HEARD has garnered a distinctive identity within the broad efforts of advancing health equity in Africa. That identity is rooted in the diversity of our programmes, professionalism of our staff and the commitment of our partners to address fundamental inequalities in access to basic health services. Operating at the interface of applied research and policy, we seek to inform public debates, engage constructively with governments, aid agencies, the private sector and non-government organisations, influence policies and practices and educate the next generation of health leaders. This package is what distinguishes HEARD from consultancy firms, universities and campaigning organisations.

Our reputation as a source of independent, evidence-based research is our primary asset. Our ability to leverage that asset is contingent on an understanding of policy-making processes and engagement with policy-makers, and on our ability to generate compelling narratives, strong propositions and practical recommendations.

Looking ahead, HEARDS’s ability to contribute to change will be shaped by the partnerships and alliances that we build across the world and our ability to diversify our sources of income to ensure our sustainability. Our Strategy 2017-2019 sets out ambitious goals that will require us to:

- deliver research that interacts intelligently with the timelines and critical moments in the policy processes and debates that we seek to influence;

- strengthen our ability to communicate our research to the policy community and the wider public - joining up our research and communications efforts is vital if we are to take HEARD to the next level of impact; and

- develop our role as a strategic convening agency - bringing key actors together and acting as an ‘honest broker’ can help to position HEARD in the key debates we seek to influence.
A message from our Chair of Governors

For over 15 years, HEARD has pioneered, developed, organised and supported knowledge exchange and the uptake of research evidence across much of the African continent and beyond. The organisation has a strong track record of directing research to decision makers across the spectrum of local, national and international government and non-government organisations.

Under the leadership of Professor Nana Poku, as Executive Director since January 2014, the organisation has worked with partners and funders to broaden the scope of HEARD’s research, education and short term consultancies from a focus on HIV and its impacts on African economies and societies, to encompass Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, Health Governance and Financing, and Health Systems Strengthening, among others.

Through the long-term support of Swedish International Cooperation Development Agency (SIDA) and the University of Kwazulu-Natal, HEARD has been able to make great strides in pioneering regional research into neglected issues such as understanding induced abortions (legal and illegal), intimate partner violence, and disabilities among adolescents and young people in East and Southern Africa.

HEARD benefits from the support and guidance of an influential Board of Governors that assists HEARD to maintain the high quality of its research and identify over-the-horizon issues for early attention. Governors are prominent individuals from the public and private sectors with a passionate commitment to development, including political scientists, development economists, and health policymakers.

Janet Love
National Director of the Legal Resources Centre

A message from our Executive Director

HEARD occupies an important interface between research, policy, and advocacy; working with research and advocacy groups to generate innovative ideas and also ensuring these ideas are turned into practical policies to overcome the enormous burden of disease in Africa. The organisation’s longevity, influence and esteem are some indication of the strategic success of the organisation to adapt to the changing landscape of Africa’s health needs and responses. The challenge is to sustain the achievements of the past in another period of change in global health.

Since HEARD’s formation in 1998, we have examined the economic case for some of Africa’s most enduring health conditions including HIV and AIDS, Gender vulnerabilities, Adolescent health and Intimate Partner Violence, and Health Disabilities, particularly those related to medication for chronic diseases. We have studied the effectiveness of public health campaigns targeting HIV prevention and adolescent sexual health issues, examined health systems and ways of strengthening them, and compared the costs and benefits of hundreds of health related interventions to influence policy. In the process we have partnered with a range of actors to leverage comparative advantages in advancing health equity in Africa.

Going forward, the organisational priority for HEARD is to align our strategy to the key challenges outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals. We will design, generate and disseminate research around HIV prevention and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights. Research foci include maternal and child health, unsafe abortions, health policy and economics, gender inequalities, and the rights of vulnerable groups such as people living with disabilities and the LGBTI communities in Africa.

Nana K. Poku
Professor of Health Economics at University of KwaZulu-Natal
Introduction

Throughout much of Africa, health progress over the past decade has been impressive: child and maternal mortality have declined at unprecedented rates in many countries; and demonstrable progress has been made in the fight against major infectious diseases such as AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. However, the nature and scale of the health challenges facing African countries remain both urgent and daunting—medically, but also in matters ranging from ensuring sustainable financing to improving programmatic efficiency and effectiveness. Current investment levels in health, including sexual and reproductive health, is in many countries neither sufficient, efficient, nor equitable. HEARD’s Vision 2016-2020 is to contribute to achieving health equity across Africa by generating evidence to inform policy and by training future health leaders to use evidence more strategically to improve performance.

In the global health realm, data is abundant, but collating that information, evaluating it, filling in gaps and presenting it in the form of actionable agendas remains sadly deficient. HEARD’s critical mission is to undertake this work: to convert our evidence-based research into sustainable programmes, specifically for southern African countries. Through our research, we strive to provide the most accurate and comprehensive regional knowledge to create a stronger foundation for strategic decision-making and, ultimately, better health for affected communities. Our aim is to create the most reliable and up-to-date information to help regional policymakers, civil society organizations, donors and communities to determine which options are the most viable and beneficent for improving the health of all peoples within their purview.

The current strategy builds on a period of great achievement. In the last few years, HEARD has succeeded in expanding its work and consolidating its reputation. We need to be alert to changes in the external environment and agile in our responses. Keeping HEARD at the forefront of the debates that will shape health outcomes for Africans will require a strengthened focus on shared goals and priorities, continued excellence in research, and more effective strategies for engagement with policy-makers, the public, the private sector, and partners in developing countries.

Based on the ideas and perspectives of our partners and staff, our Strategy 2016-2020 defines our collective ambition, sets out our priorities, and identifies some of the organizational changes needed for effective delivery. It reflects a determination to ensure that the impact of HEARD as a whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Recognizing that the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals are a watershed in international development, the Strategy outlines our core, inter-related areas where we aim to support meaningful ‘global to local’ action.

HEARD’s Action Priorities, 2017-2019

1. Helping to strengthen regional health systems through applied research on health interventions – particularly cost challenges and governance.

2. Advancing regional understanding in Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, including neglected issues such as unsafe abortion, early marriage, and LGBTI marginalization.

3. Educating the current and next generation health sector managers, strategists and decision makers, through a robust PhD programme.

4. Working on how states can best reconcile the on-going costs of sustaining the fight against HIV and AIDS with the demands of (or for) forms of universal health care.
HEARD is an applied research centre with a global reputation for its research, education programmes, strategic support, partnerships and networks, devoted to addressing the broad health challenges of Africa.

Our aim is to shape public health policy and practice in order to reduce health inequalities in Africa and to improve the reach, comprehensiveness and quality of health services delivery throughout the region.

Our work entails catalysing, conducting and disseminating innovative research on the socio-economic aspects of public health, especially the African HIV and AIDS pandemic.

HEARD is a self-funded organisation established in 1998 and based at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

**Our Vision** is to achieve Health Equity across Africa

**Our Mission** is to be the leading institution in interdisciplinary health research and education in Africa, in order to influence policy and practice to more effectively address Africa’s health challenges.
Research

HEARD conceives of, conducts, and disseminates innovative trans-disciplinary research to influence public health policy and practice in Africa, with a particular emphasis on engaging with decision-makers and policy-makers. HEARD’s intellectual orientation arises from a recognition that no single discipline or mode of expertise can successfully address deeply impacted health issues; these are never simply bio-medical, but often entail socio-cultural determinants of behaviour, health systems funding and organisation, and the full range of development issues.

HEARD is uniquely equipped and poised to combine data and insights from medical science, politics, economics, sociology, psychology and more to inform both research and practice. Our research draws on an epistemological approach to solving health problems that transcends national boundaries and resonates with local communities (‘global-local relationship’). Our work will continue to be inspired and underpinned by a rights-based approach to health strategies and interventions. We draw on the interests and knowledge of significant actors on all sides and at every level, enabling knowledge sharing and flows of information to facilitate socially beneficial policies and programmes.

We seek to sustain a dynamic research agenda that reflects the changing African burden of disease and catalyses interdisciplinary and innovative work among key researchers across the continent and our international partners. Our research reflects a dedicated and dynamic engagement with Africa’s health challenges, but also seeks to drive an agenda for emerging opportunities in the field of global health, both in Africa and globally. Our agenda is creative and resourceful, focusing on the intersections of diverse investigator expertise and methods.
In the era of Sustainable Development Goals, the importance of linking sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) with HIV is rightly recognised. In Africa, most HIV infections are sexually transmitted or are associated with pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding; moreover, sexual and reproductive ill-health and HIV also share root causes, including poverty, gender inequality, and social marginalization of vulnerable groups. Success in reversing these trends will require far stronger focus in national level research on underlying drivers of discrimination, be they rooted in gender, wealth, ethnic, regional, religious and other identity-based inequalities.

HEARD will seek to materially influence the national agendas on SRHR at several levels. We shall strengthen our data and analytical capabilities to inform approaches to tackling issues around access and protection of rights, particularly for marginalised and vulnerable groups including LGBTI. We will advocate for stronger linkages between SRHR and HIV as a route to improving health outcomes by improving access to and uptake of services, reducing stigma and discrimination, streamlining services and reducing duplication of efforts, increasing the efficient utilization of human resources, and increasing cost-effectiveness. These benefits and the importance of linkages have been recognized in key international and regional agreements including the Maputo Plan of Action.

Since 2015, we have embarked on three important initiatives within its Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights research agenda, looking at:

- Safe and unsafe induced abortion and post abortion care, as well as early pregnancy;
- Integration of HIV and SRHR services, in particular contraception for adolescents;
- Working with LGBTI and key populations to strengthen the legal and policy environment to reduce discrimination and human rights violations.

In each research initiative, our priority is to generate insights into, and a better understanding of, processes that determine and strengthen the sexual and reproductive health of people, as well as their ability to claim their sexual and reproductive rights. The outcomes will contribute to improving and innovating SRHR policies and practices, with a special focus on empowering young people and key populations.

HEARD also seeks to lead a regional debate on progress towards the normative commitments to upscaling the effectiveness of prevention, particularly among adolescents and young men. Central to the analysis will be a focus on achievements in the critical area of integrated services and also progress towards eliminating intimate partner violence – see section on Gender Equality & Health.
Gender Equality & Health

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have a strong focus on gender equality and women’s empowerment, signalling a significant focus and investment on gender equality and health over the next 15 years. A significant shift will be an emphasis on the wider social issues shaping women’s equality, ranging from violence against women, through to carework, economic reform, and legislative reform. In addition, the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality and women’s empowerment has become central to global discourse and practice.

Globally one third of women will experience violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime and women’s experience of violence undermines their health. Recent research demonstrates the burden of intimate partner violence (IPV) is significantly greater in lower-income settings, including Africa. The impact of IPV on women’s health includes greater rates of depression, suicidal ideation, induced abortions, higher pregnancy rates and hospitalisation, as well as reduced participation in the economy. In the next five years there is likely to be a significant shift in the field of preventing violence against women in two ways: first, as a series of large-scale well designed and research driven evaluations are finalised, the discussion will shift towards how to deliver such interventions at scale through national structures, rather than in research settings; second, violence against women will be increasingly linked to issues of men’s violence in other settings as well as violence against children and comprehensive responses can reduce all these forms of violence.

Women’s lack of economic autonomy not only undermines their social and political autonomy and human rights, but also increases their vulnerability to a range of health issues, including intimate partner violence (IPV), poor mental health and poor reproductive and maternal health. The recognised importance of women’s economic empowerment is evident through the recent establishment of the first-ever United Nations High-Level Panel on Women’s Economic Empowerment. Understanding how women’s economic empowerment shapes health outcomes and how supporting women’s economic empowerment can improve women’s health (and that of their children) remains a critical future challenge. Broadly, research needs to understand how economic processes shape women’s economic disempowerment and how both micro- and macro-interventions can build women’s economic power and in turn generate a series of health gains.

Over the past 20 years, working with men and boys has become a central strategy for supporting women’s empowerment and women’s health, and is increasingly recognised for the benefits this can also bring to men. While there is a tendency to frame working with men and boys entirely in positive ways, research needs to understand the challenges and limitations of such interventions, as well as develop novel approaches to ensure men and boys are actively engaged in gender equality work.
Health Governance & Financing

The transition from the Millennium Development Goals to the Sustainable Development Goals, together with decreasing donor support for the fight against HIV/AIDS, increasing health demands and competing, national-level spending priorities place the health ministries of African countries at a difficult juncture. Although the health and health financing issues are configured uniquely for each nation, there are overarching themes, common issues and shared interests.

Achieving adequate and sustained funding will remain fundamental issue, the already visible constraints will oblige us to conceive and contract new partnerships; to welcome a wider range of actors (including the private sector as appropriate); to work assiduously on creating fiscal space and securing efficiency gains; to reanimate and extend prevention programs; to better support the most effective civil society initiatives; and to conceive our strategies on a re-articulation of the founding principles of the United Nations: human rights; social justice and ethical responsibility for protecting vulnerable/key populations.

Our central priorities are to provide effective support for the dialogue on post-2015 health financing. If the new goals are to have any traction, they will have to be underpinned by a new global partnership that goes beyond aid to encompass domestic resource mobilization, national and international tax policies, private investment, and a range of concessional and non-concessional financial flows.

Over the next three years, HEARD will continue its research and partnership consolidation to provide an informed African perspective on the following key questions:

- How can the donor/country-induced burden of entitlement to continue HIV treatment, under a ‘moral duty to rescue’, best be shared to avoid huge debts for the future, reach the Fast Track Targets and end the AIDS epidemic by 2030?
- How much can African low- & middle-income countries be expected to contribute to their HIV and AIDS response, given the rapid economic growth across the region?
- Where is there greatest potential to find domestic fiscal space in low- & middle-income countries and innovative financing, including public-private partnership?
- What might be a realistic timeframe for transition of predominantly externally funded, vertical AIDS programmes to greater ‘country ownership’, without significantly disrupting the AIDS response?
- Where does the HIV epidemic sit amongst the many domestic development concerns and financing of the SDGs, and how might this affect countries’ willingness to prioritise the AIDS response?
Health Systems Strengthening

There is widespread consensus that weak health systems are a major constraint to improving the health of people across low and middle income countries (LMICs), and for providing HIV/AIDS services in particular. At the same time, specific health conditions remain critical concerns, with HIV/AIDS, TB (and increasingly noncommunicable diseases) being clear priorities in many countries, due to their impacts on morbidity, mortality and structural disabilities. In many countries, particularly in southern and eastern Africa, the HIV epidemic continues to pose a major threat to development.

Strengthening health systems in LMICs, especially in the context of unprecedented investment in the HIV and TB sectors, is, therefore, among the most vital seminal research priorities in global health. It requires a multi-pronged, but coordinated, approach that is based on sufficient evidence on the gaps, challenges and opportunities that exist. The relationships between health systems capacity, HIV/AIDS services, and other health and social services are complex and may be mutually reinforcing, leading to both virtuous and vicious cycles. As such it cannot be said that solutions to meet this challenge will be uniform across LMICs – particularly in Africa where different countries and sub-regions exhibit varying strengths, weaknesses and capabilities (both human and structural).

At the outset, however, it is vital to obtain sound evidence and to add to that which already exists, in order to devise practical solutions. The Health Systems Strengthening programme aims to tackle the seminal question of how to deliver optimal health services to the greatest number of people within a particular fiscal space. Our work in this vital area will consider the following:

- Effects that HIV policies and programmes are having, and have had, on health systems development in heavily burdened Southern African countries.
- Functional bottlenecks, from individual to national level, for effective implementation of health systems development and HIV services.
- Contribution of existing HIV, TB and health financial contributions to the strengthening of health systems and scaling up to universal access.
- Contribution of synergistic approaches between HIV and health systems development to better health and HIV outcomes, including key populations.
- Potential positive impact on health systems of the adoption of innovations such as new technologies, management techniques and organisational procedures.
Over the past 15 years, we have built a global reputation in leading applied research, bringing together interdisciplinary teams to solve complex health problems and to train the next generation of leaders in African health policy and research. Our educational programmes cross disciplines, geographic borders, and levels of learners; emphasise problem-based and experiential learning methodologies; and explore innovation transfer within the global south, as well as north-south and south-north knowledge exchange.

Individual states and the international community are facing health challenges of an ever increasing scale and complexity. Effective and progressive national health governance demands the commitment of generations of exceptional individuals with raw talent, intellectual sophistication and discerning management skills, but above all, the vision and the wisdom to lead. Equally, successful delivery of health programmes requires technically trained and socially sensitised health practitioners to provide competent, non-discriminatory diagnosis, treatment and care. HEARD’s PhD programme and Learning Centre workshops offer information and training to support the professional development of health leaders and practitioners in Africa.

Community involvement in health has been recognised over the past thirty years as central for primary health care and accepted as an essential element in many public health interventions, notably in addressing the HIV epidemic. HEARD seeks to support community involvement through building capacity to empower communities to take on both social and technical responsibilities. HEARD’s Learning Centre provides information and guidance to community-based organisations involved in health, and offers workshops to support capacity development.
PhD Programme

Over the past 15 years, HEARD has built a global reputation as a leading applied research Centre that brings together interdisciplinary teams to solve complex health problems and to train the next generation of African health leaders. Our priority research themes reflect a committed and dynamic engagement with enduring concerns in Africa’s health challenges, as well as a responsive approach in driving a research agenda for emerging opportunities in the field of global health. Our shared vision is to bring academic excellence to meet Africa’s health challenges of today and tomorrow to achieve health equity across the continent. Our vision speaks to our goal of becoming the leading institution in interdisciplinary health education in Africa.

Programme Aim

The HEARD Doctoral Programme is designed to produce leaders in focused areas of HIV/AIDS and African health research. The program will, through its emphasis on the mastery of quantitative and qualitative analysis, provide robust training for understanding particular policy problems and for evaluating, devising or implementing policy solutions. Those awarded the degree will be expertly qualified to advise or be part of governments or other influential policy-making organisations in Africa.

Programme Objectives

- To catalyse and conduct interdisciplinary and innovative research to respond to Africa’s burden of disease and influence policy.
- To create a robust network of international partners to exchange global health knowledge and skills as they relate to Africa.
- To implement new educational methodologies and cutting-edge research approaches to address health challenges and to discover and evaluate innovations in health care provision in Africa.
Fellowships

HEARD recruits postdoctoral fellows, for limited periods, with a research trajectory aligned to HEARD’s priority research areas. Post-doctoral fellows have the opportunity to engage and collaborate with colleagues who share their research interests, while bringing different knowledge, experience, connections and perspectives. Our Visiting Researcher scheme enables researchers to join HEARD during a period of sabbatical leave from their home institution. The scheme aims to enrich the intellectual life at HEARD and facilitate links to Visiting Researchers’ home institutions globally, and encourage international research collaborations. Visiting Researchers benefit from the data library, and HEARD’s partnerships within the sector, as well as a base for international researchers seeking to carry out field research in Africa.

Internships

HEARD is offering a dynamic research internship programme for young scholars in the public health and allied sciences field. The purpose of the intern programme is to train and mentor young researchers from Africa on the pathway towards early career researchers, and ultimately increase the human resource base of researchers working on the Africa continent. The intern programme strives to forge links between UKZN and other universities worldwide through the avenue of applied research and policy interventions on global health issues.

Learning Centre

The HEARD Learning Centre is a new initiative to share the practical resources we produce in the course of our research, policy engagement, and training events. We are also looking to develop and facilitate a programme of workshops and a seminar series, for example in health-related project planning and project management, proposal writing, monitoring and evaluation, and reporting, among others.
Support

Our mission is to influence and support evidence-based policy and good practice to more effectively address Africa’s health challenges and contribute to achieving health equity on the continent. Our applied research and our connectivities within civil society and affected communities enable us to bring valuable evidence and insight to health debates, policies and practices, while our technical expertise in, for example, situational analysis, strategy and programme development, health economics and financing, monitoring and evaluation, and capacity development, serve to strengthen particular health sector processes, outputs and outcomes.

We primarily seek to increase the impact of our research and expertise through:

- High level technical assistance to governments, international agencies and other health sector partners, including short-term consultancies for discrete assignments as well as longer term contractual agreements to provide broad-based strategic support to institutions.
- Effective communication of research evidence and analysis, including policy-friendly publications, social media and an accessible and information-rich website.
- Leadership or membership of influential groups and events, including think tanks, networks, panels, working groups, discussions, conferences, and more.