



Working with Africa

Human and Social Science
Research in Action



BRITISH
ACADEMY

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Foreword

“A strong research base, including the humanities and social sciences, is of vital importance in Africa. Effective policies, critical to the continent’s future, can only be developed with deep and textured knowledge of the societies in which they are to be implemented. The importance of the research which provides that knowledge has not always been recognised.”

Working with Africa has long been a priority for the British Academy. As the UK’s national academy for the humanities and social sciences it seeks to strengthen its disciplines worldwide and to facilitate opportunities for researchers based in the UK to collaborate with and tap into existing pockets of excellence in sub-Saharan Africa.

This booklet brings together examples of some of the diverse and exciting research on Africa supported by the British Academy, reflecting the aims and values which inform the Academy’s approach to working with this fascinating continent.

The British Academy provides a variety of support for scholars working on and in Africa. It offers seed-corn funding to develop and work on new research ideas and inter-institutional links and provides opportunities for African-based researchers, and for UK researchers to work in Africa.

For more than half a century, the Academy has funded the British Institute in Eastern Africa and through it offered support to academics working throughout East Africa, strengthening British links in the region and providing opportunities for new generations of scholars.

Through its increasing work on research policy, (in collaboration with other key players), the Academy seeks to strengthen engagement with African and UK institutions and academics. It also aims to emphasise the vital contribution that humanities and social science research can make to Africa’s future.

The Academy bases its work with Africa on four key premises:

- Research collaborations of lasting value must be based on equal partnership, not on a donor/recipient mentality
- The future of international scholarship lies in the hands of early-career academics, and a key priority must be their nurturing and development
- There must be a genuine understanding, through consultation and discussion, of the needs of research communities
- And it is vital to strengthen and expand research networks in Africa, to facilitate communication between scholars and to help develop communities of research excellence upon which tomorrow’s research leaders can build

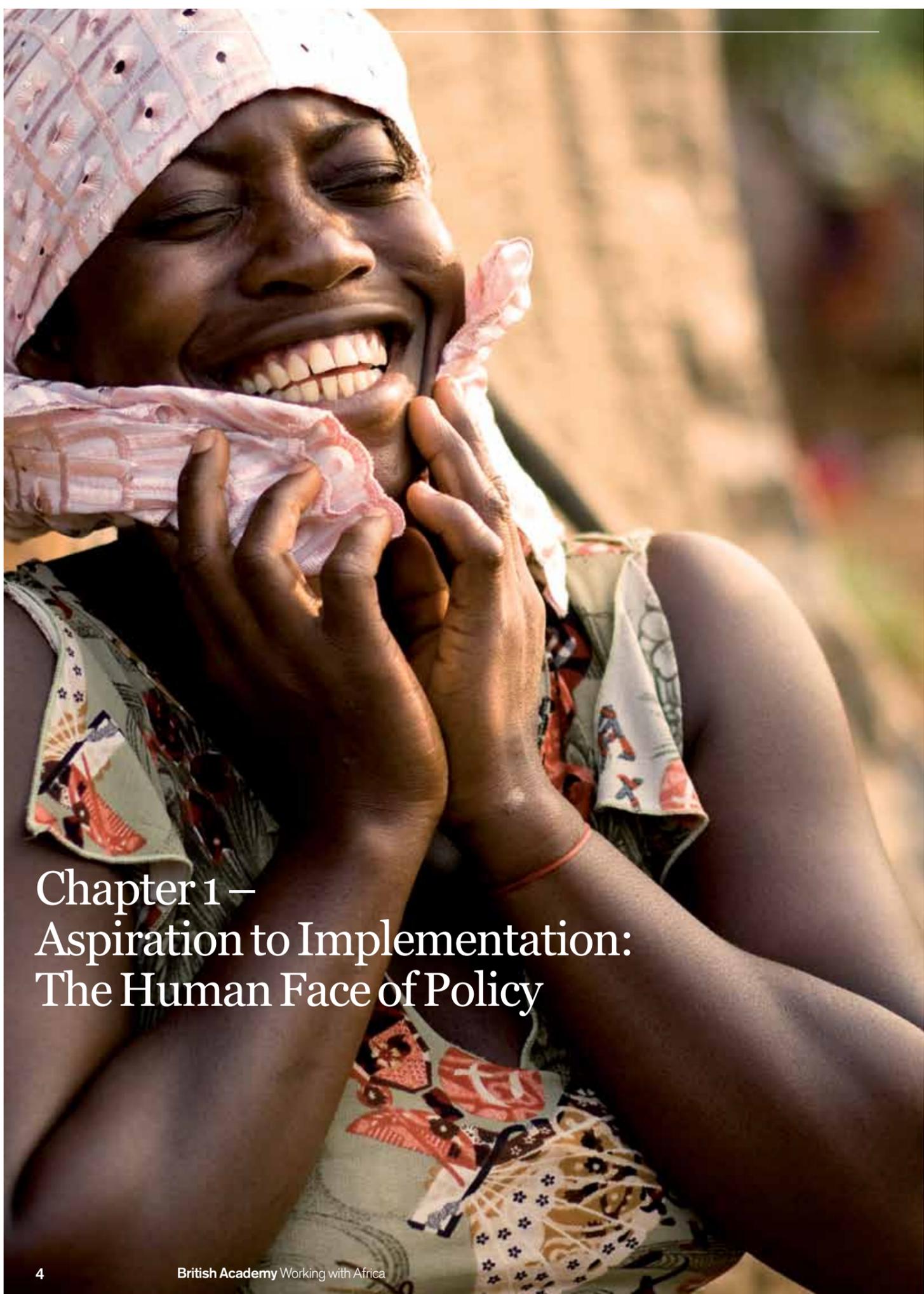
This booklet describes fascinating examples of research based on these principles. Are you interested in how to build peace after a society has undergone a long and bitter conflict? In the different ways in which chronic disease is viewed in different societies? In the history and meaning of cultural heritage? In the political messages conveyed by Ethiopian church murals, or the consumption of illicit spirits in modern Kenya? These and other topics jump out of these pages and we are grateful to Liz Lightfoot for her invaluable writing skills and investigative research that made this possible.

I hope you enjoy these lively accounts, and that they show the value of ongoing efforts to strengthen work in and on Africa in the many and varied fields of the humanities and social sciences.



Professor Sir Adam Roberts
President of the British Academy





Chapter 1 – Aspiration to Implementation: The Human Face of Policy

“If we have to revitalise African universities – and to me the need is self-evident – then we have to bury for good the dangerous notion propagated by the World Bank in the 1980s that universities are an expensive luxury for poor Africa.”

Professor Bethwell A. Ogot
Chancellor Moi University, Kenya

Africa is considered by paleoanthropologists to be the oldest inhabited part of the world. It is the second largest continent, covering a fifth of the Earth's land area.

A land of contrasts and diversity of climate, landscape and people, its past was characterised in the nineteenth century by the struggle by European powers to claim a piece of it, followed in the twentieth century by its own struggle to break free from their dominance.

Now, despite its considerable natural resources, Africa contains some of the world's poorest countries, plagued by food shortages and the spread of disease, poverty and illiteracy. The 53 African countries are striving to play their part in the global economy, often hampered by a legacy of instability, violence and authoritarianism.

Africa is a priority for UNESCO which has declared education the key to the region's development. While the focus has been on basic education, there is a growing demand for higher education. Sub-Saharan Africa has remained a world leader in tertiary enrolment growth over the last four decades, with a more than 20-fold increase from fewer than 200,000 higher

education students in 1970 to more than four million in 2007.¹ But despite this growth, only six per cent of the tertiary education age group enters higher education compared to the global average of 26 per cent.²

This increase in enrolments has coincided with a long term decline in funding. Universities have precious little research funding to go round and what little there is usually finds its way to subjects seen as important to capacity building and greater prosperity, such as medicine, science and engineering.

It is hardly surprising that science and technology take precedence in a continent struggling to meet the basic needs of human survival, but the history of more developed nations shows that governments ignore the human impact of their spending and policies at their peril. The British Academy has long seen the development of strong social science and humanities as a priority for Africa's future development.

The humanities and social sciences lie at the critical juncture between aspiration and implementation, providing an understanding of the social and cultural forms which underpin daily life, and helping to ensure that scientific and technical knowledge is used effectively.

How can a water charging system which allows the rich to buy it more cheaply – and be allowed to waste it – be acceptable to a community which reveres water as a precious natural resource?

What is the point of providing start up funding for local communities to form small businesses when they do not have the literacy levels to expand their trading beyond word of mouth?

How can health authorities promote the benefits of a varied diet when aid programmes concentrate on one staple product?

What can be done to restore pride and peace to war-torn indigenous people and build bridges between insular ethnic communities?

These are crucial questions which fall to the social sciences and humanities. They illustrate how important it is to foster relevant excellence and expertise of individuals and institutions.

Right:
Grandmother Veronica Naipelu Ene Sitonik puts the finishing touches to the roof of a traditional house she built single-handedly, which won second prize at the 2008 Olosho-oibor cultural show, Kenya



¹ Trends in tertiary education in Sub-Saharan Africa, 2009 Global Education Digest, UNESCO Institute of Statistics

² Trends in tertiary education in Sub-Saharan Africa, 2009 Global Education Digest, UNESCO Institute of Statistics

“If I could benefit so much from a short, four month visiting fellowship, it implies a very huge transformation and impact could be possible with longer term ones. I thank the British Academy for taking the lead.”

Dr Emmanuel M. Akpabio
University of Uyo, Nigeria

Visiting Fellowship: Indigenous Water Management
University of Newcastle upon Tyne

The importance of humanities and social science research for modern Africa is the driving principle behind the determination of the British Academy's Africa Panel to use money wisely to provide support for the most effective and sustainable research projects; ones which provide the most benefit for the career development of researchers, especially those at the start of their careers.

Due to the poor internet connections in parts of Africa and the very limited funds for travel to conferences, work with the potential to become world class can go unrecognised. For many of the scholars working in isolation or in small departments, British Academy-funded partnerships with academics in the UK is their first chance to present and discuss their work with a wider audience.

The support is not purely altruistic, however. According to Professor Graham Furniss, chairman of the British Academy Africa Panel, the future of the study of Africa in the UK is intimately bound to the future of research in African universities and institutes. Groundbreaking work on contemporary attitudes to the tradition of bride price – money or goods paid by a groom to his wife's family for her hand in marriage – is just one example of a project which could not have been accomplished so successfully without the enthusiastic indigenous researchers with the language skills and sensitivity to local customs which gained people's trust.

Says Professor Furniss: “The dynamism and cultural flux of Africa's major cities; the complex multiple identities of living in a multilingual world; the creativity and eclecticism of African music and art; the sheer grit and determination of coping mechanisms and the laughing underbelly of popular culture are of burning contemporary interest in our interconnected world. They are part of all our cultures and our truly common interest.”

The British Academy's funding schemes for African research aim to find and support excellence in research to:

- back projects with the potential to grow and be sustained with alternative future funding
- help build a solid research base in the social sciences and humanities in higher education institutions across Africa
- facilitate collaboration and networking between academics in the different African countries, north and south, and with the international academic community

Many of the projects featured in this publication also meet another important aim, which is to promote the practical application of the research to help build peace and prosperity in a continent with historic ties to the UK now facing some of the world's greatest challenges.



Left:
Kaoko Otavi
Spring, Kaokoland
Namibia

Research in Action

The real cost of bride price in Uganda

Unique research in Uganda has shown women deeply unhappy with bride price, the money or chattels paid by the groom to his wife's family on marriage.

Despite its value as a traditional cultural practice and part of marriage rites in many parts of Africa, the overwhelming majority of women surveyed believed bride price was outdated and in need of reform.

The research conducted on the ground found widespread concern over a possible connection between the payments and incidences of violent and abusive behaviour towards wives by husbands who believed they had “bought” them.

In communities where the payments are seen as compulsory, women risk being treated as chattels, owned by their husbands, researchers were told.

And it is not just women who want to scrap the rule that a groom must pay for his future wife's labour and childbearing capacity. The study also found dissatisfaction among men who complained of being reduced to poverty by the need to find the payment, or even being forced to stay single through lack of funds.

The exchange of goods from one family to another happens across the world, but the way bride price is used to help give official recognition to a marriage and its status as a requirement within some communities makes it an emotive and controversial issue in Uganda. Those seeking reform have filed a petition to the Constitutional Court, the highest court in the land, seeking to have the traditional practice declared unconstitutional. The study, funded by the British Academy, found cases where wives had been made homeless when their families could not complete the payments, or on the death of their husbands.

Although bride price has operated beneficially in many African countries in the past to give formal recognition to marriages and stabilise partnerships, and remains an important cultural tradition, key findings from the research identify the serious effects the tradition is having on gender equality, early or forced marriage and HIV/Aids.

Many tribes and families in rural areas continue to regard bride price as important, in contrast to urban areas where bride price is more likely to be regarded as a gift to the woman's parents rather than a price to be paid.

“While bride price is a traditional cultural practice of value, the research also found disturbing connections with domestic violence and poverty,” says Professor Gillian Hague from the Centre for Gender and Violence Research at the University of Bristol who carried out the study with Dr Ravi Thiara of the Centre for the Study

of Safety and Well-being, at the University of Warwick and MIFUMI, the African NGO and international aid and development agency.

“This was a pioneering piece of research, the first of its kind on bride price poverty and domestic violence in Ugandan communities,” said Professor Hague.

The British Academy funded study has been widely discussed in Uganda and is playing an important contribution to the debate. It was carried out in collaboration with local people. MIFUMI provided essential community-based researchers.

The international partnership was developed as an example of trans-national collaborative research between an African and European country, led by the African partner to avoid dominance from the West and to bring much needed research resources into Uganda.

It found 60 per cent of members of the public interviewed were in favour of a reform and a further 28 per cent wanted bride price abolished. Only 13 per cent wanted the system to continue unchanged.

Respondents suggested that bride price was contributing to the spread of HIV infection because older, richer HIV-positive sufferers could pay a good price for a young wife. Women also said they found it difficult to protect themselves from HIV-positive husbands who had paid a bride price for them.

The research is contributing to awareness and reform efforts at both local and national level says Dr Robin Jackson, Chief Executive of the British Academy. “This fascinating piece of work reflects the international scope of research supported by the British Academy which is shedding light on important issues of our time.”

Key Findings

65% of respondents said bride price had mainly negative impacts.

35% said there were both negative and positive impacts.

99% of interviewees who had experienced domestic violence believed bride price had contributed.

82% of all interviewees believed there was a connection between poverty and bride price.



Right:
Copyright: Professor
Gill Hangué / University
of Bristol

Case Studies

Z is 24, painfully thin and pale. She has sickle cell anaemia and was unable to marry because no one would pay bride price for a sick wife.

Her father was angry because she could not bring in bride price, said she was a useless daughter, beat her then drove her out of the home.

“He said I was no good as a woman or a daughter because I can’t bring in money or cows. I can’t get work and when I try to go home my father makes me leave again,” she told the interviewer.

“How will I be able to live with no family, no money and this bad illness which is making me sicker all the time?” she asked.

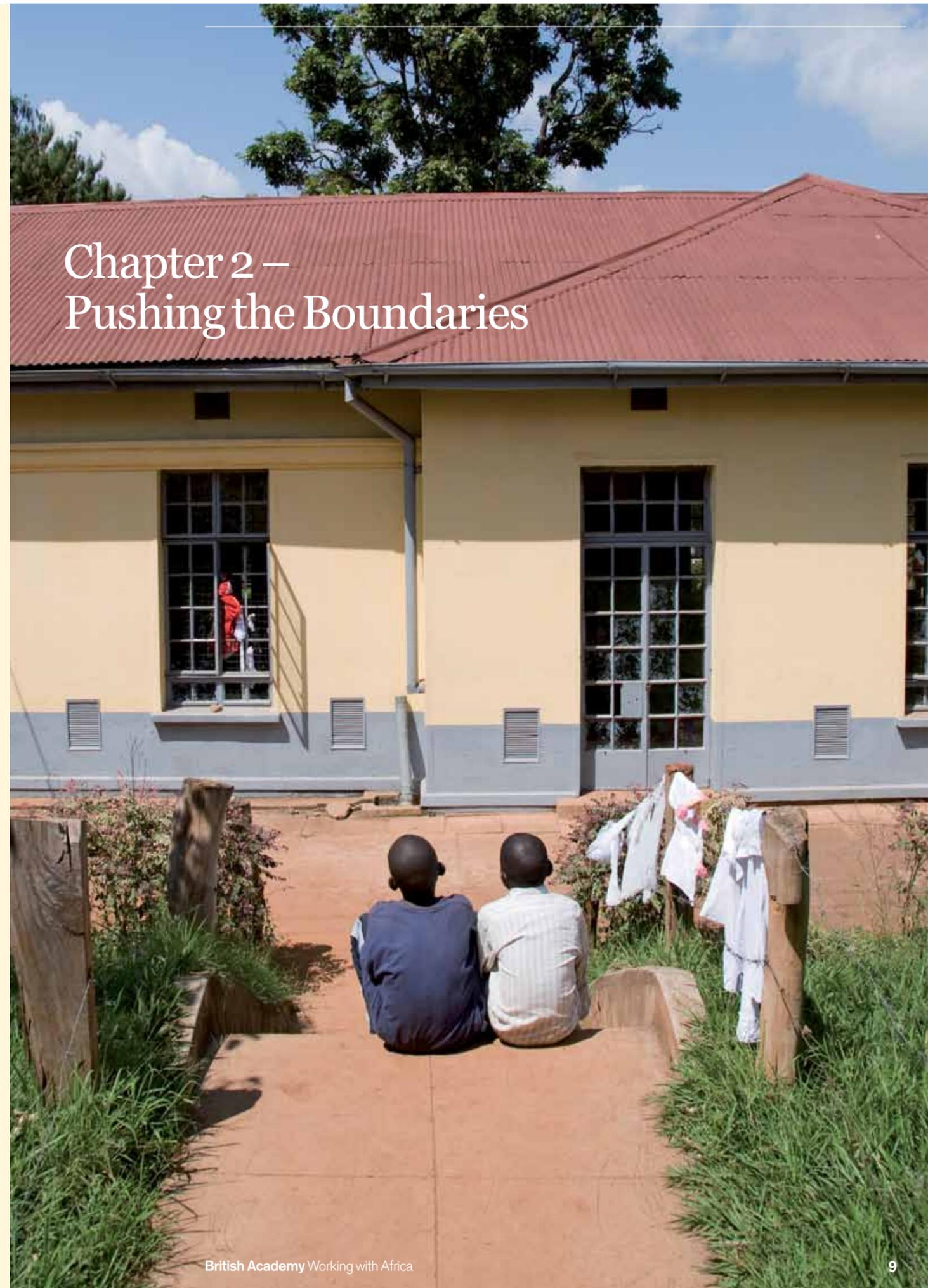
X is emaciated and says she goes without food most days because she is too weak to earn. She says she had a hard marriage with her unfaithful husband.

She wanted to leave but she couldn’t because her family didn’t have the money to repay the bride price. Then he died. His brothers sold the home and land and pressured her and her children to leave, saying they were no longer welcome.

She had nowhere to go and no house or possessions. The children had to leave education because she could not pay school fees. Then she got sick and found she was HIV-positive due to her husband’s infidelities. The children are also HIV-positive.

“The brothers said I was not entitled to stay and was worth nothing because the bride price had been paid and I was just a burden,” she told the interviewers.

Chapter 2 – Pushing the Boundaries



“There will be no quick fixes to strengthening the African research base. Several decades of declining funding have hollowed out many universities and the challenges to rebuilding research capacity and reinvigorating research cultures are substantial.”

The Nairobi Report 2009

The Nairobi Process

It was a report commissioned by the British Academy's Africa Panel which started what has become known as the Nairobi Process, the search for ways to support African academics and strengthen the humanities and social science research community across the continent.

It began with a survey of the views and reflections of UK and African academics, research administrators, donor organisations and other interested bodies. The study, funded by the British Academy, was carried out by the Association of Commonwealth Universities with guidance from the African Studies Association of the UK and the Royal African Society.

The findings formed the basis of a draft report – *Frameworks for Africa-UK collaboration in the social sciences and humanities: African university perspectives* – which was debated intensively at a conference in Nairobi in September 2008, and which subsequently gave rise to a second report, *The Nairobi Report*, published in the UK in March 2009.

The discussions in Nairobi, and the subsequent Report, left no room for doubt about the critical condition of humanities and social science research in African universities. Its highlighted the urgent need to find ways to help create and sustain a vibrant research tradition able to play its part both at home and in the international research community. The report also underlined the importance of international support for African universities struggling to retain staff, with woefully inadequate infrastructures and libraries lacking essential books and journals.

Most universities rely on state funding which is often insufficient to cover day-to-day costs, let alone redevelop crumbling infrastructure and invest in future scholarship. As a result between 70 and 90 per cent of research is externally funded, the report found.

The Nairobi Report explores the key challenges but does not attempt to produce answers. Instead it draws on the experience and views of a wide range of people to highlight areas of common concern for debate and suggest possible measures that could be taken.

There are three main thrusts:

Institutional Foundations: The need to improve the structures, systems and governance of African universities and colleges of higher education.

While the issue of inadequate core funding was noted as important, the report suggests that some of the barriers to research are not necessarily to do with money, but the result of poor management and organisation. Much could be done without great expenditure if systems were better organised to provide time for people to do research, it said. For example, consultancy work which takes researchers out of their universities could be incorporated into departments' research programmes.

Communities and Networks: Humanities and social sciences are well placed to conduct research as a collaborative enterprise across country boundaries. Researchers in these disciplines tend not to need expensive scientific equipment. Their work is grounded in discussion to push the boundaries of the subjects through analysis of theory and debates over the implications of fieldwork and archival research.

The Nairobi Report talks of the notion of building and empowering research communities, such as networks of excellence shared across institutions instead of centred in one building and location.

Researcher-Teacher: The report talks of the damage to the brightest and best researchers who complete their doctorates and are then so swamped by massive classes and administration that their research careers come to an abrupt halt.

The importance of doctoral training and early-career development for people who represent the future of research on the continent is seen as crucial. Keeping up with literature, knowing how to get published in journals, joining networks and attending conferences are all seen as ways to support teaching academics and keep them abreast of developments in their fields.

Since March 2009, the Nairobi Report has been widely circulated in Africa, and major universities and research funders have begun to take the report's key messages forward, and consider the small but incremental steps which will lead to positive change. The Academy will continue to play an active role, working with African partners, in encouraging, supporting and instigating the Nairobi Process.

Research in Action

Peacebuilding in Africa

What started as a small scale academic partnership into armed groups and post-conflict peace building in Africa has been so successful that it is already bringing in additional funds and partners.

Widespread interest from the international academic community has been bolstered by the enthusiasm of military officials, non-governmental organisations, diplomats and government officials, all bringing fresh perspectives.

“The second year of our project surpassed our expectations and we are excited about the interest and enthusiasm it has generated so far,” says Devon Curtis from the Department of Politics and International Studies at the University of Cambridge. “We were extremely fortunate in attracting partners and co-funders for our events.”

Dr Curtis is coordinating the British Academy sponsored UK Africa Partnership in collaboration with Paul Omach of Makerere University, Catherine Gegout from the University of Nottingham and Mpho Molomo from the University of Botswana.

A highlight of the first two years was a round table discussion with military officials from Botswana, representatives of the Botswana Government and NGO representatives. The debate focused on post-conflict governance, security sector reform, justice and the culture of peace.

Interest in the UK has also been intense. A joint international workshop with the Centre of African Studies in Cambridge called “Rethinking peace building in Africa” attracted an unexpectedly high level of interest and the room was filled to capacity. The workshop gave African and UK based participants an excellent opportunity to exchange views about peace building ideas and practices.

The first component of the British Academy Project is a collaborative teaching programme on post-conflict peace building in Africa. A joint teaching module was developed at Makerere University that fed into undergraduate and graduate courses in all four partner institutions. The module was then adapted and presented to military officials from Botswana and from the South African Development Community on a training course in Botswana.

The second component of the project involves collaborative research on armed groups and peace building. Initial findings, based on fieldwork and interviews, have been presented at a series of workshops. One of the workshops is at Makerere University in Uganda, attracting researchers from many African countries who would not be able to attend without subsidies from the project funds. The project's findings will be published in a journal.

Interest from military, government and NGO sources suggest that the work will continue, says Dr Curtis. The project has benefitted from the collaboration with key organizations such as the Centre for Conflict Resolution in South Africa.

“We have been tremendously happy about the interest and feedback from students, scholars and practitioners. The project has uncovered a rich diversity of views and approaches to peace building and staff and students at our respective institutions have benefited greatly from this exchange of ideas.

We are very grateful for the support from the British Academy without which this unusual type of teaching and research collaboration would not have been possible”.

Top:
Dr Omach presenting on Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration, University of Botswana, August 2009

Bottom:
Rethinking Peacebuilding in Africa workshop, Centre of African Studies, University of Cambridge, March 2009



Chapter 3 – Vibrant Networks: Shared Expertise

“With little effort on her part, and with much reluctance, Africa finds herself in the new age of globalization and of the knowledge economy. In this Brave New World, research and development is more critical than ever.”

Professor Bethwell A. Ogot
Chancellor Moi University, Kenya

The Africa Desk

The UK has a strong body of Africanists and many African scholars visit each year on scholarships or research fellowships. The Africa Desk aims to provide directories of African and UK scholars and their interests, information on African studies centres in the UK and on specialist libraries throughout Europe. It aspires to offer a central hub of information on Africanist research carried out in the UK, and in this way can help to publicise and strengthen the profile of Africanist activity.

It is run as a collaboration between the British Academy and the African Studies Association of the UK with support from the Association of Commonwealth Universities and SCOLMA, the UK Africanist librarians group.

A new, easily accessible internet portal³ is designed to promote and assist collaboration between UK and African researchers, helping them to make contact with colleagues with similar research interests. The UK has an active and long-established community of researchers specialising in Africa, but information on relevant experts and relationships is often hard to find and collaborative work is hard to track.

African scholars spending time in the UK may be unaware of valuable workshops or conferences taking place during their stay, or other colleagues with whom they may wish to establish contact. This site aims to operate as both a directory of expertise and a map of the Africa-UK research landscape, principally in the social sciences and humanities.

³ <http://www.africadesk.ac.uk>

The British Institute in Eastern Africa: a haven for researchers

Since 1959, the British Institute in Eastern Africa (BIEA) has promoted research in the humanities and social sciences across eastern Africa, from Sudan and Ethiopia to Malawi and Zimbabwe. Based in Nairobi, it offers a haven and support to researchers from Africa, the UK and the rest of the world. A building opened in April 2009 provides much improved research facilities, including a larger library, a large seminar room, and new computing facilities, while the old building has been converted into a guesthouse for visiting researchers. The BIEA also maintains four-wheel-drive research vehicles and a variety of field and survey equipment, which can be hired by affiliated researchers. In an example of international collaboration, the BIEA now offers part of this space to the L'Institut Français de Recherche en Afrique (IFRA), and the merging of the BIEA and IFRA libraries, with their complementary interests and coverage, has provided a significant benefit for researchers.

The British Academy provides long-standing support and sponsorship to the BIEA to sustain both the core costs for the building and the dedicated staff who ensure its success. The Academy also imparts research funding for a number of key research priorities across a wide range of disciplines. Over the years, a very broad range of research projects have been supported in the region by the BIEA, from the monumental architecture in Aksum, Ethiopia to the history of indigenous agriculture in the Rift Valley; and from the anthropology of modernity in the region to role of alcohol in contemporary society.

Part of the BIEA's emphasis is on assisting researchers based in the UK or eastern Africa with advice, workspace, the loan of equipment and small grants to cover the costs of field research. There is a significant emphasis on the postdoctoral-level researcher, but at BIEA an unusual angle is the provision of sponsorship for recent graduates, providing them with short-term placements, of between 3 and 6 months. The aim is to give graduates who might be thinking about embarking upon further studies in Africa with the opportunity to gain direct practical experience of research, working on a variety of historical, archaeological and anthropological projects throughout eastern Africa. Graduates are able to meet and work with active researchers, and take part in innovative projects, where they can provide a valuable pool of skilled and enthusiastic assistance for field projects and data analysis. This Graduate Attachment Scheme, open to both UK and African researchers, is very popular and valuable in providing encouragement towards a research career and developing the next generation.

Research in Action

Alcohol consumption in Kenya

The BIEA focuses strongly on encouraging innovative research and using its expertise and facilities to monitor international projects. It concentrates on identifying and developing projects which are relevant to both the research community and users of the work, such as health authorities, governments and non-governmental organizations.

An example is a project on alcohol consumption, which continues to be a major concern in Kenya. A collaboration between the BIEA's former Director, Professor Justin Willis, and Dr Dorothy Mutisya of Kenyatta University, the project builds on earlier research from the 1990s and explores some of the questions around the economics and sociology of drinking in modern Kenya through case studies on the coast and in Naivasha. It investigates the continued prevalence of illicit liquor of various kinds, and the consequences of the recent relaxation of restrictions on palm wine at the coast.

The consumption of illicit spirits in particular continues to be a major issue in Kenya. A large proportion – probably a majority – of the alcohol consumed in Kenya is in the form of spirits which are produced and/or traded illegally. There is a vigorous public debate over the associated health risks and the economic importance of the trade in such spirits, in which women often play a prominent role.

The research undertaken by BIEA, which has been published in the *Journal of Eastern African Studies* and disseminated through lectures, a public discussion, and various articles in the media has sought to inform this debate. It has offered two broad conclusions:

- There is a need to separate 'illicit alcohol' in considering health issues – not all alcoholic beverages carry the same risks, or even the same kinds of risk.
- Schemes to legalize illicit distillation need to be carefully thought through. There may be good grounds for such legalization, but it will not provide a comprehensive solution to the problems associated with alcohol consumption – many of which are ultimately a reflection of wider socio-economic circumstances.

The BIEA plays a leading role in publications throughout the region, with its promotion of two international, peer-reviewed journals. The *Journal of Eastern African Studies* is a leading area studies and inter-disciplinary journal, while *Azania* is a widely respected journal in the field of African archaeology. The BIEA also produces a book series, in collaboration with James Currey, a leading publisher of Africana, and organizes and hosts a programme of conferences, seminars, exhibitions and lectures in eastern Africa and the UK.

Research in Action

Africa, world languages and the British Academy

More than 2,000 languages are spoken in Africa compared with around 230 in Europe and 337 in the United States.

The continent is a rich mine of discovery for language and linguistic studies, but there are very few academics living there and working in the field.

An international collaborative project, backed by the British Academy, has been set up to generate links and networks within Africa and internationally for researchers who are often isolated within their own institutions.

Dr Lutz Marten from SOAS is leading the UK-Africa Partnership with Professor Jochen Zeller at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa and other prominent linguists from Namibia and Botswana.

The project, *Language and linguistic studies of Southern Africa languages*, has organised workshops in London and Namibia covering specialist fields, such as the use of tone in Bemba and Herero, the passive in Bemba and inversion constructions in Zulu.

Although the main focus is on Bantu languages, the grammar of Khoisan languages has also been addressed at the workshops and academics from across the south of Africa are getting involved with the project. "For a theoretical linguist interested in Bantu languages, working in South Africa can be both rewarding and challenging," says Professor Zeller. "On the one hand, the sheer number of languages spoken in South Africa and its neighbouring countries facilitates access to basic data and provides exciting opportunities for new empirical discoveries. On the other hand, theoretical work can be quite insular, since there is only a limited number of formal linguists living and working in the region."

International collaborative projects help academics in Africa to keep abreast of current research, exchange ideas and gain insight into the ways different topics are taught and presented which benefits their own teaching, he says.

The importance of knowledge and mastery of different world languages was the topic of a major report by the British Academy in 2009 which raised concerns that the future of the UK's research base was under threat by the declining take up of modern languages at school and university.

The report, *Languages Matters*, was the result of a year long study into the effect of the decline on research fields, especially in the humanities and social sciences.

It warned that the importance for the UK's position as a world-class hub of research and its ability to address global challenges was in danger of being undermined by monolingualism.



Chapter 4 – Equal Partners: Impact on Policies

“Cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and cancers affect the most economically productive age in many African countries. Without the development and implementation of evidence-based policies, the rising burden of chronic diseases in Africa will undermine productivity, cripple health systems and government budgets, and reverse the gains made on the health MDGs*.”

* Millenium Development Goals

Dr Ama de-Graft Aikins

Research Fellow, University of Cambridge/Lead Partner, UK-Africa Academic Partnership on Chronic Disease

The reduction of state support over the last three decades has forced universities in many African countries to look elsewhere for crucial funds. Unlike the private universities in the West, however, they have very few wealthy alumni prepared to give something back and nor can they turn to industry which is mainly foreign owned.

The British Academy's Africa-UK Partnership Scheme is one of its most successful initiatives and is helping to bring much needed resources to social science and humanities departments in Africa's universities. Several of the research projects which were launched through the partnerships have gone on to larger studies and have been sustained with alternative sources of funding.

Many of these projects are having an impact on policies, for example, by providing independent evidence of the effect of initiatives to combat AIDS/HIV infection and chronic disease through health education, or to tackle poverty through non-formal education for people without basic literacy, numeracy or vocational skills.

The Africa-UK Partnerships are part of the International Partnerships Scheme. They provide awards of up to £10,000 a year for a maximum three year term to support the development of links between researchers, university departments, research centres and institutions involved in the humanities and social sciences.

For UK researchers the partnerships bring the opportunity to work with people who can bring fresh perspectives and, very often, the opportunity to do collaborative fieldwork on the ground.

For African researchers, it is a chance to form networks not just with the UK but with co-partners in other African countries through joint conferences, seminars and exchanges. Many of the partnerships have held workshops to share expertise on research methods, the use of information technology and academic writing for publication. Senior practitioners and academics from the UK have proved keen to provide input to conferences through the presentation of papers and the provision of workshops or seminars in their speciality.

Some of the larger collaborations have used the conferences as a means of generating teaching materials and computer resources for use by the partners in their own institutions

The partnerships – usually two lead partners and several other co-partners – are built around research themes of mutual interest and carried forward through visits and exchanges, workshops, seminars, lecture programmes, collaborative research and joint publications. Crucially, they usually involve multidisciplinary teams, a novel concept for most scholarship in Africa, but one which is valued in the UK because the breadth of the human condition, societies and the challenges they face cannot easily be carved up to suit subject boundaries. So, a linguist may have as much to contribute to work on the effectiveness of health promotion campaigns as a partner from the medical sciences; and in one partnership an art historian provided fresh perspectives on peace initiatives.



Research in Action

Tackling chronic disease

The urgent need for a fresh approach to tackling chronic disease in Africa inspired a unique cross-disciplinary collaboration involving 40 partners from nine countries.

The UK-Africa Partnership on Chronic Disease focuses on illnesses such as diabetes, hypertension, stroke and cancer which it says are a “neglected epidemic”.

The concentration on communicable diseases – such as HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis – has left research into chronic illnesses less well resourced, despite the fact that they cause a very significant number of medical admissions and deaths.

Lead partners of the collaboration are Dr Ama de-Graft Aikins, a research fellow at the University of Cambridge, and Dr Daniel Kojo Arhinful a research fellow at the Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research, University of Ghana. Other partners are from Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, The Netherlands, Nigeria, Malaysia, South Africa, the UK and the US.

Contributors are drawn from a wide range of disciplines, including medicine, the biomedical sciences, anthropology, psychiatry, geography, nutrition, linguistics, psychology, sociology and demography.

Since its establishment in 2006 with funding from the British Academy, the project has drawn up a model of effective primary and secondary prevention which it hopes will influence chronic disease policies. A key goal of the partnership is to seek funding to pilot education prevention in Ghana and Cameroon.

“We envisage that the pilot will enable us to produce an evidence-based grant proposal that will secure further funding to develop effective chronic disease prevention interventions in Africa,” says Dr Arhinful.

The collaborative research is integrating social science research with work being done in the biomedical field and offers postgraduate teaching, training and support through teaching exchanges and research internships.

Key workshops in Ghana and the UK brought together distinguished academics, researchers, practitioners, patient groups, postgraduate students and policymakers to discuss Africa's chronic disease burden, says Dr Arhinful.

“Through the partnership there has emerged a core active working group with a sense of shared responsibility. The collective spirit of partners from various institutions, disciplines and expertise to tackle the common problem has been an important milestone,” he said.



Left: Marching for heart health in Ghana (World Heart Day)

Chapter 5 – The Science of Humanity: Shaping our Lives

“Research in the social sciences and humanities is as important as research in the physical sciences and must be supported without discrimination, not least because it gives meaning to research in other fields.”

Professor Opoku-Agyemang
Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cape Coast

The social sciences and humanities have strong protagonists in Africa who are reaching out for support. An influential paper by Professor Naana Opoku-Agyemang at a British Academy-sponsored conference in Ghana stressed the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration. Professor Opoku-Agyemang, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cape Coast, said courses such as law, politics, economics, education, linguistics, and psychology offered students an opportunity to understand the totality of the human person.

“Dwindling support for institutions and faculties that concentrate on social sciences and the humanities will increasingly impact negatively on teaching. Factors such as large class sizes, inadequate budgetary support, inadequate teaching and learning resources and

ineffective instructional techniques have made the challenges facing the social sciences and humanities even more complex,” she said.

The importance to Africa of a strong social science community was also the theme of the keynote address at the Nairobi Conference which led to the Nairobi Report. Professor Bethwell A. Ogot, the Chancellor of MOI University, Kenya, paid tribute to the foundations and learned bodies such as the British Academy for their role in promoting intercultural learning and dialogue and the respectful sharing of ideas.

Prof Ogot has a special interest in the work of the Academy his as career took off in 1961 when he was granted one of the British Academy’s Nuffield research studentships to help support his fieldwork in East Africa.

“Partnerships between UK and African academics sponsored by the British Academy come with no ties attached, other than the pursuit of research excellence in contrast to some other common sources of funding which are more limiting,” he said.

“The donor frequently sets the research agenda, often based on research priorities and paradigms in their home countries. The work of many African social scientists has been reduced to consultancy and short term contract work, which usually appears in reports that do not become part of the public domain or the wider intellectual discourse,” he told the seminar in his closing remarks.

Too often summaries and reports have replaced articles and books as a result: “In the process, the continent’s ability to define itself and the quality of African scholarship may have suffered.”

Financial assistance and moral support from internationally renowned foundations and learned bodies have helped to keep the social sciences and humanities alive despite the funding crisis they have suffered over the last two decades. Equal partnerships with academics from other countries, such as the UK, have a crucial part to play in Africa’s development.

Right:
Rural Ethiopian women
participating in a social
and demographic survey



Research in Action

Research in a war zone

Academic research on the ground was challenging during the post-election violence in Kenya, but a British Academy-sponsored study of heritage and peace museums found ways to continue.

The violent clashes in early 2008 and the intense national debate over where Kenya had 'gone wrong' served to underscore the relevance and topicality of the research project into the history, memory and heritage of the Kenyan people.

The study, which included work with the community peace museums that have sprung up across Kenya since the late 1990s, has gone on to be one of the British Academy's most successful UK-Africa Partnerships.

Dr Lotte Hughes from the Ferguson Centre for African and Asian studies at the Open University and Professor Karega-Munene from the United States International

University, Nairobi, have involved Kenyan students, national museums of Kenya and a wide range of groups and individuals in the Partnership project.

Their work included a study of the peace museums that aim to conserve the tangible and intangible heritage – such as language – of particular ethnic communities, while also using cultural traditions to promote peace and help heal historical rifts between the different groups.

Alongside the collection of cultural artifacts, some of the museums also provide alternative perceptions of Kenya's troubled history during British colonial rule, the Mau Mau uprising against British domination in the 1950s and the painful legacy of civil conflict and trauma. Working largely outside the state-managed national heritage sector, the museums and other community-led initiatives strive to represent the history of ordinary citizens, commemorate cultural heroes and mobilise communities to conserve sacred sites and local environments such as forests.

Because the community museums are far apart and run on a shoestring, it is difficult for people to get together without external assistance. Dr Hughes and Professor Munene organised two successful exchange visits for curators and museum supporters to facilitate inter-ethnic dialogue about peace and heritage and the sharing of knowledge.

The partners, joined by Professor Annie Coombes of Birkbeck College, University of London, have received a research grant of nearly £370,000 from the Arts and Humanities Research Council for a wider project: 'Managing heritage, building peace: Museums, memorialisation and the uses of memory in Kenya'.

Right: Joseph Mwarandu, from Malindi District Cultural Association, entertains visitors at Kyansazu with the story of Mekatili, a woman who led a rebellion by Giriama people against the British in 1913-14.



Photographer: Karega-Munene

Case Studies

The Community Peace Museums Visits Project aims to bring together those steering the different museums and cultural initiatives so they can share their knowledge and experience.

On one visit more than 50 people from eight different community projects visited Lari Memorial Peace Museum which has been documenting what took place in the Lari massacre in 1953, when Mau Mau fighters attacked the loyalist village of Lari. About 170 men, women and children were hacked or burnt to death. In the weeks that followed, suspected Mau Mau were summarily executed by police and loyalist Home Guards.

Njiru Njeru, the curator of the Aembu Community Peace Museum, said the visits established platforms for inter-ethnic dialogue. "Members realise that communities have lost a lot of cultural knowledge that could be of meaning as far as peace building is concerned, through vanishing artifacts and the deaths of elders who are key community custodians of peace knowledge," he said.

"Members decided to publish a newsletter because they realised that documented knowledge can easily be passed from one ethnic group to another and help to identify the common grounds through which peace can be reclaimed and built."

Research in Action

Ethiopia: stopping the "brain drain"

Ethiopia is Africa's second most populous nation with more than 79 million inhabitants. But until very recently it had no provision for doctorate degrees and its students had to travel overseas for the qualification, often failing to return because of job opportunities in the West.

Now Addis Ababa University, the largest in Ethiopia, is starting an ambitious campaign to develop its own PhD programmes which it hopes will help halt the brain drain by encouraging the best students to remain in their homeland.

The British Academy has been proud to sponsor a UK-Africa Partnership between the University of Bristol and Addis Ababa University which has a strong focus on helping Ethiopian students and academics develop their research methods through training workshops, the development of PhD training modules and computer support.

The partnership, led by Dr Mhairi Gibson from Bristol and Dr Eshetu Gurma from Addis Ababa, is on a research theme which is relevant and important to Ethiopia and many other African countries: *The demographic and health consequences of population change in rural areas*.

It is an area of study that has been led in Africa by social sciences such as human geography and demography, says Dr Gibson. "As biocultural anthropologists we are well positioned to address future implications for health and society as part of a coherent interdisciplinary research approach," she says.

Western researchers have dominated the academic discussion on Africa's escalating HIV/AIDs epidemic, rapid urbanization, environmental degradation and erratic economic growth says Dr Gibson. "The training workshops help to improve dialogue between researchers and users across the African continent. Social scientists from across Africa are encouraged to present oral research papers and participate in debate."

Staff from several UK universities travelled to Addis Ababa for the first training workshop held in 2008 and provided sessions on qualitative and quantitative social science research methods. The materials generated by the workshop, including software, computer exercises, videos and books, are being used by the Centre for Development Studies at Addis Ababa University to initiate a new PhD training programme in population studies.

Academics in Ethiopia have considerably fewer opportunities to network and form research collaborations than those in the West, says Dr Gibson. "What few opportunities exist are tied to funds for attendance at overseas events where there are perhaps only one or two other African academics for them to meet." Funds from the British Academy will help finance travel bursaries for African participants for future workshops as necessary.

Right: Demographic data collection in rural Ethiopia (Dr Mhairi Gibson and field team leader Burka Tessema)



Chapter 6 – Building the Future: Nurturing Talent



“High quality research and teaching across the sciences, humanities and social sciences is essential to enable Africa’s peoples to shape the fairer, more equitable and vibrant societies to which they aspire.”

Professor Tim Unwin
Chair, Commonwealth Scholarship Commission

Despite the chronic underfunding of the social sciences and the humanities in many African countries, there is groundbreaking work going on. This is often by academics working in isolation from the international community because of poor internet communications and the high cost of travelling to conferences and seminars.

As the Nairobi Report pointed out, the future of social science and humanities research in Africa rests with the quality of the next generation. The British Academy offers a range of grants to individuals, both to UK-based academics to enable them to focus on and to visit Africa, and to foreign academics to enable them to come to the UK. The Postdoctoral Fellowships, The Newton International Fellowships and grants to allow visits to the UK for short periods can provide opportunities for African researchers to strengthen their skills.

The three-year Postdoctoral Fellowships are designed to enable outstanding researchers (based in the UK or other EEA countries) in the early stages of their careers to strengthen their experience of research and teaching in a university environment. In turn, this will develop their curriculum vitae and improve their prospects of obtaining permanent lecturing posts by the end of the Fellowship. The Visiting Scholars Scheme provides funding for recent postdoctoral academics to spend a short period of time working within a UK university alongside colleagues with similar research interests. The national flagship scheme to support international excellence, the Newton International Fellowships, offers opportunities for the world’s best scholars in any discipline to come to the UK for two years, is intended to build lasting links with the UK. In addition, the Academy offers small grants that provide funding to spend a short period of time working within a UK university alongside colleagues within similar research interests.

Research in Action

Understanding water

The sacredness of water as a resource that must be used wisely is a theme that runs through proverbs passed on through generations in Nigeria.

Contrast this good husbandry with the sometimes wanton disrespect for today’s public water sources which are seen as no one’s responsibility and it is easy to understand why water management programmes do not always get full public support, according to Dr Emmanuel Akpabio from the University of Uyo, Nigeria.

His research suggests that government and state policies and water projects would be more successful if they took into account the indigenous population’s sense and understanding of water.

Dr Akpabio was a recipient of the British Academy’s Visiting Scholars Scheme and spent four months at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne for his research project: *Indigenous water management and the challenges of state institutions in the Cross River basin, Nigeria*.

“Studies have consistently shown that the first foundation for empowerment and development is to understand cultural and social structures,” he said.

“The British Academy has taken the lead in galvanising interest in African scholarship in the social sciences as well as empowering scholars and development planners through research funding. I happen to be one of the beneficiaries of such empowerment.”

“The most exciting and interesting part of the Scheme was the ease with which I prosecuted the work. I had access to libraries, materials, unlimited access to the internet and a convenient office and working environment – opportunities that are very scarce in Africa.”

In addition to the research facilities, Dr Akpabio says his project was speeded up and expanded by the UK’s cross-disciplinary approach. “The benefit of having the advice of geographers, sociologists, economists and political scientists was overwhelming and significantly helpful. These too, are opportunities not quite common in Africa.”

Since being awarded funding from the British Academy, Dr Akpabio has successfully expanded his work and has had several articles published. “The British Academy funding has set the stage for high manpower development in the field of water resources management scholarship in Africa. Through teaching and research in my university, I am laying a foundation which will contribute to the development of Africa.”

Research in Action

Chronic food shortages: focusing on the “micro level”

As an academic working in the politically charged area of famine and food aid, Zoltan Tiba has valued the independence that British Academy funding has given him.

With millions of dollars and the reputation of powerful relief charities and donor nations at stake, the findings of research into the success or failure of different aid programmes can quickly become controversial.

The financial backing from a learned body with an international reputation for funding research excellence has given him the confidence to pursue his seven year study into the causes and possible remedies of chronic food shortages in contemporary society.

Over a period of seven years he has spent many months living and conducting research in a village in Malawi, one of the poorest countries in the world which has endured repeated threats of famine since the food crisis of 2001.

He has completed his British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship, based at the University of Cambridge and hopes his work will add another dimension to the debate and be incorporated in policies.

Increasingly his research into the changing nature of famines, focused on sub-Saharan Africa, has been uncovering the importance of local attitudes to the diversification of food production and diet.

“The area is a Garden of Eden, with lush vegetation and plenty of water and yet chronic food insecurity is a serious problem and the threat of famine is still evident,” he says.

“One possibility for long term change at the macro level is to focus on the micro level. Something as simple as individuals growing fruit and raising small livestock in addition to growing cereals would add to the safety net to subvert chronic food insecurity and famines.”

While maize, as the staple food crop, has received overwhelming attention in policies and fund allocations, his study suggests a wide range of other highly nutritious food could be produced locally.

Famines are highly politicised, he says, especially when the diet narrowly focuses on one crop, such as maize, because production and marketing of the crop can be easily controlled. “A diversified diet at household level would help reduce this political dependency.”

Dr Tiba, a Hungarian and former adviser to the World Food Programme in Rome, says the Fellowship has helped his work enormously. “The most important aspect has been the freedom which both the scholarship and the University of Cambridge gives me to develop my ideas.

“It has allowed me to conduct fieldwork independently from any other agency – thus the research is not biased in any way whatsoever. This is particularly important in research areas which involve politics or can influence policy.”



Right:
Innovative ideas in practice at the local level: bananas around the maize field

Research in Action

Ethiopian history revealed

The history of Ethiopia has been written largely on the evidence of colonial records leaving other sources for historians largely unexploited.

But now visual imagery from church paintings and indigenous art is giving new insights into how people in the past saw their place in society, how they related to power and what they accepted as a legitimate political process.

Izabela Orłowska, from the School of History, Classics and Archaeology at the University of Edinburgh, has supplemented her study of indigenous art with unpublished sources in the languages of Amharic and Ge'ez which provide testimony to the traditions and beliefs of the country's indigenous communities.

One of the British Academy's Postdoctoral Fellows, Dr Orłowska says the deep rooted patterns of political behaviour often continued to operate within the framework of modern institutions. She found pamphlets and newspapers from the period following the fall of the monarchy in 1974 that showed symbolic imagery continuing to play an important part in ceremonies.

Non verbal gestures have been a crucial part of political interaction throughout Ethiopia's history, she says. “Church paintings, in addition to being powerful examples of traditional aesthetics, allow us to reconstruct the nuances of how indigenous politics was conducted,” she says.

Human posture, gesture and dress were of particular importance. An example is the image of St Mary and a nobleman in a church painting which included a secular theme – the method of tying the shawl-like toga in the image indicated deference or repentance.

In a nineteenth century picture, a local ruler is shown paying respect to the Virgin Mary. “His kneeling posture and the tying of the white garment around his waist implies a submissive state and corresponds with the behaviour of a subject before his master, which is also mentioned in oral poetry and written sources.”

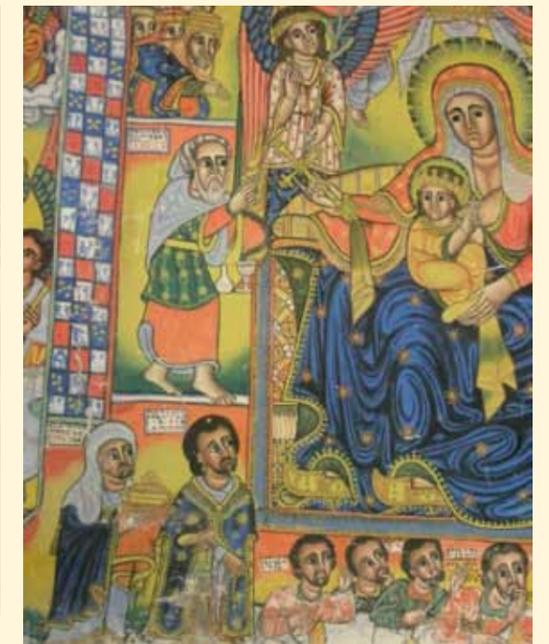
“These first hand accounts of human experiences are powerful testimonies of the reactions of ordinary Ethiopians to the changing political environment.” said Dr Orłowska.

During her extended stay in Ethiopia she became involved in fundraising and awareness campaigns to support the restoration and protection of Ethiopian church murals which are in a state of deterioration.



Right:
Lunch with the priests of Si're Yesus Church in Gojjam, Ethiopia

Opposite:
Traditional church mural of St. Mary being addressed by local rulers and Ethiopian saints



Chapter 7 – Success on the Ground: Looking Forward



“When NEPAD* and the Commission for Africa talked of finding African answers to African problems it put a spotlight, for the UK, on engagement with researchers in African universities. Such connections allow us to ask the right questions and develop the local capacity to do good research, fulfilling Pliny’s prediction – *ex Africa semper aliquid novi***.”

* The New Partnership for Africa’s Development
** *always something new from Africa*

Professor Graham Furniss FBA
Chair of the British Academy Africa Panel /
Pro-Director SOAS

When faced with huge challenges it is easy to give up in the face of the enormity of the undertaking. There is no doubt that humanities and social science researchers in Africa are undervalued, starved of state funds and saddled with large classes and a heavy burden of administration. Most do not even have reliable access to the internet.

Despite this, groundbreaking work has been carried out as a result of fairly modest funding grants which have enabled academics in some of the poorest African nations to attend conferences and carry out joint research with partners from universities in their home countries, other parts of Africa and internationally.

The task of building world-class research excellence in the humanities and social sciences in countries where science and technology are seen as the key, not just to future prosperity, but to basic survival should not be underestimated.

Successful research projects funded by the British Academy, however, suggest that the international academic community can do a huge amount to help build vibrant and confident humanities and social science departments and networks.

The Nairobi Report started with the ‘little’ things – the individual researcher, the academic department, the local practice of a discipline – and teased out the commonalities of the micro issues, not the macro, national themes.

We know what makes a departmental research culture, what is not so obvious is how to make that happen in such a myriad of different contexts. This is the question that lies at the heart of the Nairobi Process.

It is not about creating a few new centres of excellence or professorships, but making a difference in a particular discipline, in a particular university with particular people.

Looking to the future, plans are already underway to expand the support on the ground. African researchers will continue to benefit from a range of partnership schemes run by the British Academy. Then there is the proposed establishment of a UK-funded research skills training programme for social sciences in Eastern Africa.

Schemes such as writing workshops to help young scholars submit their work to the top international journals and the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission’s continuing support for its scholars are already making a difference.

From small acorns, big trees grow. The British Academy is proud of its long history of links with Africa and of the academics who are contributing by the successful, mutually rewarding and enduring partnerships they have built.



About the British Academy

The British Academy is the UK's national body for the humanities and social sciences. From Law to Linguistics, Psychology to Philosophy and Economics to Ethics, the Academy aims to inspire, recognise and support excellence and high achievement across all its disciplines, as well as nurture curiosity and influence.

With a Fellowship of over 1,000 eminent scholars, the Academy is governed by an elected Council of Fellows, and operates from 10-11 Carlton House Terrace in central London. It funds national and international research, awards prizes and medals, produces academic and policy-related publications and organises a wide-ranging programme of public events.

Promoting the interests of UK research and learning around the world is a vital part of the Academy's function. It works to develop the role of humanities and social sciences research in tackling global challenges by creating frameworks to support international networking and collaboration.

The Academy draws on expertise from a wide range of sources: its Fellowship; its seven Area Panels – for Africa, China, the Middle East, Europe, South Asia and Latin America/Caribbean – which provide specialist advice on developing links around the world; and an extensive range of international partnerships including universities and academies overseas.

In addition, the Academy funds and coordinates a network of overseas institutes which provide local expertise, logistical support and often a working base for UK scholars. These include research institutes in Amman, Ankara, Athens, Jerusalem, Nairobi, Rome and Tehran, as well as UK-based specialist learned societies which run strategic research programmes in other parts of the world including Africa, Latin America and South and South East Asia.

More information about the British Academy can be found at: www.britac.ac.uk

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