimation of a generation of researchers due to the HIV epidemic. Many junior to mid-level researchers in Uganda died during the 1990s, greatly depleting the pool of experienced researchers who might form the next generation of senior social scientists (see Pfau and Barton, 2004).

Research consultancies
Most of the research work conducted by social scientists in East Africa is in the form of consultancies. Heads of department were unclear about the proportion of time their staff spend on consultancy work (Kwesiga et al., 2000), probably because staff compete with each other for consultancies and may not want their supervisors to know its extent, due to possible conflict with teaching commitments. However, one head estimated that her
staff spend about 50% of their time doing consultancies, with the rest primarily on teaching. Very little time is left for academic research, and in any case there are rarely the resources to pursue it. Even senior university staff were said to spend more time on consultancies than on academic research. A respondent who had recently directed a large research programme in Uganda commented:

‘What happens in Makerere is that you can spend your entire time just working on very well paid, short-term consultancy studies for NGOs, usually international NGOs, who want something done in three weeks, and will pay you very well for doing that.’

The financial incentive to do consultancies is very clear. While a research associate’s salary might be $250 a month, consultancies can pay between $100 to $250 a day. A head of department explained: ‘There is a need to do the consultancies, because if you have to survive, to rely on your salary you would never make ends meet at all.’ Someone who had spent 15 years at MISR said that many researchers there have salaries of about $400/month but top that up to about $5,000/month with consultancies. A junior researcher greatly regretted that her independent research centre forbids her to do consultancies: ‘It helps you to grow: it helps your pocket to grow,’ she joked.

Furthermore, while regular salaries are subject to income tax, and 30% is paid on any declared extra income, such as consultancies through departments, most researchers can avoid declaring their individual consultancy earnings: ‘there is no mechanism for having them pay that tax.’ In Kenya agencies winning consultancies have to pay 10% tax, but individual consultants generally pay nothing.

When senior researchers win a consultancy contract they usually employ junior staff to do much of the research work, generating employment and research experience. Once social scientists gain masters degrees they get the opportunity to bid for consultancy work in their own right.

Most consultancies are commissioned by government departments or NGOs, though the government departments’ projects are generally funded by foreign donors. Nearly all interviewees said that those commissioning consultancies generally seek a contract with individuals and sometimes with consultancy firms; contracts are rarely negotiated with university departments (though one interviewee suggested the opposite). The Engineering Department at Makerere was the only department said to have formed its own consultancy firm. Private consultancy firms usually employ university staff to help write the bid and then do the work. Sometimes firms are constituted in an ad hoc way to respond to a particular advertisement.

Six interviewees reported that commissioning bodies are unwilling to pay overheads to institutions, and when they do, they are generally very low. However, the percentage overheads cited for different institutions varied considerably: from 5% in some Makerere departments to 10% in the Department of Women and Gender Studies and 20% in the Child Health and Development Centre, a small university research unit. This last example is the rate charged by university departments in Dar es Salaam. The maximum overheads that the Centre for Basic Research can charge is 15%, which is not enough to cover full administration costs. Only one interviewee, an independent researcher, mentioned that the senior management at Makerere are encouraging departments to become consulting firms and to demand 30% overheads. The consequence, he said, is that it encourages university staff to do their consultancy work independent of the university, allowing them to undercut university departments and earn more.
The predominance of research consultancies for social scientists is a key factor affecting the development of research capacity. Most consultancies involve fairly descriptive reports without very thorough analysis. Many have to be completed in a short space of time, for instance within a few weeks, offering little opportunity for rigorous research. In particular, there may be little or no time to review and build on previous research, develop the most suitable research methods, respond to or validate findings by exploring new research questions, and explore the implications of findings for a variety of stakeholders. Consequently there is little opportunity, stimulation or incentive to develop analytical skills. The research reports are not widely disseminated, sometimes being for internal use only, and time is rarely allocated to write-up the findings for publication. This gives little opportunity for peers to critically review the work, one of the main mechanisms for researchers’ professional development. Several East African researchers said that one of the reasons that few of them publish is that to use data from consultancies they would have to get the funder’s permission. However, when asked, none of them knew of anyone being refused such permission, though one researcher pointed out that the existence of such a regulation is a discouragement to publish in itself.

Since one cannot be sure when the next consultancy contract might be won, researchers are reluctant to turn down work simply because it is not in their specific area. Consequently it is difficult for them to develop a research speciality. A faculty dean commented:

‘There are no research traditions being developed. You can’t go to a department and say, “This department has a research tradition in land issues and it has been doing it for some years and they are producing social scientists that have a specialization.” We are social scientists but very few are specialists, and very few have had the opportunity of developing themselves in some area.’

A further consequence of consultancy work for university staff is that it inevitably restricts time for teaching and supervision. The policy at Makerere and Dar es Salaam is that academics can do consultancies provided these do not interfere with normal academic work. They do not need to ask their supervisor’s permission ‘so long as you don’t miss your class’. However, a head of department explained why this is difficult to enforce:

‘But who is going to say it has interfered [with normal academic work]? …And if on that day you earn twice as much as you earn in a month, how can he [your supervisor] say you must stay here? He [the member of staff] will leave you. And who loses? This is the person you have trained up to PhD level, and now he is leaving you, and you have no one to teach for you.’

Another senior academic said that in most cases supervisors are unaware of their staff’s consultancy work. The respondent from Dar es Salaam said that consultancy work during official working hours can be negotiated with one’s supervisor ‘at a price’.

For university staff publications are essential for promotion, three publications being needed to go from lecturer to senior lecturer at Makerere. In independent research centres there is also an incentive to publish, to inform practitioners, policy makers and politicians, to raise the centre’s profile and to meet the expectations of donors who often evaluate a centre in terms of number of publications. However, doing consultancies is usually at the cost of time for academic publications. Consultancy reports are rarely published, and the tight deadlines involved leave little scope for academic reading or writing. ‘The academic line sometimes suffers because if you have to finish a report you might work all through the night…’, explained a Kenyan sociologist. The director of an
independent research centre observed that an African scientist can return from London University to Nairobi University two days away from submitting a paper for publication, but does not get to finish it for years since he is immediately drawn into doing consultancies. Due to the time devoted to consultancies, many highly experienced researchers have very few publications, he continued, and so they cannot demonstrate their productivity when applying for senior jobs.

A less senior researcher thought that the conflict between consultancies and academic publications leads to a professional culture in which: ‘the point is, again, to try and chase the quick money, and not take advantage of the chance of academic growth… people don’t value it very much.’ A faculty dean referred to the same phenomenon:

‘Consultancies is not building the capacity of the person who is doing it. …. [Some] have even refused scholarships to do PhDs because they were busy doing consultancies. That is taking it to extremes.’

A mid-level researcher at Makerere said that although senior managers tell them ‘publish or perish’, there is not much pressure to do so. They are not regularly appraised, and although this researcher said that three publications are required for promotion, this was not important enough for her to know whether they had to be first authored or not.

Only one interviewee, the Ugandan director of a large research programme, questioned the inevitability that consultancy work should detract from writing for publication, although he acknowledged that it usually does.

‘Generally yes [it does detract from publications], but I don’t see why people when they get consultancies, say the evaluation of a programme,… I don’t know why they don’t write papers, actually. So consultancies can by themselves be a source of writing, they can be a very good source of training. So for me it is not incompatible, it’s just that you have to have the frame of mind to be able to, sort of, capitalise on the opportunity.’

Another respondent, who heads a Makerere department, said that consultancy work is generally compatible with, and useful to, university teaching since it usually relates closely to the course content.

The one Tanzanian interviewee, a senior university researcher, said that in Dar es Salaam consultancy reports are counted as publications in qualifying for promotion.

The high remuneration from consultancies, and tensions with teaching responsibilities, might encourage university staff to become full-time consultants. However, several respondents explained why only a few do this: they are in demand as consultants exactly because of their university posts. As a research associate put it, her post is a ‘point of connection’, a place to be approached for consultancies or collaborations, providing ‘recognition and visibility’. Several respondents emphasised that those commissioning research are seeking ‘high powered people’, individuals in established posts such as a senior lecturer or someone with a PhD. As a senior academic observed wryly, ‘These fellows want somebody who is already too busy!’ A further reason not to give up university employment is that relying entirely on consultancies would be too insecure: ‘You would earn much more in the short-term, but then you would be unemployed in the long-term.’. One would also have to work without the infrastructure provided by the university which at least includes desks and electricity. Some respondents also described how very intensive consultancy work is, often requiring fieldwork away from
home and then the completion of reports to very tight deadlines, thoroughly disrupting family life.

Due to the perceived negative impacts of consultancies, the director of an independent research centre in Kenya prohibits his staff from doing any. He explained that the only way to compete with the financial attractions of consultancy work is to offer non-monetary benefits: intellectual stimulation, collegiality, contacts and, in particular, long-term opportunities to develop their academic careers.

Drain of expertise abroad

Nearly all interviewees referred at some point to the loss of many of the most talented researchers to foreign countries. One pointed out that Africa has been losing many of ‘the best and the brightest’ for the last 40 years. While the USA, Canada and Britain offer the greatest attractions to anglophone East Africans, higher salaries in Malawi, Botswana, Swaziland and South Africa also draw people away. Several people commented that those with PhDs quickly move into international jobs and leave East Africa. A senior Northern researcher observed:

‘I think in Uganda, and maybe that’s true for the rest of Africa, once social scientists get above a certain level they are in Geneva with the WHO, or they are working in the World Bank, and earning three times what we are earning put together. And why the hell would they be working for [a large research programme in rural Uganda]?’

The most important reason for working in the North is that salaries are far higher, and even in South Africa salaries were said to be three times those in Uganda. However, there are many other attractions. For those committed to a research career, the environment in northern universities is far more conducive to good research, in terms of infrastructure, research funds, access to the literature and leading researchers, institutional administration and collegiate support. For those with less specific ambitions, almost any work in the North offers better long-term economic prospects than research work in East Africa.

Many researchers stay on in their host country after doing higher degrees there, usually starting by getting temporary jobs in the university in which they trained. As a senior researcher in Nairobi said, ‘If you train people abroad you will breed brain drain’. There are not only incentives to stay but also disincentives to return, since this can be a difficult transition. Professionally it means coming to terms with local research conditions, having become accustomed to the far more conducive environment in the north. A head of department at Makerere argued that training post-graduates abroad is not in itself the cause of the brain drain, but what they will return to:

‘The tragedy is that many of our good trained people who trained under these good universities don’t come back…. It is not the training itself, it is the other things, you know….Where are you coming back to, what is the salary, what is the atmosphere, where are the colleagues to discuss, to work with, where is the house?…. It is not the training itself, it is what comes afterwards that is the problem.’

Furthermore, on a personal level returnees often have to disappoint their relatives’ vastly inflated expectations of the wealth they will have accrued in the North.
An interviewee from a research-supporting NGO discussed the problem of researchers using further qualifications to advance their careers by moving to new posts in other organisations. This can be a problem within countries as well as fuelling the drain of expertise abroad. It means there is a disincentive for institutions to facilitate professional development, particularly if it involves accredited courses.

**Short-term perspectives**

Some interviewees commented on how difficult it now is to get long-term research funding, meaning for four or five years. They argued that it is difficult for researchers to develop skills while doing very short term projects. This relates to a broader issue to which several respondents referred: the short-term perspectives that many researchers have towards their work. This was attributed primarily to their socio-political context, but was seen to be intertwined with the predominance of consultancy work. Growing up in Uganda through the period of massive civil disruption under Amin and then Obote II gave people little long-term incentive to achieve educationally. Although Uganda is now far more stable, two senior academics at Makerere explained that concerns about the outcomes of the 2006 presidential election inhibit long-term planning: ‘Will there be a country called Uganda after 2006?’ Political uncertainty makes short term consultancies more attractive than investing in a long-term academic career.

‘That sets the parameters under which we are all working…. They are ready with their briefcase, they may take off any time … You talk to the colleagues here, and you say ‘How do we develop the Faculty?’, and they say ‘It’s not my Faculty.’ Most people have this thing of short term planning, or short term survival, not even planning. So consultancies are fine, but investing in this kind of thing which is going to pay in three to five years? No. ….. We get used to this [short term consultancies], so that it becomes very difficult to recruit social scientists because they have become… every day social scientists. And here is a programme coming, [like the] MRC, and they want to recruit you for three years and you say ‘Three years! That is going to restrict me!’"

**The global research economy**

One interviewee, the African director of an independent research centre, described the problem of research capacity in much broader terms than other respondents, presenting it as a feature of the global economy of academic research. ‘There is only one standard of science’ throughout the world, he argued, and unless one pays international salaries one cannot expect to get international quality in terms of hard work and number of publications. Yet there are huge salary differences according to where people work. Most research institutions in developing countries cannot afford international salaries, and if they can for specific projects, doing so would create serious inequities between staff. Consequently their research capacity is steadily haemorrhaged to research projects that offer short term international salaries, or to the North.

The need to pay international salaries to recruit high quality researchers was confirmed by an experienced Ugandan researcher who said that to attract her to a senior research post would require a salary of $60-100,000 (including allowances, etc.). She stated that $35,000 p.a. is too low to attract good social scientists.

Another respondent, a very senior Ugandan researcher, talked about the injustice of being denied an international salary:

‘Let me tell you, this issue of international/local [salaries] is something targeted towards reducing costs. I mean I once did a consultancy for UNFPA and was
a member of a team, and there were two Canadians and someone from the US, and we sat down and discussed and I found I was being paid the lowest. I took this to the UN representative…. He says, “Oh, he comes from Canada, and because he comes from Canada his cost of living is high, and so forth.” And I said, “Excuse me, I wish you knew how many people depend on my salary. I can tell you: my brother’s children, my brother’s brother’s children, my nephew, my mother in the village, my - I mean, my cost of living is also high! I have to pay for my bills, I don’t have national insurance… People here take a lot of responsibility.” ….He really got me worked up and I wrote to Kofi Annan: “Your system is perpetuating inequalities in employment.”

The African director of the independent research centre argued that the fundamental requirement to address limited research capacity is to establish a system that encourages researchers to develop their skills and be productive within the developing world, and to remain there. This needs long term investment in the development of research institutions; without that they will never be able to compete with long-established institutions in the North. For instance, junior researchers are prepared to take relatively low-paid jobs in order to gain experience beneficial to their careers, if they can be fairly confident of getting better paid work with the same institution in the future. If they cannot be confident of the institution’s longevity they are more likely to take on better remunerated research consultancies.

According to this interviewee, the policies and practices of international donors tend to perpetuate the dominance of Northern research institutions, in particular by paying substantial overheads to home institutions but none, or much lower ones, to developing country institutions. For instance the National Institute for Health only pays 8% overheads to institutions outwith the USA. Another problem is the funding of major research programmes through Northern, rather than African, institutions, leading to African staff moving to those Northern institutions. One respondent gave a specific example of this, citing African researchers who had moved to Britain to work on the DfID’s £15 million programme on microbicides. Although much of this funding goes to research groups at the five fieldwork sites in Sub-Saharan Africa, the funds were awarded to, and are administered by, a British research institution.

The pull of capital cities
Those who had attempted to recruit social scientists to research projects outside capital cities identified this as being particularly difficult. The more remote the site, the more difficult it is to recruit and, consequently, the lower the calibre of applicants. Multiple reasons were given to explain researchers’ reluctance to work a long way from the capital, even if it was in another large city. Some talked of the general unattractiveness of living in remote towns, others of domestic concerns such as the quality of local schools and where one’s spouse might work. A senior researcher talked of the opportunities for self-advancement that exist in the capital: ‘…because you’ve got much more exposure to possibilities when you’re in Kampala than when you’re out in the bush, ….meeting people and having email…’. Recruiting researchers to work outside the capital is a particular problem in Tanzania due to its size and poor roads; it can be several days’ journey to return to Dar es Salaam.

Commitment to developing research capacity
It is important that this focus on poor research capacity is countered by some more positive accounts from interviewees. Contrary to the impression suggested above, that
many researchers prioritise immediate earnings from consultancies over longer term academic development, a few interviewees reported that they had chosen their current jobs because of the opportunity to pursue an academic career, through gaining publications, even though they were forgoing consultancy work. One Kenyan said that she had several friends in university posts willing to earn only $200-300/month in order to do academic work. A senior Northern researcher also gave examples of East African researchers’ commitment to pursuing academic careers. He said that recently some applicants to a Tanzanian research job had complained about the local salary, but others were prepared to work for even less if it allowed them to register for a PhD. Notably these were Ugandans and Kenyans, not Tanzanians. He also referred to previous Ugandan colleagues who had left their jobs to study for masters degrees at their own expense.

The African director of an independent research centre concluded the interview by stating his ambition that, if the centre has to close after five years, he will make sure that it is not because they had failed to publish in high standard journals, or because they had been accused of financial impropriety (as happens in many African institutions). Rather, he said, it would be because donors did not want to support a strong academic institution.

Suggested improvements, and likely barriers
Many ideas for improving social science research capacity were raised in the interviews. They have been grouped into six broad areas, though these are interlinked and many interviewees discussed several of them.

Greater collegiate support within departments
Four of the more senior interviewees, including two heads of department, identified the need for more mutual support within departments in order to develop writing skills. One head of department talked about the need to have colleagues ‘to guide you through some of the very complicated processes and procedures and requirements’ to get a paper accepted in an international journal. Getting experienced staff to co-author papers with junior colleagues, or to act more generally in the role of mentors, were two approaches she suggested. She particularly highlighted the need for ‘support networks’ to assist staff to develop writing skills, and to encourage them to persevere with papers in the face of apparently negative feedback from journals’ peer-reviewers. However, she envisaged such networks extending well beyond the department, to be international and to include journal editors who might write to staff to encourage them to submit another article.

The director of a research-facilitating NGO suggested that each department should have a specialist member of staff with a remit to support colleagues to write for publication. This person would be assessed on the department’s publication output, but s/he would have to be well paid in order to prevent her/him getting diverted by consultancy work. While the director of an independent research centre insists that his staff publish, he also tries to encourage collegiate support, particularly through constructive criticism of each other’s papers.
Consultancies contracted through departments/ research centres rather than individuals

According to nearly all interviewees, at present most consultancies are contracted with individuals or with private consultancy firms. Commissioning bodies are unwilling to pay more than very modest overheads to institutions. The interviews explored the potential advantages of a system, currently being widely discussed at Makerere, in which most research consultancies would be contracted with university departments or research centres, with significant overheads of, for instance, 30%, established as the norm. All those with whom this was discussed approved of the idea in principle. Some heads of department welcomed the way it would strengthen their institutions, allowing them to improve facilities, train staff and build capacity: ‘then when the consultancy is done, that remains.’ The overheads could be used for infrastructure, in particular to improve computing facilities, for research projects that cannot be funded elsewhere, or to develop writing skills. This could be done through writing skills workshops, inviting editors to present seminars and supporting mentoring. Two interviewees valued the fact that such institutional consultancies would require departments to act as teams, with staff establishing their collective interests and the heads of department ensuring the quality of output. A senior manager in a Ugandan government AIDS organisation also argued for a less individualised approach to research, saying that new researchers will only be mentored if research is done through institutions. Unless institutional capacity is developed ‘you have a few large fish in a small pond’, and 'individuals grow old and move on'.

An independent researcher suggested that if those commissioning research paid overheads they could require reports to be written-up for publication, or at least for peer review within the university and publication in an E journal. He pointed out that such a system might allow commissioning agencies to get more for their consultancy money. Researchers would be able to build on the findings of previous consultancy research, since it would have been disseminated, and the research findings might be analysed at a more sophisticated level. However, NGOs might not welcome the dissemination of evaluation reports, since few are willing to be transparent.

Reasons for perpetuation of individually orientated consultancies

Although interviewees supported the principle of institutional consultancies, important practical difficulties were raised. Several interviewees pointed to researchers’ opposition to ending individual consultancies. One head of department explained:

‘But many of the individuals they would prefer [individual consultancies]…The culture of institutionalising things is not there. Many of them think that the institution is a barrier to them. And because of also the bureaucracy, you know, many people would prefer to have the money in their own accounts…. For a lot of research in social science, I may not need the facilities in this department. All I need is my computer which I can have at home. … I go to the field, I collect my data, and after teaching I go back home and write my report… I may not need the computer here, the printer, the telephone, because I can use mine at home.’

The Ugandan director of a large research programme thought that for institutions to charge overheads ‘…is not practical, very difficult to implement,’ mainly ‘… because people will just try to get around it. They will get consultancies privately.’ Furthermore, others pointed out that with institutional consultancies not only would a percentage of the
 Researchers were also wary of institutional consultancies because of the frustrations of having to work through inefficient institutional administrations. Some referred to the complications of getting contracts agreed with departments and the long delays in being paid after completing a job. At a wider level, one interviewee, familiar with the workings of his university, pointed out that it does not allow departments to hold their own bank accounts. Consequently there would be a strong likelihood that the university administration would appropriate some, or most, of the funds raised through departmental consultancies in order to meet the pressing financial needs of the university as a whole.

The failure of departments other than Engineering to establish successful consultancy firms was attributed to the fact that staff 'are already too tied down with private [consultancy] firms in town', and to the lack of entrepreneurial skills. ‘Most people want to follow, they don’t want to lead, to initiate’, observed a professor, who went on to explain that ‘some of us are now old’ and do not want to initiate things they cannot see to completion. This suggests a further consequence of freezing recruitment to university posts.

Several interviewees pointed out that commissioning agencies may also prefer individual consultancies. ‘It is not only a one way thing that people take individualised consultancies. Even those who are asking for research consultants, they say they don’t want to pay the institutional fee.’ The Ugandan director of a large research programme anticipated the opposition to paying overheads from those commissioning consultancies:

‘It requires also for the stakeholders to buy into it. …The stakeholders will say it is too expensive doing research with [his institution]. … All the American universities [have] institutional overheads, but tell DfID that institutional overheads have to be factored in with this project: “Oh, no!”…. How am I supposed to run the project without institutional overheads? …The stakeholders, they have the mentality that they can do it on the cheap. Africa is poor, but it is not cheap!’

Another factor is that some agencies want to specify who will work on a project, and be sure that one person will be clearly responsible for delivery. "I want you as an individual, not as an institution." That’s what they say,’ said one interviewee. It was also pointed out that with individual consultancies researchers are likely to be motivated to maintain their professional reputations, whereas with institutional consultancies individual members of staff might feel less responsible for the quality of the product. A further potential difficulty mentioned by one interviewee is that the central management of the university might demand a share of any overheads paid to departments.

Two senior university staff thought it unrealistic to establish a concordat with all agencies commissioning research, so that they pay minimum overheads. They noted that 60-70% of the government's budget is funded by donors, so the government is unable to demand how donors should act. However, one head of department did clarify that some of the larger donors do practice their policies of developing institutional capacity by only contracting research through institutions: the Carnegie Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the World Bank, the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD).
Career development within long-term research programmes

All respondents who had worked in large-scale, long-term research programmes thought that such programmes should reward researchers who have worked well for a few years by funding them through their next educational level, whether that is a bachelors’ degree for secondary school leaver fieldworkers, or a masters’ degree for graduate researchers. A programme director thought that if these courses were in-country there would need to be a careful assessment as to whether their value warranted the time away from work. This respondent also thought it necessary to bond researchers doing such courses so that they continue working with the programme for two years following their training. However, a senior researcher argued that, if sufficiently stimulating conditions were created, it should be possible to develop staff loyalty to the programme and retain such staff without bonding. The senior researcher thought that such in-service career development would create a fairly large cadre of trained researchers over a decade, and would be a more realistic way of developing research capacity in the medium-term than trying to improve schools and universities. Funding research staff to do PhDs is extremely expensive, and one large-scale research programme considers that it would use too high a proportion of their training budget. Consequently funding for PhDs is sought elsewhere, with a tendency that on completion researchers do not return to the programme. There were also calls for senior researchers in long-term research projects to invest time in developing the writing skills of their junior researchers.

A mid-level researcher argued that, to develop loyalty, long-term research programmes should recruit promising graduates while at university and sponsor them to intersperse research work with post-graduate courses and, eventually, post-doctoral training.

A related idea advanced by one interviewee was to encourage Northern universities to have long-term commitments to their overseas students and subsequently involve them in research collaborations.

Post-graduate training

Some suggested improvements involved post-graduate degrees: making access to masters degrees more meritocratic and less dependent on money and personal contacts, or getting donors to fund post-graduate degrees.

An independent researcher who had previously worked within Makerere described an ambitious ‘University-Wide Junior Staff Development Project’ that he had devised with a colleague, to award research funds to junior academic staff in such a way that it would develop their teaching, research and administrative skills over three years (Carasco and Barton, 1995). However, despite backing from the University, they were unsuccessful in getting donor support, due, apparently, to the focus of most major donors at the time on infra-structural development rather than human resource capacity building.

Other training ideas were to provide short-term (e.g. five week) courses on specific research skills which would not tempt attendees away from their original institutions, and to provide incentives for staff to remain in original institutions after gaining further qualifications, in terms of both salary and working conditions.

While acknowledging how postgraduate training in the North fuels the brain drain, senior academics did not advocate that it should be entirely substituted by local training. A faculty dean at Makerere thought that the ideal would be that, in the long-term, the academic quality of the university would be sufficient to train post-graduates at home, but that ‘sandwich programmes’ would require students to spend some time learning theory
and methodology in Northern universities. Another senior interviewee said that in his experience staff who have only been trained in Africa lack the intellectual breadth and analytical ability of those trained in the North. He argued there should be specialist courses in the North to complement African masters courses. The director of an NGO that supports research argued that local institutions should be strengthened in order to offer PhDs, which few do at the moment, and they might usefully do this in affiliation with Northern universities.

**Funding and writing**

Three interviewees identified funding as the key factor to retain good social scientists in Uganda. Good long-term financial prospects, in the form of long-term grants and good salaries, would encourage researchers to stay, which would be reinforced by greater intellectual stimulus. The director of an independent research centre wished that he was able to offer African visiting scholars $30,000 for sabbatical years. He was sure that this would result in valuable publications, but to date only Northern academics had found the funds to be visiting scholars.

Finally, some ideas to improve research capacity focused on writing and publications: encouraging more research to be funded through research grants that require publications rather than through consultancies; improve libraries with better access to E journals; have writing workshops for junior researchers, and cost into research proposals time for researchers to write-up their findings, ideally in a residential location to take them away from their daily work.
Discussion

Explanations for limited social science research capacity

Four-fifths of those interviewed in this exploratory study thought that there is a serious shortage of social science research capacity in East Africa. This suggests that the numerous gaps in support and skills identified by Barton et al. in the early 1990s (Barton et al., 1993) have only been partially rectified. Interviewees identified several causes for limited research capacity, which can be summarised as follows:

- very poor primary education
- very poor secondary education
- the diversion of most talented secondary school students into high status vocational courses at university (law, medicine, etc.)
- poor facilities and teaching at university
- lack of funding for post-graduate courses
- the death of many junior and mid-level researchers from AIDS
- lack of long-term research funding; donors tend to fund research through Northern institutions rather than support local academic institutions
- the drain of the more highly qualified researchers to southern Africa or the North
- the funding of research primarily through individually-contracted consultancies, which:
  - result in reports that are generally not peer reviewed or disseminated and which are generally descriptive rather than analytical
  - divert university staff from teaching, supporting colleagues or writing for publication
  - deny university departments overheads to core fund facilities and capacity-building.

Several interviewees thought there is a particular gap in analytical and writing skills. This was attributed to various factors. Researchers lack time to write, primarily due to the demands of consultancy work, and they lack support from colleagues: few of them have the publishing experience to act as mentors, and university departments do not have a strong collaborative culture. Further factors mentioned were the lack of access to journals and the way that consultancy reports are rarely critically reviewed, so that writing them does not develop analytical skills.

A weakness in qualitative research skills was also identified by several respondents. This was linked to an historical rejection of social anthropology, perceived to be a colonial legacy, but it probably goes deeper than this. The modernist development discourse that has been predominant in higher education in Africa for several decades idealises scientific progress along positivist lines, and implicitly rejects forms of knowledge seen as less objective, such as qualitative findings. Ironically such modernist
ideas are now less popular in northern academia, thus perpetuating the marginalisation of African academics in the global knowledge economy.

Some interviewees referred to the lack of intellectual drive behind research careers, usually pointing out that this is largely a product of macro-economic circumstances. Few researchers enter the career out of personal intellectual interest, rather than to get a salaried job. This must make it less likely for them to have a sense of ‘ownership’ in, and commitment to, their research, or to academic values of rigour and quality. This is exacerbated by the lack of career progression in universities, in many of which posts are frozen. There is little incentive to pursue one’s own research, since it is unlikely to affect promotion, and in some institutions there is little chance of being fired.

**Variations between accounts**

Unsurprisingly, respondents’ accounts were shaped by their professional and institutional positions, for instance leading them to defend their staff or externalise problems. A head of department at Makerere explained that the main reason her staff publish in local, rather than international, journals, is that:

‘You know very well that publishing houses and journals, they are different clubs of the world, and you need to get into the club, before you really get accepted. That’s the truth…. You know there’s a group of people who are consistently publishing in those journals and you need to know some people who have published there…’.  

In a similar vein, the director of a research-supporting NGO attributed the lack of journal publications in part to publishers not providing advice on how to draft articles. A Kenyan sociologist explained that the reason why many HIV projects are run by Northerners is ‘networks’: people, in this case Northerners, invite their friends or ex-colleagues to take the posts. Two senior heads of department at Makerere University initially played down the role of consultancies in the work of their staff, but towards the end of the interview attributed many problems to the predominance of consultancy work. It was striking that the director of the research-facilitating NGO, who spends much time raising funds from Northern donors, presented researchers in a more idealistic light than most other interviewees, stressing that their prime motivation to conduct research is to make a practical contribution to social development.

By and large, African interviewees were more likely to explain limited research capacity in terms of economic constraints and the restrictions of those commissioning research, while Northern interviewees were rather more likely to comment on contrasts between the professional cultures of East African and Northern researchers. However, the Northern interviewees usually attributed these cultural differences to underlying structural/economic factors.

Only one interviewee explicitly attributed inadequate research capacity to a global economy of academic research, in which Northern institutions actively maintain their dominance. This African research director articulated a coherent political analysis of the international research system. Other African interviewees might have been unfamiliar with the workings of international institutions/donors, or perhaps too courteous to their Northern interviewer to be so frank. The Northern interviewees, who generally had greater familiarity with the practices of international research funders, might simply not have thought about the perpetuation of research incapacity at this broader level. Alternatively, they might have thought the policy implications of such an analysis to be too radical to be worth pursuing, or, perhaps, too much at odds with their institution’s
interests. One Northern research director acknowledged how donor institutions can, on occasion, contribute to the problem of under capacity, when it was put to him.

Although probed about the broader consequences of the lack of social science research capacity, no one commented on how it leads Northerners to play an important role in the academic construction of East African society. This is particularly striking in relations to sexuality, given that this is a highly sensitive area of African culture.

Solutions suggested by interviewees
Interviewees' ideas to improve social science research capacity can be grouped into six broad categories. Five have previously been widely recognised in the literature: providing greater research funding that is controlled locally (Jentsch and Pilley, 2003, Lansang and Dennis, 2004); improved post-graduate training (Lansang and Dennis, 2004); career development within long-term research programmes; more incentives and support to write for publication, and collegiate support within departments, generally encompassed in references to improving the research environment (Nchinda, 2002). The sixth suggestion, to encourage institutional rather than individual research consultancies, seems to have had little coverage beyond the grey literature.

Kwesiga et al. (2000: 14) commented that individual consultancies at Makerere:

‘...do not build the capacity of staff so much. The researcher has no control over the product and therefore cannot publish them. The researcher has to work within the parameters provided by the funder, rather than hers/his own academic interests.’

They conclude that:

‘While individual research is not to be entirely discouraged in terms of funding experience has shown that institutional research tends to build both human and physical resource capacity. This being the case, there is a need to give preference to institutional projects/programmes where sizeable amounts of resources are concerned.’ (Kwesiga et al., 2000: 29)

Menken et al. (2002) were rather more cautious in their assessment of the impact of consultancies, but they observed that:

‘Faculty are increasingly relying on consultancies from donors and NGOs for ‘research’ funding but they are concerned that this ‘entrepreneurialization’ of research is driven by donor priorities, is not always done to a high standard, and provides few opportunities for publication. In addition, one informant suggested that the number of consultancies that faculty take on diverts human resources from the university.’ (Menken et al., 2002:98)

In keeping with Kwesiga et al.’s findings four years ago, this study suggests that a fundamental characteristic of social science research in East Africa is that it is a highly individualised activity. The institutional role of university departments in research seems to be fairly minimal, beyond teaching future researchers. The individualised nature of research is largely due to the predominance of individual research consultancies. As a faculty dean put it: ‘Most of our social scientists are not institution based, whether NGO or private. They are there for hire.’
Although all those who discussed it agreed with the principle that research consultancies should be contracted with university departments or research centres, with overheads of around 30% established as the norm, it is striking that only one interviewee actually advocated this himself. There are several potential advantages of such a system. The standard overheads would provide substantial funding to departments which might pay for: the dissemination of reports through, for instance, E journals; improved libraries with good internet and E journal access; improved computing facilities; time for researchers to write for publication, and an adequate salary for a senior member of staff with responsibility to train colleagues in writing skills and writing research proposals. Institutional consultancies would encourage a collective approach to conducting research and building capacity, and heads of department could better manage the research demands on their staff.

It is also possible that, in the mid to long-term, such a system might allow commissioning agencies to get better value for their consultancy money. If they accepted the transparency involved, reports from commissioned research would be disseminated and researchers could build on them, leading research findings to be analysed at a more sophisticated level.

However, in discussing the establishment of overhead payments for research contracts, interviewees identified several reasons why such a system does not exist, or would be difficult to introduce. On the one hand, commissioning agencies prefer individual consultancies because it is more straightforward and reliable to work with known individuals rather than departments. Individuals contracted to do research have the self-interest to do a good job and meet deadlines; such motivation is unlikely with departmental contracts. Furthermore, commissioners seek known, “high powered people” as consultants.

On the other hand, many individual consultants prefer the existing system because they are already known to commissioning agencies and want to maintain their business, and in practice they often do not need to get permission from their department to do consultancies. Researchers lacked confidence in the administrative competence of university departments, and noted that they require complex bureaucracy, for instance with contracts, and it can take a long time to receive pay for work already completed. With institutional contracts a proportion of the consultancy fee would go to the department, and in some universities the central administration might appropriate revenue from departmental consultancies. Furthermore, researchers have to pay tax (30% for extra earnings) if they work through a department, but can avoid this if individually contracted.

More broadly, some senior academics doubted their colleagues’ sense of agency, saying that they lack the confidence in the future necessary to develop and commit themselves to long-term solutions.

Role of Northern donors in perpetuating lack of capacity

Others have previously noted that the practices of Northern funding agencies sometimes perpetuate the lack of research capacity that their policies are intended to redress, this being variously interpreted as semi-colonialism (Cotello and Zumler, 2000) or the perverse consequences of good intentions (Edejer, 1999). Menken et al. (2002) noted the irony of Makerere’s Sociology Department not having any first year masters students because none of those admitted could pay the fees, at the same time as the Danish
Agency for Development Assistance and NORAD were funding students for masters and PhD training in Europe.

In this study one African interviewee commented bitterly on a bright new recruit being poached to a DfID-funded project at a British university. To date, large proportions of DfID’s research budget have supported British academics and their institutions, for instance through Knowledge Programme research grants. A senior manager in DfID’s Research Division acknowledged to the author that this is straightforward tied-aid, but explained that it would be unacceptable in terms of domestic politics to re-direct these funds to developing country research institutions. No doubt there are disinterested practical considerations as well, such as the administrative efficiency and probity of Southern country institutions. However, if donors are really committed to developing institutional capacity, then large scale and long-term research programmes like the microbicides project provide an opportunity to develop capacity through, for instance, training administrative staff and careful monitoring of administrative practices. Another mechanism to support the development of administrative capacity is through the regular payment of more than minimal overheads to research institutions, but several interviewees complained that Northern funders are unwilling to do this.

**Remaining research questions**

This has only been an exploratory study and, given the small sample, the data collected are inevitably patchy. Some of the questions a more thorough study might investigate are:

- what proportion of social science research funding in East Africa is in the form of consultancies?
- what proportion of university staff’s time is spent on consultancies?
- what proportion of consultancies are contracted with individuals and what proportion with institutions?
- what overheads are paid in institutional consultancies?
- does the central management of universities facilitate or impede departmental consultancies?

An important area to explore is how the agencies commissioning consultancies, primarily NGOs and government departments, evaluate the present system:

- do commissioning agencies get what they need from consultancies?
- what are their views on institutional-based consultancies with overheads?
- what barriers do they see in implementing such a system, and how could these barriers be overcome?
- to what extent would they be prepared to disseminate reports from commissioned research?
More broadly, the policies and practices of large Northern donor organisations could be examined:

- do they regard their funding of scientific research as separate from the development of research capacity?

- what proportion of their research funding goes to Northern institutions and what proportion to developing country institutions?

- what are their views on this distribution, and what are the barriers to amending it?

Since much money allocated to capacity building is used to finance developing country scientists to do higher degrees in the North, another issue to explore is the subsequent career paths of these social scientists. What proportion return to their home countries, what do they do there, and how long do they stay?
Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to all 29 interviewees for readily giving up precious time to be interviewed, and to the ten junior researchers who shared their experiences in a group discussion and through informal conversations. David Mabey and Philippe Mayaud of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine supported this project from the start, and I am particularly grateful to Charles Rwabukwali and Nelson Kakande, of the Department of Sociology, Makerere University, and to Brent Wolff of the Medical Research Council’s Programme on AIDS in Uganda, for facilitating the research in Uganda. Several people were generous enough with their time to comment on an earlier draft of this report: Caroline Allen, Tom Barton, Harriet Birungi, Graham Hart, John Kinsman, Mary Plummer, Charles Rwabukwali, Janet Seeley, Winnie Sseruma, Jimmy Whitworth and Andrea Winkelmann-Gleed. While their comments greatly improved the report, the views expressed in it are entirely my own. The research was funded by the UK Department for International Development through the HIV/AIDS and STIs Knowledge Programme.
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Appendix: Generic Interview Schedule for Ugandan Interviewees

1. Is there a problem [in your view] with local participation in social research?
   Which kinds of social science research in Uganda are led by local researchers?
   - e.g. by sector: government research, NGO research, academic research
   by subject area: demography, marketing, education, health

   To what extent is social science sexual health research in Uganda led by local researchers?
   - what proportion of major research projects are initiated, managed and written-up by Ugandans?
   - what level of research do Ugandans work at?
e.g. grant holders (PIs); senior research managers; graduate researchers; non-graduate researchers

2. Where do social scientists come from? [supply issues]
   How many social scientists trained in this country?
   - graduates
   post graduates: MAs/MSc or PhD

   Which universities/ colleges train social scientists?

3. Where do social science graduates go? [demand issues]
   Competition for social scientists. Is there an issue with recruitment?
   Where do trained social scientists end up working?

   What salary structure is there in your research programme/ institution?
   - local and international salaries: rationale for distinction

   Where are jobs advertised?
   - are vacancies circulated formally and/or informally? What networks?

   Do most post-doctoral researchers do a lot of consultancy research?
   - what is the output from these consultancies?
   - what quality is it?
   - how does this affect acquisition of skills to write successful research proposals
     and write for publication in academic journals?

   Are some jobs perceived to be for ex-pats?
   - what links are there with Makerere?
   - are there any pro-active recruitment practices?

   Might there be a lack of confidence amongst local social scientists? (Cultural dependency?)
4. Issues of education and training. Academic community of practices, medium of communication, resources. Motivation to develop skills.

What is the quality of social science courses?
- do staff have to rely on consultancies for income?
- does reliance on consultancies effect teaching staff’s teaching quality?

What styles of teaching? Discursive/ didactic?

What language is used in secondary school and university?
- how does this help or handicap students?
- access to literature?
- implications for writing for publication

What are the main areas in which training is needed?
- do many social scientists have experience of writing?
- does assessment of researchers/ research institutions allow much time to be devoted to developing local researchers’ writing skills, when quicker for ex-pats to write papers?

What are the pros and cons of local researchers doing post-grad. degrees in West? e.g. value of international exposure
- value of international ideas/ theory
- are degrees always appropriate
- does it encourage researchers to stay in developed countries
- does it perpetuate expertise and resources in the West

How do you motivate staff to develop their skills?
- is there any motivation to get publications?

What is the usual system for allocation of authorship for journal articles?
- how widespread is practice of ‘gift’ authorship?

5. How are 'social scientists' perceived in Uganda? Is there a professional grouping? If so, what does it do? What is social status of social scientists? Is it seen as a worthwhile career? [retention issues]

Is there any professional identity as a researcher, a social scientist or a scientist in Uganda?

What kind of professional organisations or networks are there for social scientists?

What is status of social scientists compared with other professions?

What career structure is there?

Could large scale research programmes funded by foreign donors do more to provide career progression for researchers?
6. How might things be improved? Have you tried anything, different strategies? Do you think it matters?

   Can you suggest any other possible solutions to help develop social science research capacity?

   Do you think there are biases between local and Western researchers in access to research funds?
   - how do these operate?

   Do you think there are biases between local and Western researchers in the way academic journals review and accept papers for publication?
   - how do these operate?