



## Just 0.7 percent, but still a most welcome increment

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Researchers who met recently in Dar es Salaam to look at among others, how to access opportunities available in various local, regional and international institutions for funding research projects to augment the insignificant state allotment, were overwhelmed when President Kikwete announced increased funding for research and development from the current 0.3 per cent of the gross domestic product to one per cent, come next financial year.

The new allocation is an increase of 0.7 per cent of the GDP - equivalent to about Sh248bn, up from Sh75bn that was the normal annual budgetary funding.

Scientists and researchers had strongly argued that the current budgetary allocation did not match the government's resolve to speed up the country's development through scientific research.

During their meeting the researchers also dwelt on the cause of the country's failure to attract funding for research institutions particularly when compared to Uganda and Kenya.

However, it was also acknowledged that the new funding allocation should spur researchers and scientists to double their efforts in bringing to light their research findings for development.

One of the researchers, Prof Wen Kilama, wrote in a local daily recently saying: "I have been working at senior levels in health R&D institutions in Tanzania for 39 years and have never seen more commitment to such a worthy cause than this."

He also says that industrialized countries do much better in research than developing countries is that they invest heavily in R&D and apply the results in solving problems at the individual, community and national level.

"In the case of Tanzania, we invest little in research and frequently ignore or fail to put to use relevant research findings, even those obtained within our own country," he says.

Prof. Kilama, a retired malaria researcher and professor in parasitology adds that what we have badly been missing, and now we seem to be getting it, is the realisation of the fact that research is unequalled as a powerful tool towards equity in social and economic development.

"Without research, we would have persisted in ancient ways of addressing old and even new problems, and consequently there would be no development," he says.

Tanzania ranks below Kenya and Uganda in accessing opportunities available from several agencies funding scientific research in various disciplines at national, regional and international levels.

The researchers from universities, research institutions and non-governmental organisations, who had convened in Dar es Salaam for the first time in history, brainstormed in a day's workshop, on how best to overcome the backward stance of research and development while making good use of the small funds allocated the sub-sector by the government.

Dr. Hassan Mshinda, the Director-General of the Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology (Costech) who hosted the conference said that the Commission has decided to give priority to matters relating to research capacity building, particularly on how to access research grants.

"Tanzanian researchers must dedicate their efforts to develop convincing fundable research proposals and grant applications, which is an important facet of being active researchers.

The capacity of the scientific community has to be built in terms of how to prepare fundable projects, build research teams or consortia, partnerships and linkages as the case may require," Dr Mshinda said.

The Lake Victoria Research Initiative (VicRes) offers research funding to candidates mainly from the three East African Community (EAC) founder nations - Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. But due to poor fund applications, applicants from Tanzania trail the others.

Professor Philipo Bwatondi from the University of Dar es Salaam Department of Aquatic Sciences and Technology, is a member of the scientific advisory committee of the VicRes, and one of the key players in the workshop.

Prof. Bwatondi challenged Tanzanian researchers and scientists to do better in accessing VicRes funds. Records show that while Kenya's applicants totalled 113 in 2006, Uganda had 53 while Tanzania had 47.

Latecomers in the community - Burundi and Rwanda- fielded a meager four and three applications respectively.

Thus Kenya maintained the upper hand with 53 per cent, Uganda 24.1 and Tanzania 21.4, the two other countries shared the rest of the points.

Established in 2002, VicRes is unique window for supporting inter- and multi-disciplinary research contributing towards poverty reduction and environmental restoration in the Lake Victoria Basin.

The Research on Poverty Alleviation (REPOA) is one of the top independent non-profit research organisations in Tanzania which began operating early 1995.

Its research work is confined to Tanzania Mainland and Zanzibar with some projects covering every district.

Repoa's Executive Director Prof Joseph Semboja told the conference that his institution is concerned with pro-poor growth and poverty reduction including growth and poverty, gender, environment and agriculture, technology, socio-political and cultural issues, governance and vulnerability and social protection.

The institution extends proactive mentoring and review process for research projects to include assisting researchers with the preparation of the research projects.

The Ifakara Health Research and Development Centre, now Ifakara Health Institute (IHI) is a government facility established in 1996, to develop and sustain district based health research.

It is also a research centre capable of generating new knowledge and relevant information regarding priority problems in health systems at district, national and international levels through research, aiming at better health and community development.

Dr. Mshinda who is a former Chief Executive Officer for IHI says that the institute has several sites in the country including Bagamoyo, Mtwara and Lindi. At the Ifakara site, the Institute maintains an insectaria of mosquitoes and a massive ``screen house`` to monitor the behaviour of captive mosquitoes in semi-field conditions.

Bagamoyo and Ifakara, both have state-of-the art laboratories with extensive capabilities, including advanced DNA analysis.

In Mtwara and Lindi, IHI is running three rounds of the largest health survey ever conducted in Tanzania to measure maternal and newborn health.

On cutting edge research, IHI is best known for its malaria research. A long list of current research interests includes clinical trials of new drugs and vaccines; measuring impact of intermittent preventive treatment of infants; monitoring the effectiveness and safety of existing drugs; improving access to prompt and effective treatment; and investigating diagnostic practice and clinical management of malaria.

During their deliberations, delegates acknowledged they would be more successful if they applied for funds to conduct research work as a team rather than individuals.

It was thus agreed that they should hold annual meetings during which participants can identify areas in which they could apply for funds as a team.

In the same vein, Costech plans to conduct a series of training workshops on how to develop research proposals that can attract funding.

``We need to strategize on how best to organize these workshops for maximum benefits,`` says Dr. Mshinda.

\* SOURCE: *GUARDIAN*