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NIHR GHR Portfolio Evaluation

Assessment Summary: Brief note for PANDORA internal use

Assessment Summary – PANDORA

The Pan-African Network for Rapid Research, Response, Relief and Preparedness for Infectious Disease Epidemics (PANDORA-ID-NET) is a €11 million grant funded by the European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership (EDCTP). PANDORA-ID-NET is a multidisciplinary 'One Health' initiative that supports broad themes addressing the response to emerging infections in Africa and supporting this through research, capacity development and training. The project includes partners from 13 African Institutions and 9 European Institutions. The countries involved include the Republic of Congo, France, Gabon, Germany, Ghana, Italy, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, the United Kingdom (UK), and Zambia.

Ecorys was contracted by the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) in the UK to conduct an evaluation of the first phase of the Global Health Research (GHR) portfolio implemented by the National Institute of Health Research (NIHR). This involved an in-depth review of a small sample of awards (21) including the PANDORA award led by the European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership (EDCTP). The evaluation covered eight areas of exploration. Highlights from PANDORA are presented here.

1. **RELEVANCE:** Extent to which the GHR award is addressing priority areas of health research in LMICs where there is unmet need as identified by government and/or civil society in the relevant countries

The PANDORA-ID-NET2 award addresses a highly relevant and priority global theme, namely preparedness and response to infectious disease outbreaks. It does this through a 'One Health' approach in collaboration with the Africa Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC). The PANDORA consortium was formed to ensure a cross-Africa spread of countries building on existing networks and including people with specific expertise. Country stakeholders were engaged in varying degrees in the design of the award and generally agreed that their perspectives were important throughout implementation and helped drive the agenda.

2. **COHERENCE:** Extent to which the award is a coherent funding mechanism to meet its stated outcomes (i.e. supportive of complementarity, harmonisation and coordination within the award and externally)

Stakeholders provided evidence of a wide range of valuable collaborations and interactions across the partner countries in the award which helped drive its success. The network resulted in opportunities for additional grants and new partnerships. The Africa CDC provides a valuable platform for facilitating more comprehensive coherence and dissemination across Africa and leveraging greater political buy-in and regulatory harmonisation. There is also evidence of a wide range of partnerships and collaborations across most partner countries and globally, beyond the PANDORA network. Africa CDC, WHO and EDCTP play an important role in facilitating these but there was little awareness that the award was co-funded (50%) by the NIHR.

3. **EFFECTIVENESS:** Extent to which the GHR portfolio been effective in achieving its intended interim results

The award has resulted in an extensive and broad range of publications and other outputs which have been widely disseminated and are likely to have contributed to the One Health agenda regionally and globally. Many of these are available on the website: <https://pandora.tghn.org/>. The award has been effective in strengthening both individual and institutional research capacity as evidenced by reported progression in careers, building up local teams of researchers and additional successful grant applications. Of the 93 publications in year 5 of the award, 16% had a female first author and 45% an African first author. Building equitable partnerships and a competent network are key priorities for the award, and multiple interviews confirmed that the award has ensured that partners have been equally involved in strategic decision-making on priorities, design and implementation which supported the development of respectful relationships.

4. **EFFICIENCY:** Extent to which GHR programme and its delivery partners have been able to convert inputs into outputs in a timely and effective way

The award seems to have been managed efficiently and produced strong outputs despite challenges with the size of the consortium and the COVID-19 pandemic which resulted in a significant change in focus of activities.

5. IMPACT: Any early evidence that funded research and capacity strengthening activities are on track to/have the potential to contribute towards 3-10 year anticipated impacts

There is evidence of early signs of impact through the dissemination activities of the award and the national responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, but more time will be needed to see the wider impact in countries and across the African region. This should be facilitated by the links with Africa CDC.

6. SUSTAINABILITY: Extent to which the net benefits of the award will continue, or likely continue, beyond the funded period

There are promising signs that results from the award will be sustained as One Health is such a global priority and the COVID-19 pandemic raised alarm levels substantially increasing the likelihood of ongoing funding and support both globally and nationally. Country stakeholders confirmed that through the capacity building undertaken in PANDORA, they have improved their chances of obtaining additional grants, growing their institutes, and continuing to strengthen their newly acquired expertise. Many provided examples of where they are collaborating with national and regional level actors to ensure their research moves into the policy space and is further taken up, for example, through One Health platforms. They also reported that their training during PANDORA, for example, in laboratory strengthening, has enabled them to be better prepared for future pandemics, so the results will be sustained.

7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: Extent to which and ways the portfolio has supported inclusive and meaningful community engagement and involvement (CEI)

While CEI was a stated principle in the award, there was not a systematic approach across all countries but a more nuanced approach based on country activities and contexts. The CEI examples provided by stakeholders related to project implementation rather than design and priority-setting.

8. ADAPTABILITY AND LEARNING: How well the portfolio is adapting and embedding learning

Learning was embedded in the award and there were multiple opportunities for engagement and sharing across the countries. Stakeholders confirmed they had personally learned a lot and grown in knowledge and confidence. Many reported that lessons learned during the implementation would be directly fed into the next award including stronger South-South collaborations. The award adapted substantially in response to the pandemic and successfully navigated challenges regarding implementation. Each African partner country had a different response to COVID-19 at the political level, influencing how the different countries engaged. Most stakeholders agreed that countries are better prepared for outbreaks and epidemics and that the COVID-19 pandemic positively influenced this.