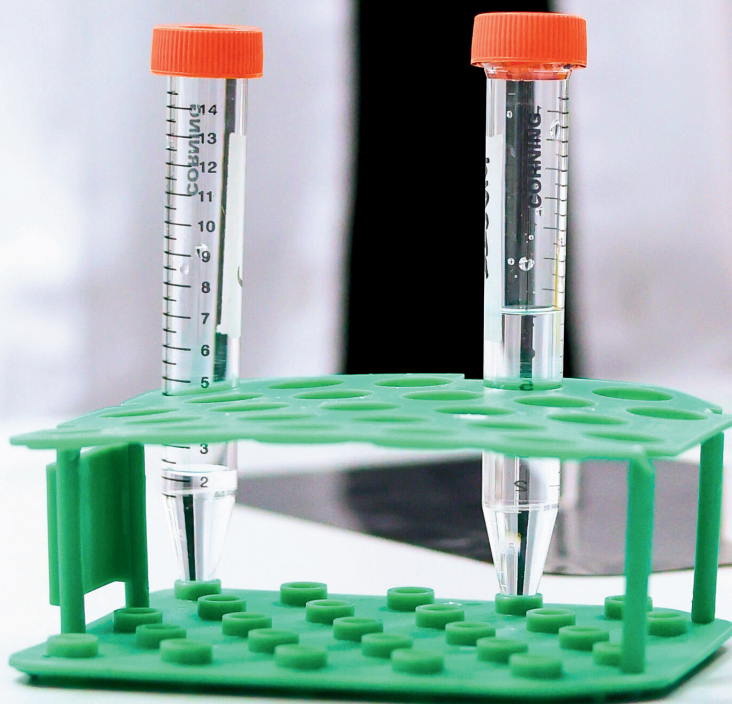




# IMPACT REPORT

AREF's 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Impact  
Evaluation Executive Summary





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The Africa Research Excellence Fund (AREF) is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (Company Number: 13219209) and a charity registered in England and Wales (Number: 1193865)

The Africa Research Excellence Fund (AREF AFRICA), is a company limited by guarantee in The Gambia with (Business Registration Number 2400131982) and (Company Incorporation Number 2024/C22928)

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**Professor Sir Tumani Corrah**  
**KBE MRG MD PhD FRCP**  
**PWACP FAAS**  
**Founder and Co-President**



## Message from the Founder

What began in 2015 as a mission to empower emerging African health researchers to achieve research independence has blossomed into a vibrant community of over 821 dedicated individuals from 42 African countries.

As the founder, I am deeply proud to reflect on a decade of resilience, collaboration, and unwavering commitment to AREF's vision. Together, we have overcome challenges, learned from setbacks, and celebrated incredible milestones along the way. Our progress, outlined in this impact report, highlights both the challenges and the triumphs of our growth, all fuelled by a shared purpose and the dedication of our team.

This journey would not have been possible without the support of our partners, donors, and community members, who have believed in the transformative power of investing in Africa's brightest research talent. Through AREF's programmes, we've fostered a robust ecosystem of health researchers, focusing on the development of early and mid-career researchers, tailoring initiatives to the unique needs of Africa, and carefully selecting participants who demonstrate promise and potential.

As we enter the next decade, we remain committed to innovation, growth, and collaboration, ensuring that the future of Africa's health research agenda is led by Africans. Together, we can continue to nurture talent, overcome new challenges, and achieve even greater impact.

Thank you for being an essential part of this remarkable journey. Here's to the next chapter of success, innovation, and positive change.



# Message from the Chair of the Board of Trustees

Without doubt, the past ten years have been an exciting and transformative journey beginning with our inception in 2015. We have since supported the development of over 821 African health researchers across 42 African nations through various programmes and in many capacities.

To highlight our achievements, this impact report demonstrates the effectiveness of our programmes and initiatives, showcasing how they drive positive change beyond financial outcomes, such as fostering accountability and transparency with stakeholders.

AREF's growth over the last ten years has been remarkable. From a small project fund supported by the Medical Research Foundation (MRF) to a now fully-fledged independent charity registered in the UK and The Gambia. AREF's funding has continued to grow and diversify but we must keep up the momentum. The events of the past years are proof of the unwavering dedication of partners, funders, and the staff who work hard to support the talented researchers we serve.

Health research has the power to unlock answers to some of our most critical health challenges, from infectious diseases to non-communicable conditions. However, for this research to be effective, it must be rooted in the lived experiences of the populations it serves. This is particularly so in the case of health provision in Africa. That is why we prioritise partnerships with regional and global institutions and organisations ensuring that our training initiatives are equitable, participatory, and aligned with the needs of the people.

We are actively investing in capacity development programmes that focus on enhancing the ability of African research scientists to secure research grants, developing leadership capacities, and building technical and transferable skills. We believe that enhancing these capabilities will ultimately transform lives and health systems. But we cannot do this alone. We need collaboration, funding, and shared vision from stakeholders across sectors — governmental, academic, philanthropic, and private.

I invite you to join us in this endeavour. Whether through partnerships, knowledge sharing, or support, your contribution can make a real difference. Together, we can build sustainable health research ecosystems that address disparities and build pathways to health equity across the globe.



**Solomon Soquar**  
**Chair of the Board of Trustees**



# Message from the CEO

The journey of AREF has truly been remarkable, and it is a privilege to celebrate AREF's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Over the last ten years, AREF has designed and implemented programmes that uniquely meet the needs of African health researchers across the spectrum of early to mid-level career development. Our experiences have steered us to continuously refine our programmes to be fit for purpose. This Impact Report gives a succinct description of our achievements, adaptability to change, and readiness to embrace a future of strategic programming to consolidate our impact.

Our commitment to reach all corners of the continent is exemplified by our drive to engage more researchers from countries with low or no participation in AREF, such as North Africa and Lusophone countries, extend our Francophone Grant Writing Programme (GWP), and set the stage to commence the implementation of a Lusophone GWP. We are also totally committed to accelerating progress for women in research by creating safe and supportive environments for women researchers to navigate and overcome the additional barriers they face.

We have continuously engaged and celebrated our alumni, as they are the true testament of our impact. We will continue to support this vibrant community of African health researchers as more and more of them transition to leadership roles. In the coming years, we will continue to refine our programmes and systems to meet the needs of the brilliant African researchers we serve.

The story of our journey so far is by no means complete without mentioning the tremendous support we have received from collaborators, funders, volunteers, and other stakeholders. The impact we have achieved is a direct reflection of their commitment to AREF. To the AREF Board of Trustees, members of the Expert Review Panels and committees, the College of Experts, AREF Faculty, and the amazing AREF team: the successes depicted in this report are a testament to your hard work, creativity, dedication, and resilience.

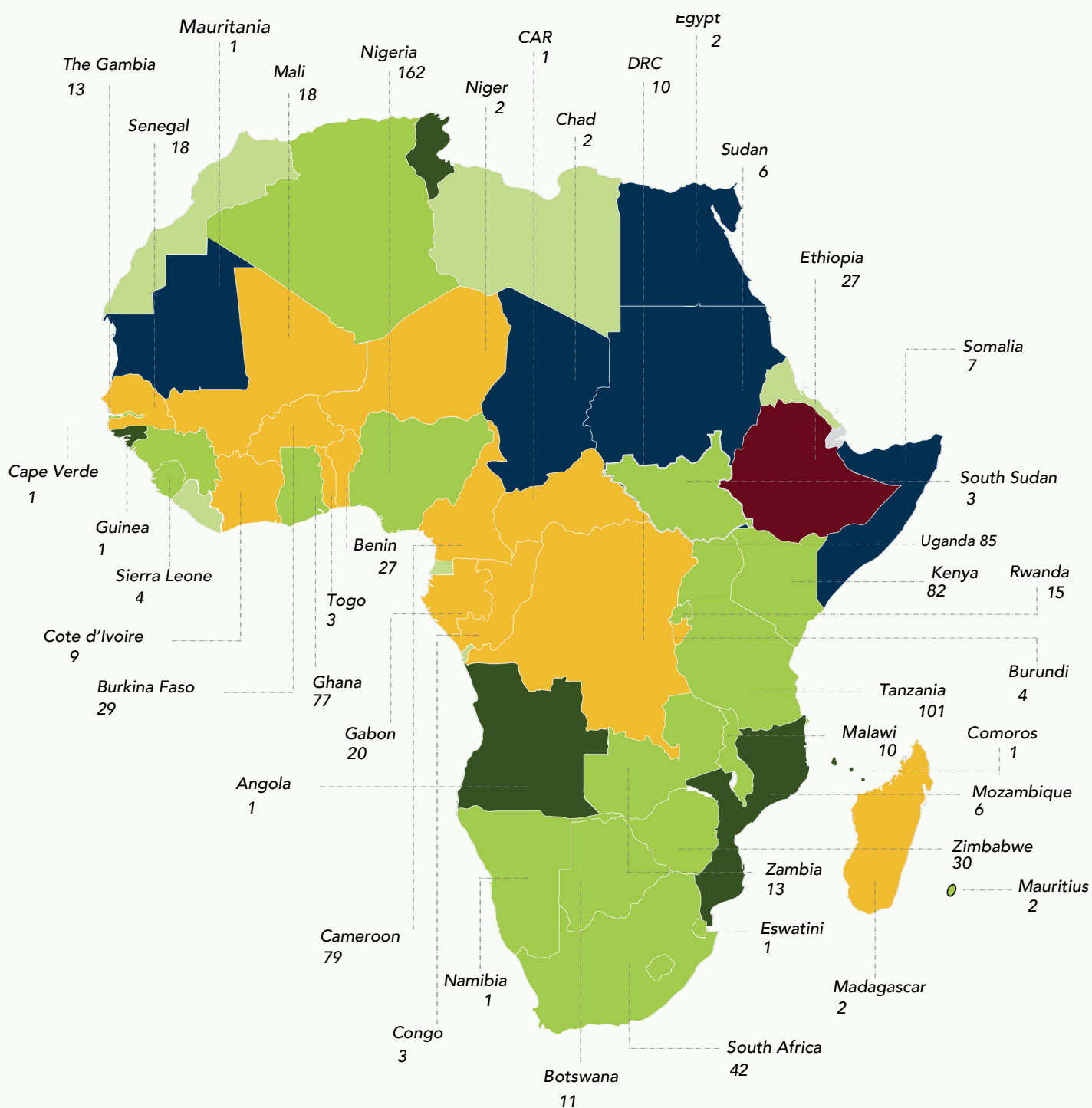
We look forward to another ten years of supporting emerging health researchers in Africa. We are confident that we are on the right track to building a community of African health researchers who are capable of undertaking world class research to tackle African and global health challenges.



**Professor Akhere Omonkhua**  
**Chief Executive Officer**







900+ Researchers  
42 African countries

A woman with dark hair tied back, wearing black-rimmed glasses and a white lab coat, is looking down at something in her hands. She is in a laboratory setting with various pieces of equipment and glassware visible in the background. A blue lanyard with the word 'UNIVERSITY' is visible around her neck. A green circular graphic is on the left side of the page.

## AREF's mission and vision

Founded in 2015, the Africa Research Excellence Fund (AREF) is an international charity, registered in the UK with a clear mission to nurture, mentor, and support talented researchers across Africa so they can become leaders in their fields and tackle the continent's most pressing health challenges. AREF focuses on early-career scientists, providing practical support through training, mentoring, and fellowship opportunities. These programmes are designed to build not only technical skills, but also confidence, leadership, and the networks needed to thrive in global research environments. **At the heart of AREF's work is a simple belief: the best solutions come from those closest to the issues.** AREF exists to support a future where world-class health research is led by researchers based in Africa, contributing to both local and global knowledge. This evaluation set out to explore how far AREF has come in realising that vision and what it will take to carry the work forward into the next decade.





“

The skills I acquired through my participation in the Towards Leadership Programme helped in fostering interdisciplinary research and collaboration within and outside my institution. Also, I'm able to manage departmental problems and complaints better.

“

I am truly grateful to AREF for providing me this training opportunity. The knowledge and skills I gained during the training have had a profound impact on both my professional and personal development. The practical approach and the examples from real life experiences not only demystified the process but also equipped me with the confidence to navigate the complexities of grant applications. I look forward to continuing to apply the knowledge and skills gained in my ongoing grant application and the years to come.





“

The goal of this evaluation was to tell the full story of how AREF's capacity development programmes have supported the growth of scientific research in Africa and to learn how to build on that success in the years ahead

## Background and purpose of the Impact Report

To mark its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, AREF commissioned an independent UK-based research consultancy, Kohlrabi, to take a deep and honest look at the impact it has made over the past decade. The commemoration of AREF's 10-year anniversary in 2025 presents an opportunity to reflect on its achievements, assess the impact it has had since its inception, and communicate its vision for the future through a comprehensive and rigorous Impact Report. This evaluation showcases AREF's contributions to developing the capacities of African health researchers, highlights key accomplishments, and presents insights into the organisation's effectiveness and sustainability.

Over a six-month period (September 2024 to March 2025), the evaluation combined several research approaches, including impact and process evaluation, as well as a deeper exploration of what makes programmes work in different settings known as the realistic evaluation method. Kohlrabi reviewed AREF's existing data from past evaluation efforts, observed one of its live grant writing programmes, and conducted interviews with staff, alumni, and donors. We also created a survey that was shared across AREF's entire alumni network, to make sure a wide range of voices and experiences were included.





At its core, this evaluation asked three key questions:

1. How have AREF's programmes helped African researchers grow in their careers?
2. What has worked best, for whom, under what circumstances, and why?
3. How can AREF keep evolving to meet the needs of researchers in the next decade?

The graphic below shows the nine main evaluation questions commissioned by AREF for this evaluation project.



# AREF's programmes

Since 2015, AREF has delivered six flagship programmes:

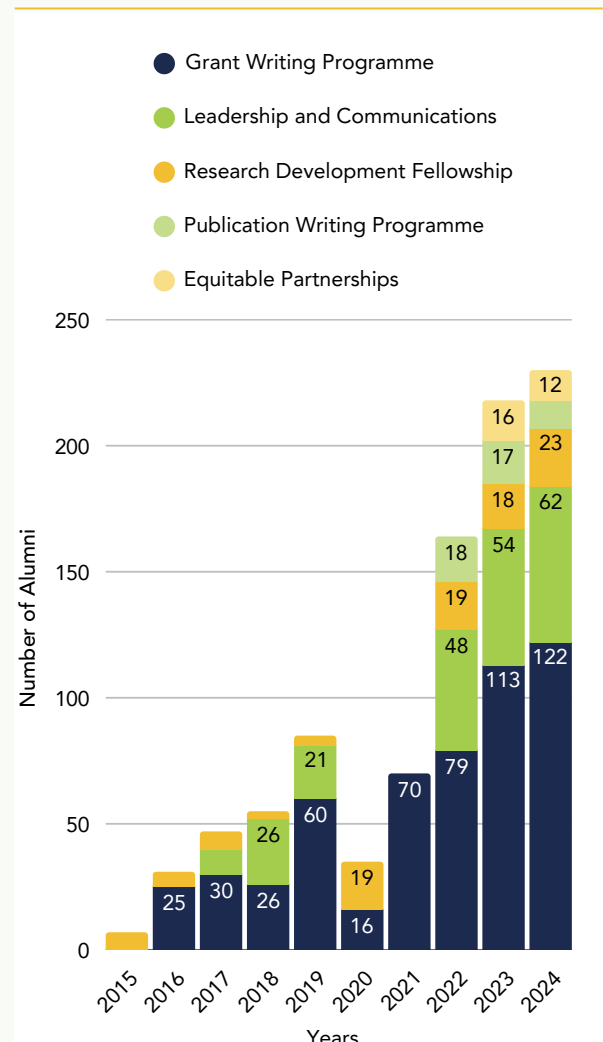


Participation in AREF programmes have grown significantly, from just seven individuals in the inaugural year to over 821 researchers across the African continent over the past decade.

Since its inception, AREF has supported over 821 unique researchers, with a total of 939 programme participants. The Grant Writing Programme has supported the largest number of participants, followed by the Leadership Programmes and the Research Development Fellowship.

Participants come from 45 countries, including 42 across Africa. Most are based in West and East Africa, with Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya, and Ghana making up over half of all participants. This reflects AREF's strong African focus and growing impact across the continent.

**Figure 1.** Increase in participation over time by programme type





## Our thriving alumni community

AREF alumni continue to find meaningful ways to stay connected and contribute to the wider community. Nearly three-quarters of them actively participate in the Alumni WhatsApp group, where they share funding opportunities, research collaborations, and practical advice. One in four alumni has gone a step further by serving as a guest speaker, peer reviewer, or mentor for new participants, helping to nurture the next generation of researchers across the continent.

Alumni have also expressed a strong interest in expanding opportunities for engagement. Although not immediately possible, some suggested forming national sub-groups to help coordinate in-person training and local networking. These ideas reflect the strength, generosity, and growing momentum of the AREF alumni network.

(To read AREF's Alumni Report, click [here](#) )

## Research Development Fellowship (RDF)

The Research Development Fellowship is designed to support early career researchers (ECRs) i.e. researchers who have completed their PhDs within the past few years. The programme provides a crucial stepping stone in the researcher's career by offering a funded international research placement lasting between three and nine months. These placements help researchers strengthen their technical skills, build global mentorship networks, and generate early findings that can serve as the basis for future, large-scale research projects. The RDF plays a vital role in enabling African researchers to position themselves competitively for research leadership and funding.



## Leadership Programmes

Leadership development is another cornerstone of AREF's work. Through programmes such as Towards Leadership, Excell, and Women in Research Leadership (WiRL), AREF provides tailored support to African researchers who are preparing to take on greater leadership roles in science and global health. These programmes help participants gain the practical knowledge, professional behaviours, and strategic thinking skills needed to succeed in senior research and academic positions. In some cases, institutions also benefit from this training, helping to create environments where research careers can thrive. Together, these initiatives contribute to a growing community of capable and confident African research leaders.

## Grant Writing Programme (GWP)

The Grant Writing Programme is one of AREF's most widely accessed and foundational offerings. The aim of this programme is to support early career scientists by strengthening their ability to secure competitive research funding. Through practical skills training, peer learning, and mentorship, participants gain the confidence and competence needed to develop strong funding applications. This programme has helped hundreds of researchers improve their success in applying for grants, fellowships, and awards, enabling them to pursue meaningful and impactful research projects.



# The journey of impact so far

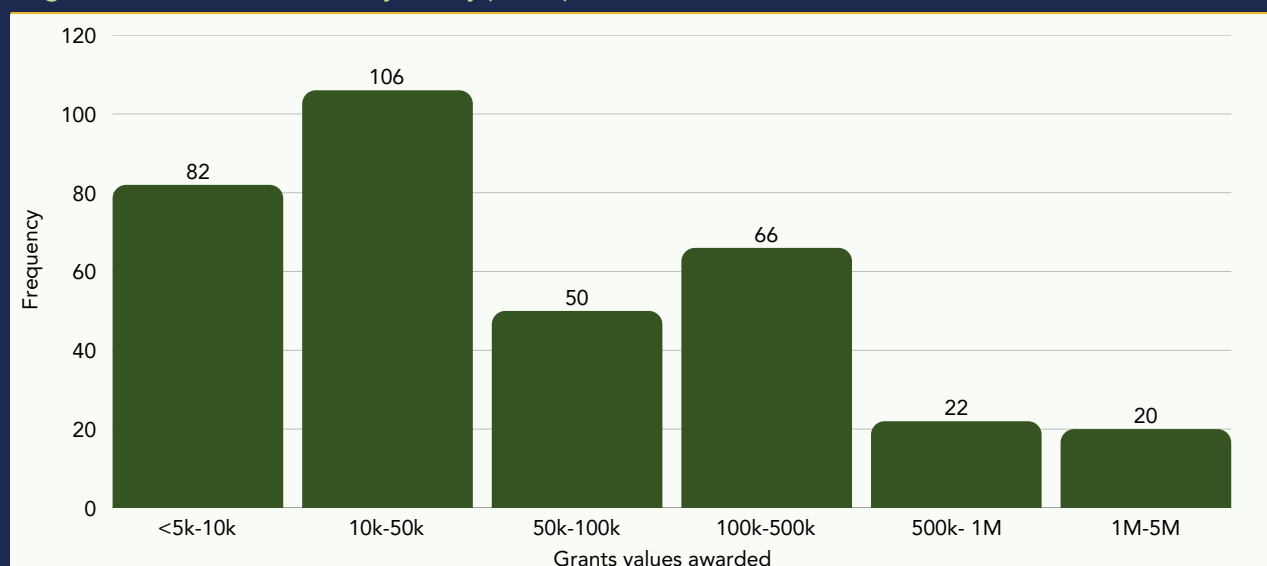
## Overall

Four out of every ten AREF alumni who responded to our survey have successfully secured research funding since completing an AREF programme. Together, they have been awarded over **£153 million in competitive grants from more than 200 funding organisations worldwide**. The average grant amount was around £45,000 per researcher, with three alumni receiving grants of over £5 million each. Most grants were won as Principal Investigators, reflecting AREF's success in fostering research leadership. An overwhelming

majority of these alumni admitted that participating in an AREF programme or fellowship has contributed to their success in winning grants.

**Seven out of ten people published a research paper after taking part in an AREF programme.** Of those, over 70% said the programme had a moderate to significant impact on their success. On average, the number of publications increased from 13 to 21.5 among AREF alumni. In terms of career growth, 21.6% moved up at least one step on their career ladder within three years, and 28% did so within five years.

**Figure 2.** Grants values won by survey participants







## Specific programme insights

### Research Development Fellowship (RDF)

Alumni of the RDF equally reported career successes in winning funding, publishing papers, and career advancement. 46% of RDF alumni reported securing a grant for their research. Together RDF alumni grants totalled £51 million with an average of £42,000 per researcher. Before engaging with AREF, alumni had an average of 13 published research papers which increased to an average of 21.5 after participating in an AREF programme. Considering return on training costs relative to grants won by alumni, RDF has the highest investment per person trained (£43,200) and returned nearly £1 for every £1 spent. While less cost-efficient, it offered alumni intensive, career-shaping support.



## What we heard from RDF alumni

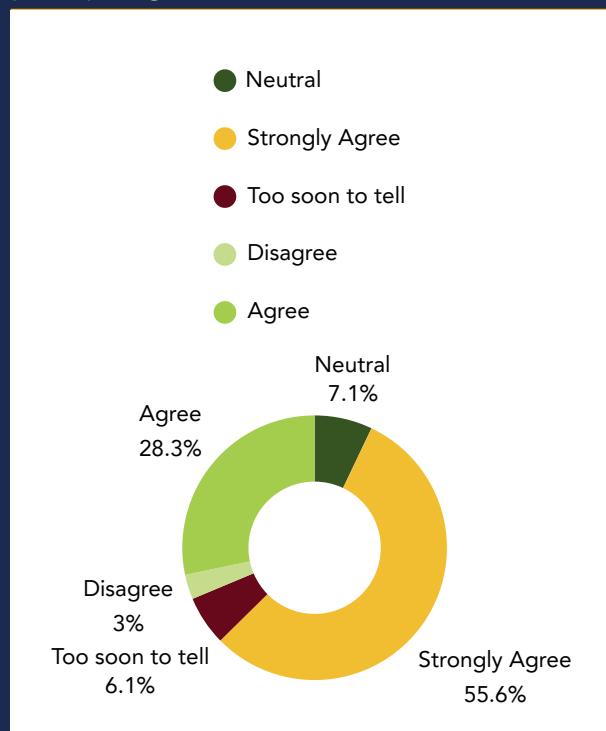
Interviews with Research Development Fellowship alumni revealed the far-reaching impact of the programme on their careers and on the broader research landscape. Participants valued the hands-on research experience they received at the institutions where they were hosted. They gained technical skills, operated advanced lab equipment independently, and built new research collaborations outside of their existing networks. These experiences helped them carve out their own space in the research world and step into visible, impactful roles.

Alumni described taking on leadership roles in national health programmes, advising ministries, and influencing research culture and policy within their institutions and beyond. Several alumni contributed directly to public health initiatives, including expanding disease surveillance in Ghana and helping to shape national guidelines on antimicrobial resistance and sequencing in Nigeria.

Many participants also gained international visibility, for example, by co-chairing expert groups for the Africa CDC, supporting WHO guideline reviews, and collaborating with global research institutions.

Their success stories consistently pointed back to AREF, with many sharing that their achievements would not have been possible without the opportunities and support they received through the fellowship.

**Figure 3.** Survey participants responses to “I would not be where I am in my career without participating in the RDF” (n=68)



(To read AREF's RDF Report, click [here](#))





## Leadership Programmes (LP)

About 43% of alumni of the various leadership programmes reported having received a grant. The total value of grants amounted to £58 million with an average of £79,000 per researcher.

Before engaging with AREF, alumni had an average of 13 published research papers which increased to an average of 17.5 after the programme. LP showed a solid return, generating £8 for every £1 invested. With a cost of £9,605 per participant and average grants of £78,655, it also contributes significantly to long-term leadership and institutional impact.

### What we heard from LP alumni

From coordinating major research projects like malaria vaccine trials to mentoring the next generation of scientists, participants are putting their learning into action. Many credit the programme with boosting their project management and mentorship skills that have helped them build more inclusive, collaborative research environments.

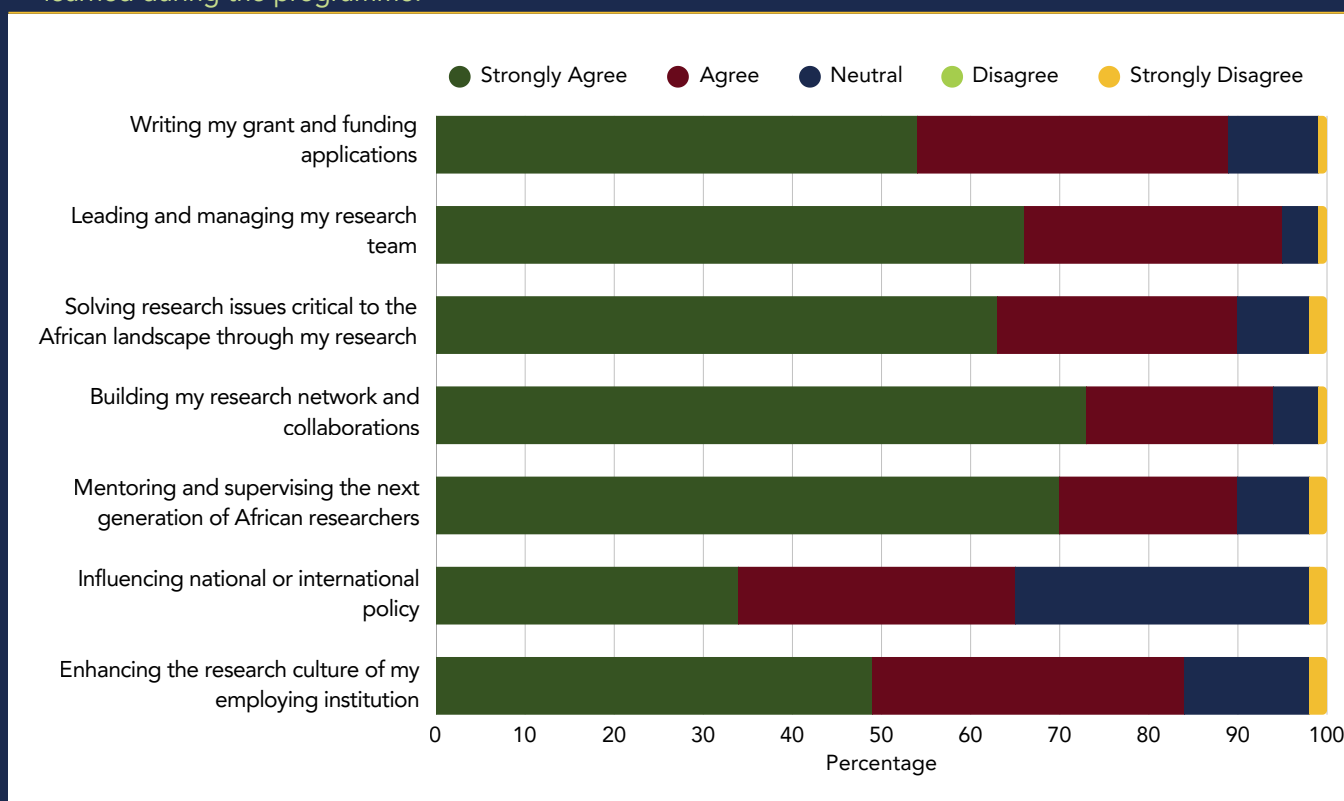
The AREF experience also opened doors. Alumni spoke of powerful networking opportunities that led to collaborations across institutions and borders. Exposure to real-world grant reviewers and insights into navigating complex institutional landscapes have helped many secure competitive funding and take on leadership roles in decision-making spaces.

Leadership is another area where the impact runs deep. Participants report stronger time management skills, sharper strategic thinking, and the confidence to say no to opportunities that don't align with their long-term goals. Tools like the Performance Development Plan played a key role in helping them gain that clarity.

The ripple effects are significant. Some alumni have gone on to advocate for fairer grant evaluation processes. Others are shaping national public health agendas, bringing research-driven insights directly into policy.

(To read AREF's Leadership Programmes Report, [click here](#))

**Figure 4.** Likert scale demonstrating how much LP participants agree with the usefulness of the skills they learned during the programme.



The **AREF Towards Leadership program** completely transformed my mindset. From one of being a victim of my circumstances to being a leader and a change maker.

Only a year after joining AREF, I was successfully awarded my first international grant from the UKRI... a highly competitive grant. This funding has allowed me to grow and to develop my research career at an unimaginable rate. Two years after joining AREF, I now lead a 12-member team of young and energetic doctoral and postdoctoral researchers, most of whom are women.

I grew tremendously at a personal, organizational, or even at a global level. And as a scientist, I'm living in my field. I'm a PI. I am an invited speaker at global scientific meetings. I've authored several publications. I'm an editor or senior editor for reputable journals. I'm a reviewer for international funding bodies.

So far, I've successfully established the first lab, and currently the only lab in Africa that focuses on brain injury and cryptococcal meningitis. For the first time in 60 years, we're going to host the first World Congress in Neuroscience in Africa... and we just won the bid for that.

The **Research Development Fellowship** has significantly improved my research career. I've been able to grow my research capacities and leadership. Thanks to this fellowship, I got awarded with a bigger grant from the prestigious African Academy of Science (AAS) and got appointed as an AAS Affiliate.

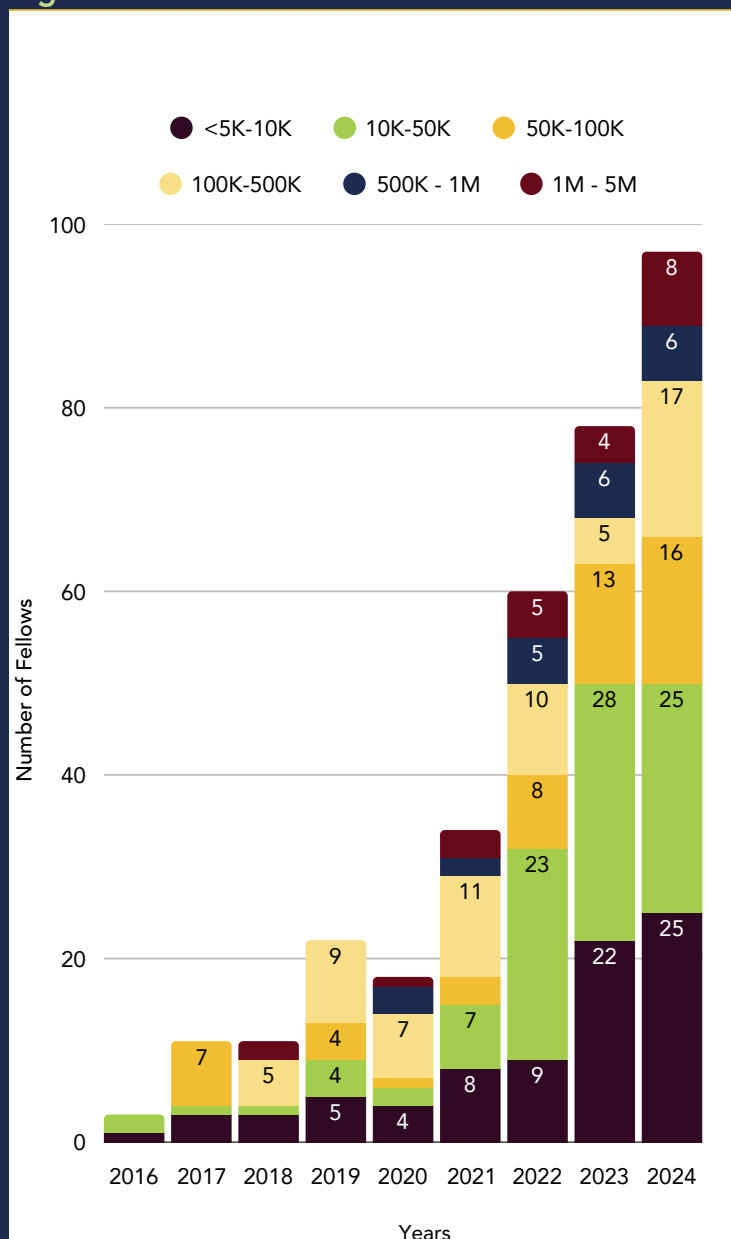
This allowed me also to build international collaborations and get involved in other collaborative grants. My confidence, technical and soft skills have improved, leading me to get involved in national and international groups of experts. I have also gotten promoted in my institution and appointed to engage with policy makers at the Ministry of Health of my country.



## Grant Writing Programmes (GWP)

Collectively, the alumni of the GWP won over £115 million in grant funding, with an average of £39,000 per researcher. Similarly, the publication outputs of these alumni increased from 12 to 20 published research papers after engaging with AREF. This programme demonstrated the strongest association with career progression over three years, with six in ten persons who experienced an upward career movement being an alumnus of this programme. GWP delivered the highest return on investment, with each £1 invested generating £39 in grant funding. With a low cost per participant (£998) and strong outcomes, it stands out as the most cost-effective programme.

**Figure 5. Grants won over time**



## What makes the Grant Writing Programme work?

From conversations with facilitators of the Grant Writing Programme (GWP), one thing was clear: the success of the programme isn't just about what's taught, it's about who takes part.

One of the biggest drivers of impact is the programme's careful and competitive selection process. Facilitators told us that this rigour pays off. Researchers who make it into the programme are highly motivated and ready to make the most of the experience. This was evident in their participation during sessions, effort in meeting deadlines, and their commitment to improving their research ideas.

Another strength of the programme lies in the peer review process where concept notes written by the participants are reviewed by fellow GWP participants. This maximized the learning experience of most participants as they learned from the concept notes of others.





“

*I am truly grateful to AREF for providing me this training opportunity. The knowledge and skills I gained during the training have had a profound impact on both my professional and personal development. The practical approach and the examples from real life experiences not only demystified the process but also equipped me with the confidence to navigate the complexities of grant applications. I look forward to continuing to apply the knowledge and skills gained in my ongoing grant application and the years to come.*

*The training on grant writing offered by AREF was of great benefit because it improved my [grant] writing [skills] and enriched my ability to formulate relevant and fundable research questions. I also learned a crucial skill that now allows me to anticipate and manage potential obstacles in my research projects. This will strengthen not only the credibility of my proposals, but also their attractiveness for funders, and position me as a rigorous and far-sighted researcher.*

”

“

*The seed grant helped me to set up a microbiome research group, generate preliminary data, and hence strengthen my portfolio for future independent work.*

*The research group is leveraging such life-altering opportunities to not only increase our research output but also impact the health of local, traditionally under-represented communities.*

*I now have a functioning molecular biology laboratory. I can work with bacteria from isolation till sequencing and bioinformatics analysis to unravel mechanism of antibiotics resistance. This is the only laboratory that can do that at the College of Medicine, University of Lagos.*



# Case study of the Impact of AREF



## From Clinician to Global Research Leader: The Journey of Dr. Gibril Ndow

Dr. Gibril Ndow, Assistant Professor and Head of the Hepatitis Research Group at the MRC Unit, The Gambia, took a pivotal step in his career through the AREF RDF. As a skilled clinician with a PhD, he sought to bridge the gap between clinical practice and basic science, particularly in understanding how hepatitis B leads to liver cancer. However, without laboratory expertise and pilot data, securing grants and advancing his research ambitions remained a challenge. The RDF provided him with a transformative opportunity to develop new skills in metabolomics and build the networks needed to achieve his vision.

During his nine-month placement at Imperial College London and the National Phenome Centre, Dr. Ndow immersed himself in metabolomics research, refining his skills in data analysis and bioinformatics, despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. He credits the RDF for granting him protected training time, a rare luxury for clinicians, allowing him to fully engage with his research and lay the foundation for future success.

The RDF proved to be a turning point for Dr. Ndow's career and leadership opportunities. With new skills and pilot data, he secured a £315,000 Wellcome Trust Postdoctoral Fellowship, which became a springboard for his leadership and influence. He was promoted to Head of the Hepatitis Research Group at MRC Unit The Gambia and appointed Assistant Professor at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine. His impact also extends beyond academia. Nationally, he chairs The Gambia's Hepatitis Technical Working Group, advising the Ministry of Health on hepatitis control strategies. Regionally, he is a board member of the Society for Liver Disease in Africa and Co-chair of the Africa CDC's Viral Hepatitis Expert Group. His expertise has also shaped the WHO's Global Hepatitis B Guidelines, and he is set to become Director of the Center for Operational Research on Hepatitis B (COR-HEPB) in the USA.

Determined to strengthen research capacity in Africa, Dr. Ndow is now working to establish a metabolomics laboratory in The Gambia, securing funding and collaborations to make this a reality. He is also partnering with AREF to develop training and grant writing programmes, ensuring that more African researchers can access global opportunities in the future.

Dr. Ndow's journey from clinician to global research leader is a testament to the transformative power of the RDF programme. With AREF's support, he has advanced his career, influenced global hepatitis research, and is mentoring the next generation of African scientists. His story underscores the importance of investing in African researchers at the early career stage, demonstrating their potential to drive global health innovation.

(To read AREF's GWP Report, click [here](#))

# AREF's commitment to equity and diversity



Women comprised 46.5% of AREF participants overall, up from only 14% in 2015. AREF has made a strong commitment to gender equity through targeted actions that support women researchers at every stage of their careers. This includes women-only programmes like the Women in Research Grant Writing and Leadership Programmes, launched in 2021 and 2022 respectively. These initiatives equip participants with critical skills, mentorship, and leadership training.

The organisation aims for gender balance across all its programmes, striving for 50 percent women representation and delivering at least one women-focused programme each year.

To help women advance, AREF offers strategic mentorship, networking opportunities, and inclusive application processes that take into account career interruptions. Women alumni are also actively supported into leadership roles, including participation in the AREF College of Experts.

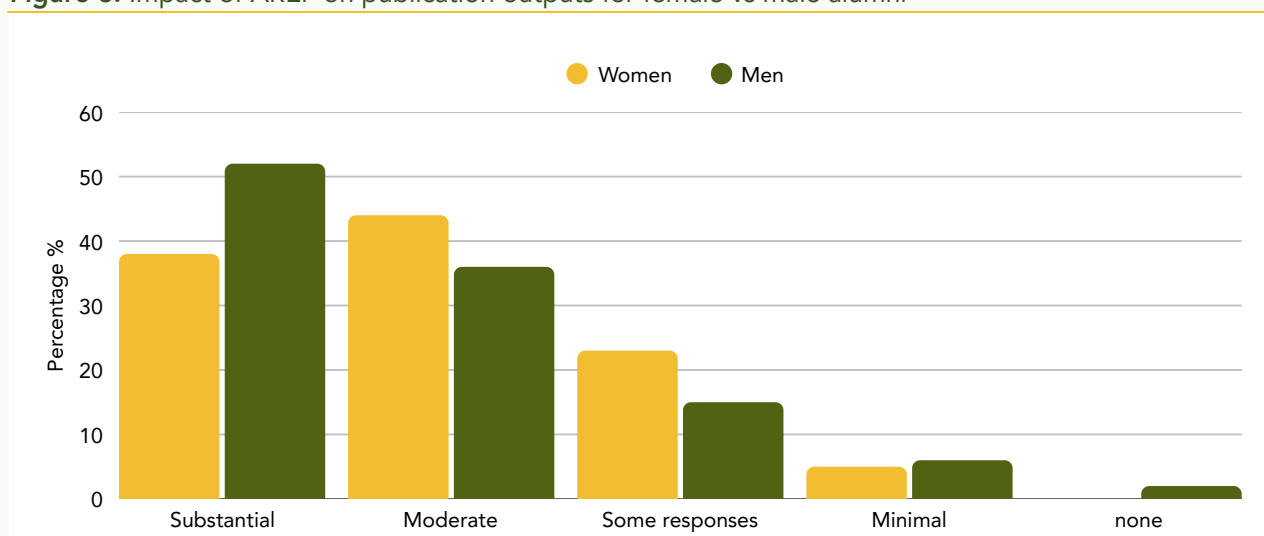
## Gender differences in research outcomes

The evaluation revealed some clear gender disparities in outcomes related to grants, publications, and career progression. Although women made up nearly half of the survey respondents, they received a smaller proportion of total grants (32%) and grant funding overall. The median amount of grant funding won by women was also lower compared to men.

When it came to publications, women and men had similar levels of output before joining AREF programmes, particularly in first and last authorship. However, after participating in AREF, men showed a greater increase in total publication numbers compared to women. This may point to gendered differences in opportunities for collaboration and research engagement and may reflect broader challenges such as balancing family responsibilities or limited access to senior roles.

While recent AREF cohorts have included more women, these findings suggest that many of the women may have been earlier in their careers than their male peers. Even so, the results highlight the importance of continued and targeted support for women researchers to ensure equitable growth, productivity, and long-term impact in research careers.

**Figure 6.** Impact of AREF on publication outputs for female vs male alumni





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*For me, the most valuable part of the programme was having such outstanding female guest speakers share with us their stories and their experiences. There's nothing as inspiring as hearing how one has walked the path you find challenging from where you are standing. The women who were invited to speak to us were very inspiring and made me realise that many things which I previously found very challenging are possible.*

“

*Beyond learning how to write a project, I acquired notions to present myself as a researcher, to get in touch with other researchers. I learned to write and present my project in a simple language that everyone could understand. Being among women, most of whom were married with children, there was a sharing of experiences on how to reconcile family life and a research career. It was also great to meet these very ambitious young women. Now I have fabulous mentors (Dawn and Jane), I belong to a family of African researchers, and I am very proud of that.*

*AREF programmes for women are amazing and provide much needed opportunity for women to learn how to maximize their potentials in the face of varying challenges.*

*“To have a work/life balance was a key issue for me, it was great to have experiences of other women shared on how they created a balance. Very important for career progression.*

# What has worked so far?

Overall, the major enablers behind these impacts across all programmes were targeted support and training programmes that featured well-developed content and expert facilitators. Networking opportunities and collaborations with fellow participants, facilitators, and mentors also played a key role in fostering professional growth. Additionally, AREF's focused support for women researchers through specialised programmes, special considerations in applications and opportunity to visit family while on the RDF helped address specific challenges they face in their careers, empowering them to succeed.

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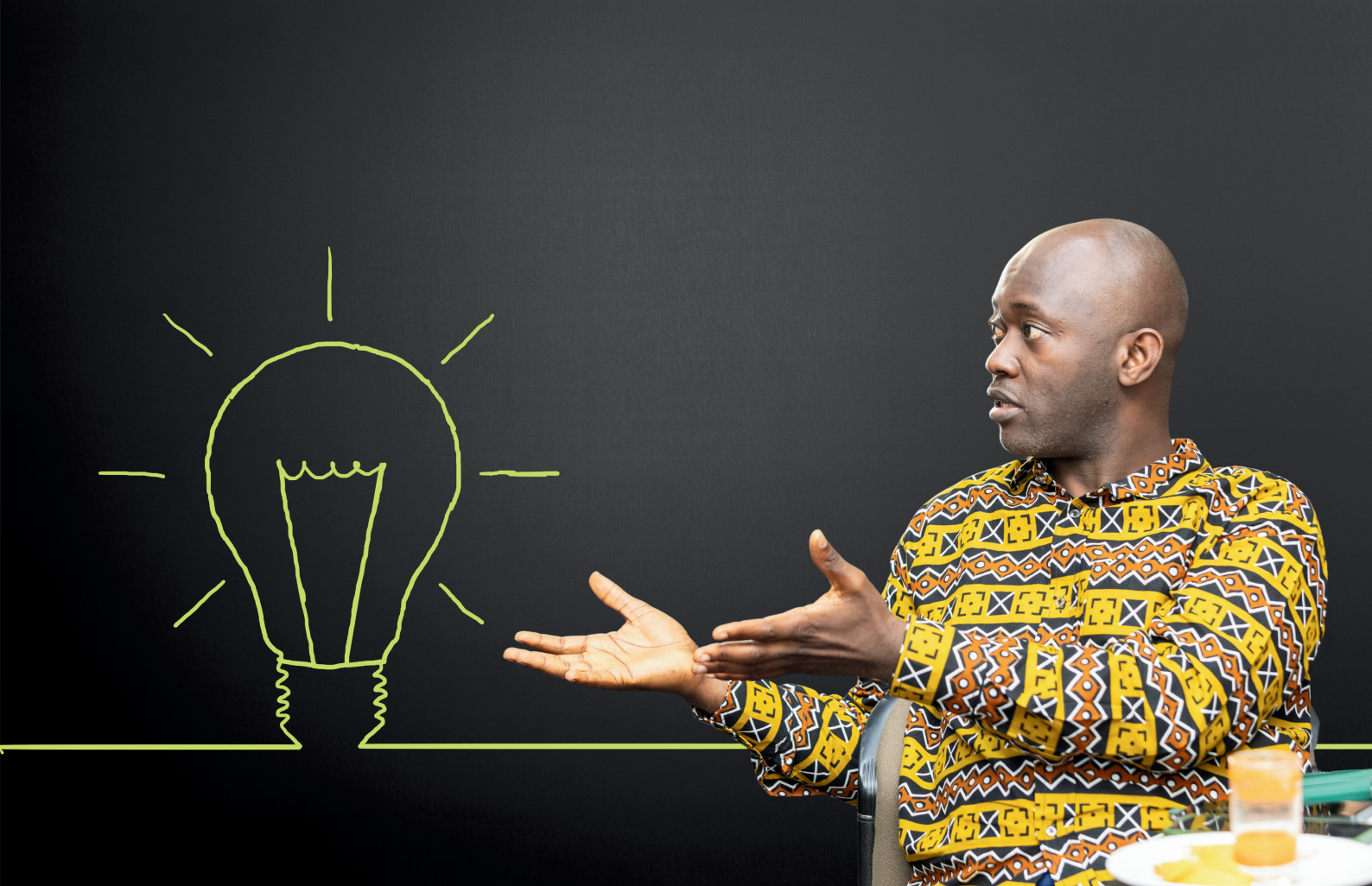
*The seed grant helped me to set up a microbiome research group, generate preliminary data, and hence strengthen my portfolio for future independent work.*

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## Where improvements can be made

While participants shared many positive experiences, the evaluation also revealed a few common challenges.

- Some found parts of the Grant Writing and Leadership Programmes intense or difficult to follow, especially in a virtual format. They appreciated the content but felt that in-person sessions or clearer sequencing could make the experience even better.
- Administrative hurdles also stood out, particularly for those applying to the Research Development Fellowship. Navigating paperwork, approvals, and unfamiliar processes took time and energy, though many noted that things have improved over the years.
- After completing the programmes, some participants faced delays in putting their training into action. Issues like budgeting mismatches, approval bottlenecks, or trouble accessing lab space and equipment were frequently mentioned.
- Finally, many returned to institutions with limited resources, where things like power cuts, expensive supplies, or slow internal approvals made research progress more difficult.





# Key Recommendations

## 1. Programme Improvements

- Adopt a hybrid model of programme delivery as well as the fully online programmes such as the GWP.
- Streamline administration with simpler applications, reporting, and clearer due diligence.
- Expand manuscript writing support to help fellows publish.

## 2. Post-Programme Support

- Strengthen local context support: partnerships for reagents/equipment, alumni recognition.
- Enhance alumni engagement: extended fellowship follow-up, mentoring, proposal reviews, alumni conferences.
- Expand seed funding opportunities for RDF alumni.

## 3. Expansion & Diversification

- Scale up publication writing programmes to boost African representation in global publishing.
- Invest in leadership development:
  - Early-career researchers for long-term impact, or
  - Senior researchers who can mentor others.
- Launch a structured annual mentorship programme, with emphasis on female mentorship.
- Create national chapters and regional collaborations to strengthen networks and visibility.

**Overall,** it is important that programmes are made more flexible and accessible, strengthen post-fellowship support (mentoring, funding, visibility), and expand leadership and writing initiatives to sustain long-term impact.



# Appreciation to all AREF stakeholders: collaborators, volunteers, and donors

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To AREF's collaborators in research institutions and partner organisations, thank you for sharing in the vision and working together to create meaningful opportunities for African researchers. Your commitment has helped expand the reach and deepen the value of AREF's programmes.

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To the donors and funding partners who have made this work possible, we thank you for your belief in AREF's mission and in the potential of African researchers. Your support has helped unlock opportunities and strengthened the foundation for future research leadership across the continent.

This report reflects not only AREF's achievements, but also the collective effort of a community dedicated to building a stronger, more equitable research future. We are deeply grateful.





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