

Analysing the impact of the GCRF Neglected Tropical Disease Network on Early Career Researchers to promote Leishmaniasis and Chagas disease research.

1. Introduction and Aims

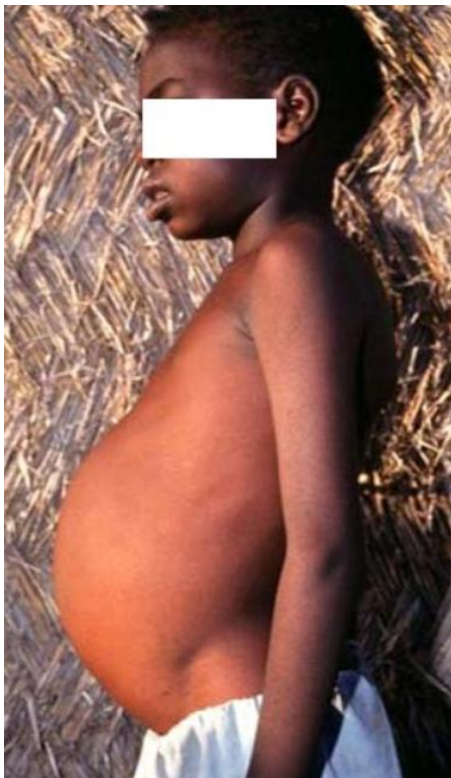
- The Global Network for Neglected Tropical Disease was funded by the GCRF and ran from 2018-2024
- It sought to accelerate research on Leishmaniasis and Chagas disease by facilitating international research collaborations and strengthening research capacity
- One of the ways it did this was by supporting Early Career Researchers (ECRs)
- This study aims to explore the impact of the Network on ECRs and whether this has helped promote Leishmaniasis and Chagas disease research

2. Background

- Neglected Tropical Disease (NTDs) affect over 1 billion people yet have been historically underfunded and sidelined by global health
- NTDs primarily affect impoverished tropical communities and are known as a “poor mans disease”
- Leishmaniasis and Chagas have among the highest mortality rates of NTDs
- The Network included over 50 academics from 14 institutions and provided the following opportunities to ECRs: fellowships, research secondments, travel bursaries, hands-on workshops, and conferences

3. Methodology

- The study adopted an in-depth qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews
- 19 interviews were conducted with participants from all countries involved with the Network
- Interviews lasted between 20mins and 1 hour
- The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and then thematically analysed using NVivo 12
- Thematic analysis was conducted according to the methodology as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006)



4. Results and Discussion

3 key themes were identified:

- **Skill development and capacity building**
 - Mentorship and soft skill development was equally valued as technical skill training
 - Autonomy was especially valued, ECRs felt they had access to support as well and this bolstered confidence and independence crucial to a career in research
- **Collaboration and networking**
 - ECRs really valued exposure to PIs and other research approaches, in many cases interdisciplinary
 - Networking helped with careers, particularly international movement
 - Participants really valued informal networking between ECRs at the same career stage and felt this was very supportive as they started their academic careers
- **Legacy and barriers to ECR retention**
 - The funding landscape remains the key obstacle and barrier to ECR retention and limits the continuing impact of the Network now it has finished
 - However relationship established with the Network continue to provide a source for international collaboration and career advancement

5. Conclusion

- The study has demonstrated the important role that international research networks can play in developing ECRs while simultaneously advancing NTD research
- Without systemic change, there is a real risk that funding challenges will erode the gains achieved by the Network, leading to attrition of talent from a field already constrained by chronic underinvestment.

6. Key References

Hotez PJ, Fenwick A, Savioli L, Molyneux DH. Rescuing the bottom billion through control of neglected tropical diseases. *The Lancet*. 2009 May;373(9674):1570-5.

UKRI. A Global Network for Neglected Tropical Diseases [Internet]. *Ukri.org*. 2020 [cited 2025 Jul 15]. Available from: <https://gtr.ukri.org/projects?ref=MR%2fP027989%2f1&pn=21&fetchSize=10&selectedSortableField=firstAuthorName&selectedSortOrder=ASC#/tabOverview>

