

# The International Environmental Health Research and Training Platform in Ghana

## 1. Background

A consortium that includes so far the

- Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Kumasi, Ghana;
- University of Ghana, Accra,;
- International Water Management Institute (IWMI), West Africa Regional Office, Ghana;
- University of Copenhagen, Denmark and
- Emory University, Atlanta, USA

and which is open to any possible partner from research, training and development, has been set up to support the establishment of a **Platform** that would focus on research and university level training in environmental health in Ghana and in the West African region. The current consortium represents a diversity of disciplines, ranging from engineering, land use planning, water resources management, veterinary sciences, medicine, public health, anthropology and behavioral sciences.

The partners are supporting a Platform coordinating office, so far hosted by KNUST-IWMI in Kumasi. The office has so far provided logistical support to several environmental health research proposals and projects. It has supported many students from Europe, Ghana and the US undertaking studies in public health, microbiology, medical anthropology, sociology and agricultural sciences in Ghana. The coordinating office has demonstrated the importance of forming a platform to pool resources, share information across projects, and facilitate collaboration among several national and international partners, for the promotion of interdisciplinary research. This has especially promoted interdisciplinary research. The Platform infrastructure has also provided support for cross visits and development of joint research protocols between institutions in Ghana and Mali. To expand the geographical focus and increase the level of activities, external funding needs to be secured.

## 2. Research topics

To date, the consortium behind the Platform has identified research topics that include a focus on:

- health impacts of wastewater-based irrigation of vegetables, and related risk mitigation;
- qualitative studies analyzing the hygiene and risk perceptions of street food vendors;
- studies of barriers to sanitation and hygiene promotion at household and school levels;
- management of pesticides; and
- studies of malaria transmission and control.

However, the Platform is open towards new topics related to environmental health as long as several of the partners support the activities.

## 3. Aims of the Platform

- Strengthen North-South linkages by enhancing on one hand the capacity for environmental health research of Southern partners, while giving Northern partners access to a network of local partners and infrastructure for field studies;
- Coordinate and optimize the use of research, information sharing and training infrastructure among Platform partners, thus providing leverage and matching funds;
- Identify needs for research capacity development and research priorities related to environmental health in Ghana and in the West African region;
- Develop and organize Masters and PhD level courses in collaboration between Southern and Northern Platform partners;
- Facilitate the development and strengthen the quality of research proposals being developed among the Platform partners;
- Strengthen the national and international dissemination of research findings and engage in dialogue to inform sector policies in the private as well as public arena by using already established local networks and impact pathways; and
- Provide an established Platform for donors to engage with a coordinated consortium of well respected institutions covering multiple disciplines.

#### **4. Organization and Management of the Platform**

There are three institutional arrangements to make the platform operational: an advisory board, a steering committee and a platform coordinator.

##### ***Advisory Board***

Once each year, during the month of October, an Advisory Board comprising of seven members covering implementing agencies, policy makers and the national research council meets for half a day to discuss the progress of the Platform, research priorities, needs for capacity building activities, fund raising strategies and the key findings from ongoing research linked to the Platform. The role of the Advisory Board is to assist the Platform partners in prioritizing research questions and training needs and to facilitate the dissemination of findings to national stakeholders and policy makers. The members of the Advisory Board also assists with the identification of funding opportunities and may propose new institutions or individuals that could be relevant for inclusion in proposed projects or as members of the Platform.

The Advisory Board has membership from local Ministries in charge of Environment and Public Health, the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, the subregional WHO or UNICEF office and the two major donors, with the platform coordinating institution as ex-officio.

##### ***Steering Committee (SC)***

For practical reasons, the number of representatives in the SC is limited to 5, selected by all platform partners by vote. The Steering Committee appoints the Platform Coordinator, who holds the position for a period of two years at a time, and draws up the terms of reference and conditions of appointment for the Platform Coordinator. The Platform Coordinator is a non voting member of the Committee. The Steering Committee holds two meetings each year, with one immediately following the Advisory Board meeting in October. The Steering Committee approves the annual work program for the Platform, agrees to the inclusion of new projects and activities onto the Platform and discuss strategic directions for funding, research and training activities. The Steering Committee ensures that projects have received the necessary ethical and research clearances. The Steering Committee presents platform reports at the Advisory Board meetings.

##### ***Platform Coordinator***

The daily activities of the Platform are coordinated by a Research Coordinator, appointed by the Steering Committee. The Research Coordinator presents an annual draft work plan and draft budget to be discussed and approved by the Steering Committee. The Researcher Coordinator is expected to be an active researcher and will be allocated time for research activities.

##### **Project research and training activities**

Projects that form part of the Platform portfolio should involve a minimum of two Platform partners. They will be presented and approved by the Steering Committee. The financial and overall reporting and managerial responsibilities of the majority of the ongoing Platform projects and future projects should ideally be with one of the Platform partners who is mutually accepted by the others and in particular by the donor community. This should however not limit any other institution to lead projects or link new projects to the Platform. Only few of the projects would be directly managed by the Platform Secretariat and the Platform Research Coordinator. However, it is expected that new projects submitted by Platform partners and agreed to by the Steering Committee should have a budget allocation to support the Platform.

**Contact:** Bernard Keraita (b.keraita@cgiar.org)