COVID-19 FUNDED RESEARCH PROJECTS IN FOCUS

UKCDR
UK Collaborative on Development Research

GL PID-R

COVID CIRCLE
COVID-19 RESEARCH
COORDINATION & LEARNING

Key Findings:

Number of indirect health impacts projects:

134

Funding investments (known funding amounts):

$197.2m

Top funder:

NRF South Africa

Research Capacity Strengthening

The coronavirus pandemic has triggered an unprecedented global research response across multiple disciplines to gain insights into this novel infection and its impacts. To date, thousands of research activities have been embarked on with a predominance of research projects in higher income countries. Strengthening research capacity, particularly in low-resourced settings, facilitates an equitable response to the COVID-19 pandemic and is likely to be most effective when funded as part of preparedness. Research capacity strengthening activities are purposeful initiatives which enhance the ability of individuals, organisations and systems to successfully undertake research (1). Here, we present the scope of funded research activities with capacity strengthening as an objective within the COVID-19 pandemic, drawing on evidence from the sixth version of the Living Mapping Review (LMR) of COVID-19 funded research projects and the UKCDR/GloPID-R COVID-19 Research Project Tracker.

Methodology

Descriptive and thematic analysis were done as outlined in the LMR study protocol. Projects with a capacity strengthening objective explicitly mentioned were identified (capacity strengthening at all levels - individual, institutional and national were included). Further funders, funding amounts, country distribution of projects and projects' specific research focus were determined.

Findings

Locations, funders and funding amounts

The 134 projects identified with a capacity strengthening objective were funded by 47 funders with a total investment of at least $197.2m as shown in Figure 1. However, $101m of this amount was invested in one National Institutes of Health (NIH) vaccine site preparation project with sites in Sub-Saharan Africa and South America. NRF South Africa funded the most projects (17 projects). Figure 2 shows research projects involved at least one of 78 countries. Overall, 59.7% of research capacity strengthening projects involved at least one of the 62 low- and middle-income countries included in this version of the tracker database – with Nigeria and Senegal being involved in the greatest number of these projects (10 and 9 projects, respectively). In particular, partnerships involving Senegal were the most prominent among all multi-country projects, with 9 out of all 36 multi-country projects involving the Western African nation.

Figure 1: Funders of Capacity Strengthening projects - known funding amount indicated in brackets (funders of 3 or more projects shown)
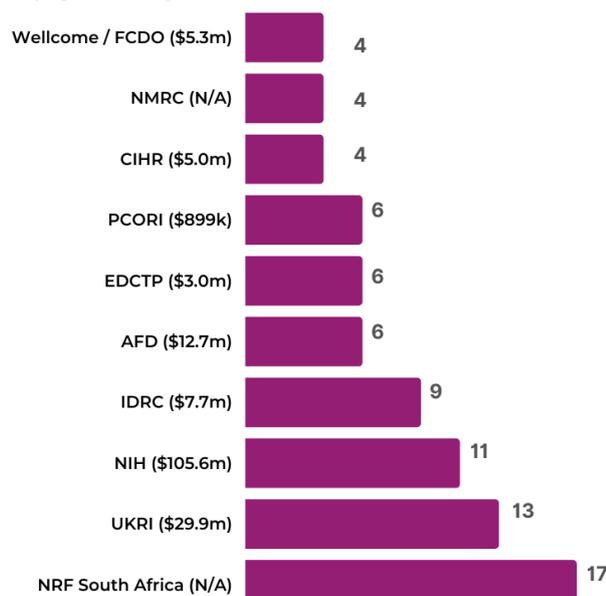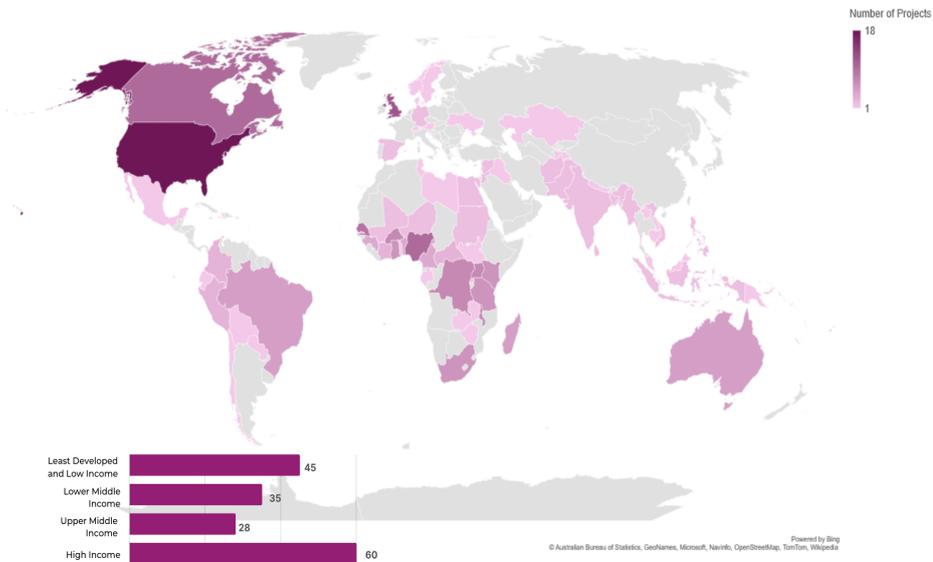

Funder	Projects
Wellcome / FCDO ($5.3m)	4
NMRC (N/A)	4
CIHR ($5.0m)	4
PCORI ($899k)	6
EDCTP ($3.0m)	6
AFD ($12.7m)	6
IDRC ($7.7m)	9
NIH ($105.6m)	11
UKRI ($29.9m)	13
NRF South Africa (N/A)	17

Figure 2: Locations of Capacity Strengthening projects

Table 1: Area of focus for Capacity Strengthening projects

Area of Capacity Strengthening projects	No. of projects
Laboratory	39
Research Training	27
Clinical Management	15
Surveillance	11
Pandemic Preparedness	11
Data Management	10
Policy Response	9
Clinical Trials	7
Infection Prevention	8
Ethical Governance	1

Research focus and WHO research priorities

Most of the projects focused on strengthening laboratory capacity in less-resourced countries followed by strengthening capacity through research training as indicated in Table 1. It is therefore unsurprising that the majority of the projects fell under "virus: natural history, transmission and diagnostics", "Social sciences in the outbreak response" research priority areas. Laboratory capacity strengthening activities were predominantly focused on diagnostics. Some projects involved advanced laboratory procedures such as coronavirus manipulation and genomic sequencing whereas other projects referred to laboratory capacity strengthening with no details as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Area of focus of laboratory Capacity Strengthening projects
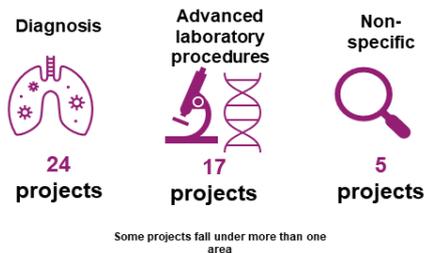
Discussion and conclusion

The prioritisation of laboratory research capacity strengthening activities indicates the importance funders and researchers attach to these activities and their importance for an effective pandemic response.

Limiting the studies included in this analysis to only those mentioning research capacity strengthening implies some projects are likely to have been missed. Existing capacity leveraged for the response to this COVID-19 pandemic is also relevant to capacity strengthening and will promote preparedness for future pandemics.

About the UKCDR/ GloPID-R Tracker

The UKCDR/GLOPID-R COVID-19 Research Project Tracker (the Tracker) is a live open access database which categorises COVID-19 research activity funded around the world against the WHO research priorities outlined in the WHO Coordinated Research Roadmap. COVID CIRCLE has initiated a Living Mapping Review of these projects, published in Wellcome Open Research, to support funders and researchers in the achievement of a coherent response to this pandemic.

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Get in touch

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