

ABSTRACT

Introduction: strategies to transfer international health research training programs to sub-Saharan African institutions focus on developing cadres of local investigators who will lead such programs. Using a critical leadership theory framework, we conducted a qualitative study of one program to understand how collaborative training and research can support early career investigators in Kenya toward the program transfer goal.

Methods: We used purposive sampling methods and a semi-structured protocol to conduct in-depth interviews with US (N=5) and Kenyan (N=5) independent investigators. Transcripts were coded using a two-step process, and then compared with each other to identify major themes.

Results: A limited local research environment, funding needs and research career mentorship were identified as major influences on early career researchers. Institutional demands on Kenyan faculty to teach rather than complete research restricted investigators' ability to develop research careers. This was coupled with lack of local funding to support research. Sustainable collaborations between Kenyan, US and other international investigators were perceived to mitigate these challenges and support early career investigators who would help build a robust local research environment for training.

Conclusion: mutually beneficial collaborations between Kenyan and US investigators developed during training mitigate these challenges and build a supportive research environment for training. In these collaborations, early career investigators learn how to navigate the complex international research environment to build local HIV research capacity. Shared and mutually beneficial resources within international research collaborations are required to support early career investigators and plans to transfer health research training to African institutions.