

Background Sub-Saharan African countries have urged grassroots input to improve research capacity. In East Africa, MicroResearch is fostering local ability to find sustainable solutions for community health problems. At 5 years, the following reports its progress. Methods The MicroResearch program had three integrated components: (1) 2-week training workshops; (2) small proposal development with international peer review followed by project funding, implementation, knowledge translation; (3) coaching from experienced researchers. Evaluation included standardized questions after completion of the workshops, 2013 online survey of recent workshop participants and discussions at two East Africa MicroResearch Forums in 2013. Results Between 2008 and 2013, 15 workshops were conducted at 5 East Africa sites with 391 participants. Of the 29 projects funded by MicroResearch, 7 have been completed; of which 6 led to changes in local health policy/practice. MicroResearch training stimulated 13 other funded research projects; of which 8 were external to MicroResearch. Over 90% of participants rated the workshops as excellent with 20% spontaneously noting that MicroResearch changed how they worked. The survey highlighted three local research needs: mentors, skills and funding – each addressed by MicroResearch. On-line MicroResearch and alumni networks, two knowledge translation partnerships and an East Africa Leaders Consortium arose from the MicroResearch Forums. Conclusion MicroResearch helped build local capacity for community-directed interdisciplinary health research.