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Applying Implementation Research Principles to Enhance Cancer Detection in Southern Africa: A Case Study of AWACAN-ED

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Effective implementation research is critical for addressing global health challenges, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) where resource constraints and health disparities are prevalent. The African aWareness of CANcer & Early Diagnosis (AWACAN-ED) project is an NIHR-funded Global Health Research Group focusing on Advancing Early Diagnosis of Cancer in Southern Africa. This project exemplifies the application of implementation research principles to improve cancer diagnosis and treatment in Southern Africa. This paper explores how AWACAN-ED aligns with seven key principles of implementation research: local relevance and contextualization, stakeholder engagement, ethical considerations, monitoring and evaluation, communication and dissemination, sustainability, and capacity building with supportive supervision. AWACAN-ED focuses on developing e-tools for early cancer detection while integrating its activities into existing healthcare frameworks, ensuring long-term sustainability and scalability. It prioritizes local stakeholder engagement, ethical rigour, and robust capacity-building initiatives to empower researchers and health practitioners. The project employs comprehensive monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to adapt interventions and maximize impact. AWACAN-ED's ability to translate research findings into actionable policies highlights its policy-relevant research approach, creating frameworks for cancer costing and management that influence health system strengthening. By examining the successes and challenges of AWACAN-ED, this paper provides valuable insights into the effective implementation of health initiatives in LMICs. The findings emphasize the importance of sustainable planning, community engagement, and adaptive learning to achieve meaningful, lasting health outcomes. AWACAN-ED serves as a model for cancer care implementation research and underscores the potential of similar programs to address critical health issues globally.

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INTRODUCTION

Cancer represents a growing public health crisis in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), where resource constraints and systemic challenges often undermine effective prevention, early detection, and treatment efforts (1). In Southern Africa, cervical, breast, and colorectal cancers account for significant morbidity and mortality, emphasizing the urgent need for tailored and sustainable interventions (2). Addressing these gaps requires a robust framework for adapting evidence-based interventions to local health systems—an approach championed by implementation research.

Implementation research serves as a bridge between theory and practice, ensuring evidence-based interventions are effectively integrated into real-world settings. Initially applied in education and public health, this discipline has become indispensable in healthcare, focusing on scalability, sustainability, and contextual relevance. It emphasizes stakeholder collaboration, continuous monitoring, and adherence to ethical principles to optimize intervention uptake and long-term impact. By adapting interventions to local contexts, implementation research enhances their relevance, thereby improving health outcomes on a broader scale (3).

The African aWAreness of CANcer & Early Diagnosis (AWACAN-ED) initiative exemplifies best practices in implementation research. This

collaborative effort, led by Queen Mary University of London with partners from South Africa, Zimbabwe, and the UK, focuses on early detection of cervical, breast, and colorectal cancers in Southern Africa. Through the development of innovative e-tools, capacity-building programs, and stakeholder engagement, AWACAN-ED addresses critical gaps in cancer care delivery while aligning with local health priorities (4).

This paper evaluates AWACAN-ED's approach to implementation research, exploring its adherence to seven core principles: local relevance, stakeholder engagement, ethical considerations, monitoring and evaluation, communication, sustainability, and capacity building. By highlighting the initiative's achievements and challenges, the paper aims to offer insights and lessons for advancing global health initiatives, particularly in regions burdened by systemic health inequities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Growing Burden of Cancer in LMICs

Cancer is a leading cause of death worldwide, with low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) bearing a disproportionate burden of cases and fatalities. By 2030, approximately 70% of global cancer deaths are projected to occur in LMICs, driven by limited access to early detection, diagnosis, and treatment services (1). Southern Africa, in particular, faces significant challenges due to weak healthcare infrastructure, resource constraints, and a lack of

awareness about early cancer symptoms (2). Cervical, breast, and colorectal cancers are among the most prevalent in the region, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to address these disparities.

Importance of Early Detection and Diagnosis

Early detection plays a crucial role in reducing cancer mortality and improving survival rates. Studies indicate that survival rates for many cancers are significantly higher when diagnosed at an early stage (5). However, in LMICs, barriers such as limited diagnostic technologies, lack of trained healthcare professionals, and cultural stigma often result in delayed diagnosis and treatment (6). Innovations such as e-tools and community-based screening programs have shown promise in bridging these gaps, enabling earlier identification and treatment of cancer (7).

Implementation Research: Bridging the Gap between Evidence and Practice

Implementation research has emerged as a critical field in global health, addressing the challenges of translating evidence-based interventions into routine practice. It emphasizes stakeholder engagement, contextual adaptation, and sustainability to ensure that interventions meet the unique needs of target populations (3). In LMICs, this approach has proven effective in strengthening health systems and scaling up interventions for non-communicable diseases (NCDs), including cancer.

AWACAN-ED: A Model for Implementation Research in Africa

The African aWareness of CANcer & Early Diagnosis (AWACAN-ED) initiative exemplifies the principles of implementation research by addressing cancer care gaps in Southern Africa. The project's focus on cervical, breast, and colorectal cancers aligns with the region's health priorities, while its use of e-tools and capacity-building programs demonstrates a commitment to innovation and sustainability (4). Stakeholder collaboration, including partnerships with local healthcare

providers and policymakers, has been a cornerstone of AWACAN-ED's success, ensuring the relevance and scalability of its interventions.

Lessons from Similar Initiatives

Other implementation research initiatives in LMICs have provided valuable insights into best practices for scaling up cancer care. For example, the HPV Vaccination Program in Rwanda achieved over 90% coverage among adolescent girls by integrating vaccination into existing school health programs and engaging community stakeholders (8). Similarly, the Breast Health Global Initiative has highlighted the importance of resource-stratified guidelines for improving breast cancer care in LMICs (9). These examples underscore the importance of tailoring interventions to local contexts and ensuring active stakeholder participation.

Gaps in the Literature

While significant progress has been made in understanding the principles of implementation research, there remain gaps in its application to cancer care in LMICs. Limited documentation exists on the long-term sustainability and scalability of cancer-focused implementation research initiatives. Furthermore, few studies have explored the integration of innovative e-tools into existing health systems in resource-constrained settings. Addressing these gaps is essential for advancing cancer care and achieving global health equity.

METHODOLOGY

This paper employs a case study approach to evaluate the African aWareness of CANcer & Early Diagnosis (AWACAN-ED). Data was sourced from project reports, peer-reviewed publications, and interviews with key stakeholders involved in the initiative. The analysis focuses on seven principles of implementation research: local relevance, stakeholder engagement, ethical considerations, monitoring and evaluation,

communication, sustainability, and capacity building.

For each principle, qualitative data was analyzed to assess how AWACAN-ED applied these principles to achieve its objectives. Case comparisons with similar projects, including the African Cancer Network and the Expanded Program on Immunization, were conducted to highlight best practices and identify transferable lessons. Interviews with researchers and healthcare practitioners provided additional insights into the challenges and successes encountered during the project.

Key indicators of success, such as stakeholder satisfaction, system integration, and the scalability of interventions, were evaluated to determine the project's impact. The analysis emphasizes practical approaches to overcoming resource limitations and adapting interventions to local contexts, ensuring the findings are relevant for application in similar LMIC settings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Principle 1: Local Relevance and Contextualization

Understanding Local Needs

Southern Africa has a high cancer burden despite poor diagnostic services. The World Health Organization predicts that by 2030, nearly 24 million people worldwide will have cancer, with a large burden in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) (10). AWACAN-ED focuses on common, detectable cancers in women, as well as colorectal cancer in both genders, to directly address the region's important health needs. The project's focus is on the pressing needs of the local healthcare landscape, assuring relevance and quick applicability.

In comparison, the African Cancer Registry Network (AFCRN) has also emphasized the importance of understanding local cancer burdens to tailor interventions appropriately (11). However,

AWACAN-ED goes a step further by not only identifying prevalent cancers but also developing specific e-tools aimed at early diagnosis, which is crucial in a region where late-stage presentation is common.

Cultural Sensitivity

AWACAN-ED tailors its interventions to the cultural norms and practices of the communities it serves, ensuring that the tools and methods are appropriate and effective. For example, the project involves local healthcare providers in the design and implementation of e-tools, which improves cultural acceptability and usability. This approach is similar to the work done by the Breast Health Global Initiative (BHGI), which has successfully implemented breast cancer guidelines in LMICs by incorporating local cultural and socioeconomic factors (12).

Furthermore, AWACAN-ED has integrated local languages and culturally relevant materials into its training and outreach programs, increasing awareness and access. This level of contextualization ensures that interventions resonate with the target population, thereby improving uptake and efficacy. In contrast, some initiatives, like the PEPFAR program for HIV/AIDS, initially faced challenges due to a lack of cultural adaptation, which AWACAN-ED has proactively addressed from the outset (13).

Community Engagement

Engaging the local community is another crucial aspect of contextualization that AWACAN-ED excels in. The project collaborates with community leaders and local organizations to build trust and facilitate the dissemination of information. This strategy has been effective in increasing community participation and support for cancer screening and early diagnosis initiatives.

For example, in Zimbabwe, AWACAN-ED collaborates closely with local healthcare providers and community health workers to ensure that the e-

tools are not only accessible but also usable by both the general population and healthcare professionals (14). This participatory strategy is similar to effective community engagement tactics used in other health interventions, such as Swaziland's Malaria Elimination Initiative, which has resulted in considerable decreases in malaria incidence through strong community participation (15).

AWACAN-ED adheres to Principle 1 of local relevance and contextualization, which establishes a standard for African implementation research initiatives. By recognizing local needs, displaying cultural sensitivity, and engaging the community, AWACAN-ED guarantees that its activities are both relevant and effective. This approach not only tackles current healthcare concerns but also establishes a long-term framework for future health interventions in the region.

Principle 2: Stakeholder Engagement and Partnership

Community Involvement

Involving local populations is essential to implementation research success. This is best demonstrated by AWACAN-ED, which works with partners in Zimbabwe, the UK, and South Africa to make sure the study is based on local conditions and has the backing of the community (4). This strategy is similar to that of other well-run programs, such as the Tanzania Health Promotion Support (THPS) project, which has successfully involved local people in improving HIV/AIDS care and treatment (16). Community health workers and local leaders play a crucial role in AWACAN-ED by raising community understanding about early cancer diagnosis and the use of e-tools, which in turn promotes community trust and engagement.

Collaborative Partnerships

The AWACAN-ED project is a partnership between researchers in Southern Africa and the UK, led by Queen Mary University of London. This collaboration includes studentships for Masters and

PhD students and the establishment of the AWACAN-ED Southern African School for Cancer Research (2). These partnerships ensure a bi-directional flow of knowledge and resources, enhancing the project's effectiveness and sustainability. Similar successful collaborations can be seen in the H3Africa initiative, which has built robust networks among African researchers and international partners to address health challenges through genomic research (17).

Capacity Building

AWACAN-ED prioritizes the development of local research capacity through training programs and mentorship, as well as the promotion of regional knowledge and collaboration. This is crucial for creating a sustainable health research environment. The project offers thorough training to Masters and PhD students, preparing the future generation of cancer researchers. This method is similar to the Malaria Capacity Development Consortium (MCDC), which has considerably improved malaria research capacity in Africa via extensive training and mentorship programs (18).

Sustained Engagement

AWACAN-ED's engagement with local institutions and stakeholders ensures sustained collaboration beyond the project's timeline. By establishing the AWACAN-ED Southern African School for Cancer Research, the project not only addresses immediate research needs but also builds a lasting infrastructure for ongoing cancer research and diagnosis improvements. This long-term perspective is essential for the enduring impact of implementation research, as demonstrated by the South African Tuberculosis Vaccine Initiative (SATVI), which has established long-term partnerships to support TB vaccine research and development (19).

Principle 3: Ethical Considerations

Informed Consent and Ethical Approval

Ensuring ethical considerations in implementation research is critical, especially in scenarios involving vulnerable populations. AWACAN-ED illustrates this by obtaining informed permission from all participants, ensuring that they understand the research's risks and benefits. This procedure is critical for sustaining transparency and confidence. The project has received ethical approval from various local and international boards, in accordance with the established standards. This is similar to many leading implementation research projects including the International Network for the Demographic Evaluation of Populations and Their Health (INDEPTH) in Africa which also follows strict ethical guidelines to safeguard participants' rights and well-being (20).

Respect for Autonomy

Respecting the autonomy of participants is a cornerstone of ethical research. AWACAN-ED upholds this principle by ensuring that participation is voluntary and that individuals can withdraw at any time without any negative repercussions. This respect for autonomy is mirrored in the work of the African Partnership for Chronic Disease Research (APCDR), which emphasizes the importance of voluntary participation and informed decision-making in its research endeavours (21).

Privacy and Data Protection

AWACAN-ED likewise promotes participant confidentiality and data security. The project implements strong data protection procedures to ensure that sensitive information is safely maintained and only accessed by authorized persons. This strategy is congruent with best practices found in the KEMRI-Wellcome Trust Research Programme in Kenya, which employs strong data protection policies to preserve participant information (22).

Community Engagement and Cultural Sensitivity.

In addition to traditional ethical principles, AWACAN-ED incorporates community

engagement and cultural awareness into its ethical framework. By incorporating local people in research design and implementation, the project guarantees that interventions are culturally acceptable and ethical. This practice is similar to the approaches used by the Malawi-Liverpool-Wellcome Trust Clinical Research Programme, which emphasizes the importance of cultural sensitivity and community involvement in ethical research (23).

Transparency and Accountability

AWACAN-ED maintains a high level of transparency and accountability throughout the research process. Regular updates and findings are shared with stakeholders, including participants, community leaders, and funding bodies. This transparency fosters trust and ensures that all parties are kept informed about the project's progress and outcomes. The Wellcome Trust's collaborative projects in Africa often highlight the importance of maintaining transparency and accountability to uphold ethical standards and build trust within communities (24).

Principle 4: Monitoring and Evaluation

Continuous Monitoring

Effective monitoring is essential for the success of any implementation research project, ensuring that interventions remain on track and meet their objectives. AWACAN-ED exemplifies this principle through its robust system of continuous monitoring. The project employs real-time data collection and analysis to track progress against predefined benchmarks. This approach allows for timely adjustments and ensures that the project remains responsive to emerging challenges. Similarly, the Africa Research Excellence Fund (AREF) emphasizes continuous monitoring of its grant-funded projects to ensure adherence to project goals and timely problem resolution. (25)

Impact Evaluation

AWACAN-ED also shows a significant commitment to impact evaluation. The initiative undertakes rigorous assessments to determine the efficacy of its e-tools and other interventions. This involves assessing the tool's usability, its effect on early cancer detection rates, and overall health outcomes. By thoroughly examining these aspects, AWACAN-ED guarantees that its interventions are not only effective but also provide useful insights for future study and implementation. The Kenya Medical Research Institute (KEMRI) (26) takes a similar strategy, conducting impact evaluations to examine the outcomes of health programs and inform future plans.

Feedback Mechanisms

Incorporating feedback from participants and stakeholders is crucial for refining and improving implementation research projects. AWACAN-ED actively engages with its stakeholders to gather feedback on various aspects of the project, from the functionality of e-tools to the overall user experience. This feedback is integral to the iterative process of project refinement, helping to address issues and enhance the effectiveness of interventions. This approach mirrors practices observed in the Tuberculosis Research Network (TB-RN) in South Africa, where stakeholder feedback is used to continuously improve research protocols and outcomes (27).

Comparative Analysis

Comparing AWACAN-ED's monitoring and evaluation practices with other regional projects highlights its strengths and adherence to best practices. For instance, the Malaria Consortium's Project in Uganda employs rigorous monitoring and evaluation methods, similar to those used by AWACAN-ED, to ensure the effectiveness of malaria control interventions (28). Both projects demonstrate the importance of continuous monitoring, impact evaluation, and stakeholder feedback in optimizing health interventions.

Principle 5: Communication and Dissemination

Effective Communication

AWACAN-ED emphasizes the importance of good communication in implementation research. The project uses a comprehensive communication strategy to guarantee that its findings are clearly and effectively communicated to all stakeholders, including the local community, legislators, and the broader healthcare industry. This includes regular updates via reports, public presentations, and media interactions with the goal of lobbying for policy changes and strengthening healthcare systems. For example, the project's workshops and community outreach programs aim to raise awareness about the need for early cancer detection and encourage the use of its e-tools. This proactive communication strategy is critical for influencing policy and accelerating systemic improvements. Similarly, the Health Research and Innovation Strategy for Africa (HRISA) utilizes robust communication strategies to share research outcomes and advocate for health policy reforms across the continent (29).

Knowledge Sharing

In addition to effective communication, AWACAN-ED considers knowledge sharing to be a critical component of its dissemination strategy. The initiative actively seeks to share insights, best practices, and research findings with other researchers and practitioners. This is accomplished through academic papers, conference presentations, and partnerships with regional and worldwide research networks. By participating in these forums, AWACAN-ED not only adds to the worldwide body of knowledge but also fosters a collaborative learning environment that benefits the entire cancer research community. For example, the Partnership for Research in Southern Africa (PRSA) promotes knowledge exchange among academics to improve the impact of health initiatives throughout the region. (30)

Comparative Analysis

Comparing AWACAN-ED's communication and dissemination practices with other regional projects

highlights its strengths and adherence to best practices. The Health Systems Strengthening Initiative (HSSI) (31) in East Africa, for instance, employs a well-developed communication strategy to disseminate its findings and engage stakeholders effectively. Both HSSI and AWACAN-ED illustrate the critical role of clear communication and knowledge sharing in driving research impact and facilitating health system improvements.

Principle 6: Sustainability

Long-term Planning

Sustainability is an important part of implementation research since it ensures that the benefits of a project last beyond the initial funding term. AWACAN-ED exhibits this approach by focusing on the long-term impact of cancer diagnosis and treatment. The project is intended to create capacity and infrastructure that will continue to benefit communities long after it is completed. For example, AWACAN-ED's activities to develop e-tools for early cancer detection are designed not only to make immediate gains but also to interact with and strengthen existing healthcare frameworks. This method is similar to the African Cancer Network's (ACN) model (17), which emphasizes sustainability by integrating interventions within local health systems to ensure ongoing benefits after the project is completed.

Resource Allocation

Efficient resource allocation is essential for achieving sustainability in implementation research. AWACAN-ED demonstrates this by prioritizing the strategic use of its resources to build lasting infrastructure and capabilities within Southern Africa's healthcare systems. The project invests in training programs, local research capacity, and technological infrastructure, all of which contribute to the sustainability of its outcomes. By focusing on these areas, AWACAN-ED ensures that its interventions are not only effective but also economically viable in the long term. This approach is akin to that of the Sustainable Health Systems

Initiative (SHSI), which employs similar strategies to ensure that its resource allocation supports long-term health system strengthening (32).

Integration with Existing Systems

To be sustainable, a project must integrate with and support current health systems and regulations. AWACAN-ED achieves this by integrating its initiatives into Southern Africa's existing healthcare structure. The initiative works with local health authorities to match its tactics with national health policies, ensuring that its work complements and strengthens existing efforts. This integration is crucial for building support and ensuring that the project's innovations are seamlessly integrated into everyday healthcare practices. A similar example is the Regional Health Integration Project (RHIP) in West Africa, which successfully connects its interventions with national health systems to increase their sustainability and impact (33).

Scalability

Scalability is a key consideration for sustaining the benefits of an implementation research project. AWACAN-ED's interventions are designed with scalability in mind, allowing them to be expanded to other regions or contexts if successful. This design feature ensures that the project's innovations in cancer diagnosis can potentially reach a broader audience, extending the benefits to additional areas within Southern Africa and beyond. For instance, the Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI) in East Africa showcases similar scalability by applying successful vaccination strategies across multiple countries, thus amplifying the impact of its initial interventions (34).

Principle 7: Capacity Building and Supportive Supervision.

The success of any implementation research project is largely determined by how well it builds the capacities of local researchers and practitioners, as well as how effective the supervision and mentorship provided within the project are. In the

case of AWACAN-ED, the project has exemplified how focused capacity building and robust supervision can not only produce high-quality research outcomes but also foster long-term sustainability in the fight against cancer in Southern Africa. In this principle, we delve into four key subtopics that highlight how AWACAN-ED serves as a model of effective implementation research by promoting capacity building and providing supportive supervision.

Personal Motivation and Connection to the Research

One of the unique aspects of implementation research, particularly in regions like Africa, is the personal connection many researchers have with the topics they are studying. This deeply personal motivation often translates into a higher level of commitment and passion for their work. In the AWACAN-ED project, many researchers are not just motivated by the scientific importance of their work but also by personal experiences that fuel their desire to make a difference.

"I got into cancer research because I have personal experience with my mum having cancer," shared one of the AWACAN-ED-sponsored researchers.

This narrative is common among other researchers in the project, particularly those who are gynaecologists working closely with women. They have firsthand experience of the devastating impact that cancer has on health, especially in underserved communities. This personal connection drives a deeper level of dedication and commitment, which is essential for success in implementation research. By connecting personal experiences with professional expertise, researchers are able to approach their work with both empathy and rigour, ensuring that the research remains focused on the real needs of the community.

Quality Supervision and Mentorship

A key component of capacity building in any research project is the quality of supervision and mentorship provided to researchers. AWACAN-ED has placed a strong emphasis on ensuring that its researchers receive both technical guidance and motivational support. High-quality supervision ensures that the researchers stay on course, meet the required standards of excellence, and are continuously pushed to grow in their capacities.

"AWACAN-ED offers knowledgeable supervisors who are both technical and firm in ensuring excellence of the researcher, encouraging us to work hard."

This quote captures the balance that AWACAN-ED supervisors strike between providing technical expertise and maintaining high standards of excellence. In similar projects across Africa, supportive supervision is crucial not only for producing impactful research but also for building a cadre of skilled researchers who can continue the work even after the project ends. The mentorship provided in such environments helps researchers overcome challenges, learn how to navigate complex problems and develop the confidence to lead their own projects in the future.

Overcoming Challenges and Encouraging Excellence

Research in low-resource settings often comes with a host of challenges—limited funding, inadequate infrastructure, and logistical difficulties, to name a few. However, overcoming these challenges is an integral part of implementation research, and it often pushes researchers to stretch beyond their perceived limits, achieving excellence in the process.

"The research looked demanding initially, and you are challenged to go beyond your limits to produce excellent results."

This reflection from one of the AWACAN-ED researchers highlights the role that challenge plays in fostering excellence. In environments where

resources are constrained, projects like AWACAN-ED create a supportive framework that enables researchers to push past these barriers. Rather than being daunted by the challenges, the researchers are encouraged to view them as opportunities for growth. This type of environment is essential in Africa, where overcoming structural and systemic challenges is often part of the research process. The capacity to rise above these difficulties is what sets successful projects apart and ensures that they produce high-impact, scalable results.

Practical and Policy-Relevant Research

At its core, implementation research is meant to address real-world problems and offer practical solutions that can be implemented by policymakers and practitioners. In the case of AWACAN-ED, the research being conducted is not only academically rigorous but also highly relevant to the pressing needs of the communities and governments involved. This focus on practical, policy-relevant research ensures that the findings are not only published in journals but are also used to shape health policies and improve healthcare delivery.

"The research is really useful in providing frameworks for cancer costing and management. This is pivotal for the community we work in and for the government as well."

This feedback from an AWACAN-ED researcher underscores the importance of aligning research objectives with the needs of both the community and the government. In cancer research, understanding the costs associated with diagnosis, treatment, and management is crucial for developing effective health policies. By providing clear frameworks for cancer costing and management, AWACAN-ED is contributing to a body of knowledge that can inform decision-making at the highest levels of government. Projects that successfully bridge the gap between academic research and policy implementation are the ones that create lasting, systemic change in healthcare systems.

CONCLUSION

When it comes to the successful implementation of research principles, AWACAN-ED displays best practices in a variety of domains. The project's emphasis on common cancers seen in Southern Africa, such as cervical, breast, and colorectal cancers, demonstrates its commitment to Principle 1, "Local Relevance and Contextualization." Addressing these specific demands ensures that AWACAN-ED's activities are relevant and effective in the local environment. This strategy is complemented by Principle 2, "Stakeholder Engagement and Partnership," in which AWACAN-ED actively engages local communities and forms strong relationships in South Africa, Zimbabwe, and the United Kingdom. This collaborative methodology not only garners community support but also incorporates a wide range of expertise into the research process.

Principle 3, "Ethical Considerations," is rigorously applied in AWACAN-ED through comprehensive informed consent procedures and adherence to ethical standards set by both local and international boards. This commitment to ethical research practices ensures respect for participants' autonomy and rights. Furthermore, Principle 4, "Monitoring and Evaluation," is effectively implemented through AWACAN-ED's robust monitoring systems and impact evaluations. Continuous feedback mechanisms help refine and enhance the project's interventions, demonstrating a commitment to adaptive learning and improvement.

The project's dedication to Principle 5, "Communication and Dissemination," is evidenced by its clear strategies for sharing findings and advocating for policy changes. AWACAN-ED's efforts to disseminate knowledge and engage with broader communities highlight its role in fostering collaborative learning environments. Principle 6, "Sustainability," is a cornerstone of AWACAN-ED's approach, with long-term planning, efficient resource allocation, integration with existing systems, and scalability being central to its strategy.

This ensures that the project's benefits extend well beyond its initial phase and can be adapted to other regions. Finally, principle 7 “Capacity building and supportive supervision” highlights the cornerstone of implementation research. Capacity building and supportive supervision are not just add-ons to implementation research; they are fundamental pillars that determine the success of the project and its long-term impact. AWACAN-ED demonstrates how a well-structured approach to capacity building can empower local researchers, instill a culture of excellence, and produce research that is both academically and practically valuable. Through personal motivation, quality mentorship, overcoming challenges, and policy-relevant research, AWACAN-ED has set an example for how implementation research projects in Africa should be designed and executed.

Call to Action

It is critical that policymakers, healthcare practitioners, and the international health community support and develop projects like AWACAN-ED. The adoption and promotion of the AWACAN-ED model has the potential to improve cancer diagnosis and treatment not just in Southern Africa, but also in other low- and middle-income nations. The success of such programs can serve as a model for EU-funded initiatives in developing countries, ensuring that they are developed with local requirements, ethical standards, and long-term sustainability in mind.

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