iCHORDS

improving
Community
Health
Outcomes through
Research,
Dialogue and
Systems Strengthening

iCHORDS
Progress
Report

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Executive summary

iCHORDS is a community of practice established in 2020 in response to a need for social and behavioural science-based research to reach the WHO 2030 NTD Roadmap targets.

The primary target audience of iCHORDS is those working or interested in the intersection of neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) and the social and behavioural sciences. The definition of the social and behavioural sciences may cover many disciplines but generally refers to those based in anthropology, psychology, economics, sociology, implementation research, program delivery, community mobilization, and capacity strengthening.

iCHORDS at a glance:
- iCHORDS has over 445 members from more than 55 different countries.
- The iCHORDS *Last Mile Podcast* has had more than 1100 plays across 11 episodes.
- So far, iCHORDS has held 12 knowledge exchange cafes with a combined attendance of 452 participants.
- The iCHORDS website has more than 32 blog posts that discuss research methods, iCHORDS events and community member highlights.
- iCHORDS has more than 820 followers on Twitter.
- 70+ members have collaborated to develop cross-cutting, topical and high priority deliverables to support the effort towards NTD elimination.
- 2 separate rounds of mentor-mentee pairs have been launched.

iCHORDS continues to grow, and has proven to be an invaluable resource for connecting individuals working in NTDs and the social sciences, particularly reaching those in the early-mid stages of their career.

iCHORDS aims to increase collaboration across those working in NTDs and the social sciences, especially to expand its reach in South-East Asian countries, and to develop goals that support WHO research and development in support of the 2030 roadmap.

Acknowledgements

A special thank you to those who have served on the iCHORDS Steering Committee and the iCHORDS Mentorship Program Committee. Both committees have provided their vast knowledge, expertise and experience in shaping the future and operations of iCHORDS.

iCHORDS Steering Committee

Evelyn Acquah, Laura Dean, Alison Krentel, Elizabeth Long Hammed Mogaji, Upendo Mwingira, Doris Njomo, Rachel Strohm (community manager), Rachael Thomson & Geordie Woods

iCHORDS Mentorship Program

Evelyn Acquah, Margaret Baker, Margaret Gyapong, Alison Krentel, Elizabeth Long, Deborah McFarland, Charles Mackenzie, Hammed Mogaji, & Rachel Strohm (community manager)

COR·NTD
COALITION FOR OPERATIONAL RESEARCH ON NEGLECTED TROPICAL DISEASES

Introduction: all about iCHORDS

The idea for iCHORDS began in 2019 when experts in neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) and the social and behavioural sciences met following the COR-NTD meeting outside of Washington, DC. Individuals at that initial workshop discussed emerging areas and challenges faced by NTD programs and recognised the need for social and behavioural research to address these gaps. In 2020, iCHORDS was officially launched with an aim to increase collaboration and communication between NTD researchers, professionals and program implementers when it comes to social and behavioural research. iCHORDS supports the Sustainable Development Goals and the World Health Organisation's 2030 NTD Roadmap goals.

iCHORDS : Improving Community Health Outcomes through Research, Dialogue and Systems Strengthening
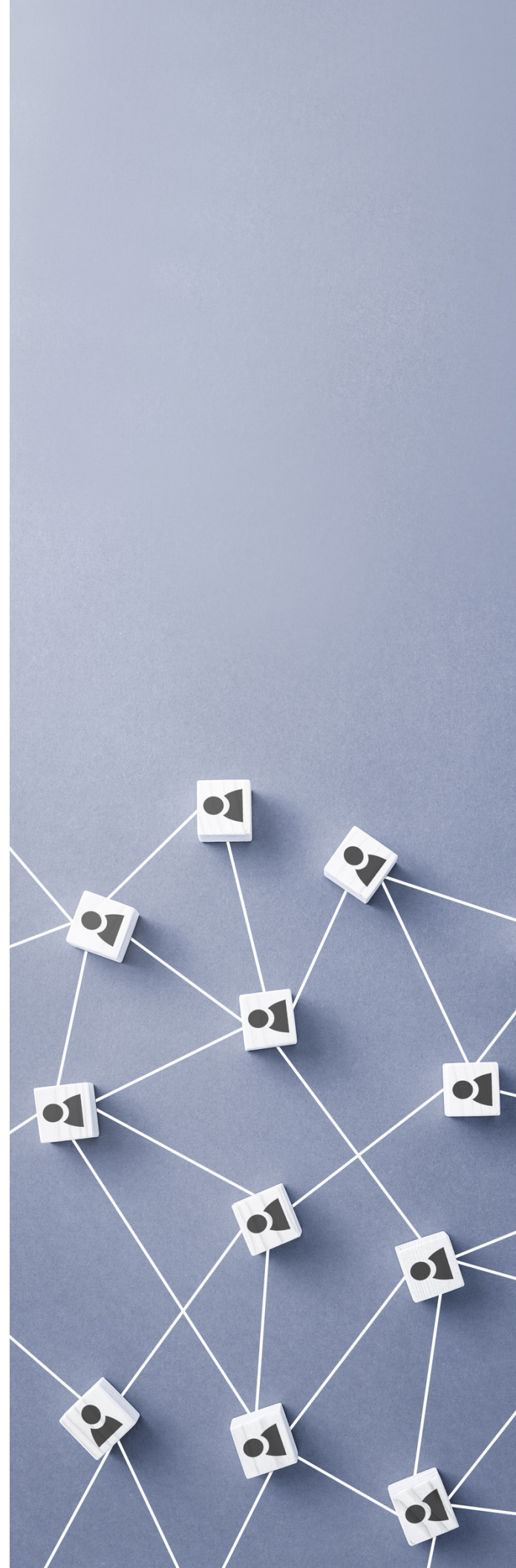
What is a community of practice?

The Community of Practice (CoP) concept was first discussed by Lave and Wenger in 1991, and was founded on social learning theory, which highlights the benefit of people coming together to discuss, share and learn from each other.

CoPs are formed when people connect over a shared interest, with the purpose of advancing and developing the practice, knowledge, and processes in this interest area (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; CDC, 2022). It is this purpose to advance practice that distinguishes CoPs from other networking opportunities or working groups (CDC, 2022). Additionally, there will always be varying levels of participation from CoP members especially depending on how and for what purpose the CoP was established, but successful CoPs should be member-driven, where the goals, projects and mission are decided upon and worked on by the members (CDC, 2022; Mazer et al., 2015).

iCHORDS' scope focuses specifically on social and behavioural research related to NTDs. In this context, social and behavioural sciences refer to any of the social science disciplines, such as anthropology, sociology, economics, or psychology, among others.

iCHORDS operates as a virtual and global CoP, with the mission to provide researchers, students, early career professionals and other mid-senior level professionals a platform to connect, collaborate and advance the field of social and behavioural sciences in NTDs.

The vision and goals for iCHORDS

The diagram below is a simplified version of the iCHORDS logic model. Logic models aim to visualize the overall objectives and goals of a program, and outline explicitly how these goals will be achieved by detailing the steps and resources required to complete them.

Mission: To create and maintain a robust forum for collaboration and coordination, knowledge exchange, and mentorship within the social and behavioural sciences to address implementation gaps and current issues within NTD programs.

Goal 1: to facilitate collaboration and connection between those engaged in social/behavioural research in alignment with the WHO NTD Roadmap

Goal 2: to advance NTD social and behavioural research by creating opportunities for knowledge exchange

Goal 3: to respond to social and behavioural research needs identified by community, program managers and partners

Yearly targets:
- At least 3 active task teams
- Grow member base
- Annual round of mentorship program with a min. of 4 pairs

Yearly targets:
- 10 Knowledge Exchange Cafes
- 4 quarterly newsletters
- 4 podcasts
- 5 blog posts for the iCHORDS website

Yearly targets:
- Establish formal governance structure
- Foster partnerships
- Establish CoP sustainability

Required resources:
- Full-time CoP manager
- Steering committee
- Website and other administrative supports
- Secure funding
- Partnerships with academic, NGO, health and community organisations/agencies
- Active members

Who does iCHORDS collaborate with?

The outcomes and success of iCHORDS are supported by its collaboration with other organisations, community partners and institutions. The organisations listed below are some of the partners who are or have directly contributed to a deliverable with iCHORDS either as the organisation itself or indirectly through a member's involvement. The list below does not reflect the numerous organisations where iCHORDS' members are affiliated.

Collaboration with the organisations listed below could entail any of the following deliverables: speaker for a knowledge exchange café, guest speaker on the Last Mile podcast, representation on the steering committee or mentorship program committee, participation in or co-leadership of a focus area, exchange of resources, and/or sharing of content, updates or events.

NGOs and other networks	Academia	Global health organisations
• Kikundi • infoNTD • Global Schistosomiasis Alliance (GSA) • Sightsavers • Canadian Network for NTDs • LeaderNet • Effect Hope • NALA Foundation • Act to End NTDs, West • Act to End NTDs, East • FHI360 • PATH India	• Kenya Medical Research Institute (KEMRI) • Emory University • University of Health and Allied Sciences (UHAS) • Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine (LSTM) • African Research Network for NTDs (ARNTD) • Georgetown University • University of Ottawa • Bruyere Research Institute • ICER-Mali • Erasmus University • University of Washington • Australian National University • University of Ghana – Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Institute (NMIMR) • Federal University Oye-Ekiti • Federal University of Bahia	• WHO-Geneva • PAHO • CDC • COR-NTD/ Taskforce • WHO collaborating center for LF MMDP

iCHORDS' Deliverables

Given that the purpose of a CoP is to facilitate connections between people to promote knowledge exchange, most of the activities or opportunities managed by iCHORDS reflect the concepts of social learning. The descriptions below outline the current opportunities provided to iCHORDS members. In response to suggestions shared by members, and changes in the NTD landscape and program managers' needs, the CoP activities may shift over time. Additionally, all opportunities except for the member profile, newsletter, and annual meeting are made available to anyone, not just individuals registered as members.

Knowledge Exchange Cafes

Classification: Social interaction and knowledge sharing

Description: Monthly online sessions where a speaker, (e.g., expert, researcher, community health worker, program manager, or iCHORDS member), speaks to a topic related to NTDs and the social and behavioural sciences. Following the presentation participants engage in discussion and Q&A.

The Last Mile Podcast

Classification: Knowledge sharing

Description: The 'Last Mile Podcast' series interviews various experts in the field to discuss the steps in the "last mile" to beat NTDs. The podcast series has evolved to focus on research methods based on audience preference and trends.

Blog posts

Classification: Knowledge sharing

Description: Blog posts are written by the iCHORDS community manager and/or in consultation with an iCHORDS member or partner. Topics can include iCHORDS' highlights, member highlights, or events related to NTDs or social and behavioural science. Blog posts are available on the iCHORDS website.

Annual Members' Meeting

Classification: Social interaction

Description: This is used to give interested members an opportunity to learn about the iCHORDS developments, share perspectives and meet other members.

Member database

Classification: Networking

Description: The members section of the website lists each iCHORDS member including their NTD focus area, research expertise, small bio, language, country of focus, institutional affiliation and contact information. Members can use the database to search and connect with other members based on research commonalities or other NTD-related interests.

Mentorship program

Classification: Identity building

Description: This is an application-based program where mentees are matched with mentors from anywhere in the world who have a similar NTD focus, to provide guidance on career planning, research methodology, project development or another area. The program runs for 6 months and pairs are encouraged to meet 4-5 times over the time period.

Focus Areas

Classification: Knowledge Creation

Description: iCHORDS members, community partners, and committee members, etc. can bring forward emerging issues related to NTDs and the social and behavioural sciences. Interested members then work together to address the issue through the development of a specific deliverable such as a policy brief, toolkit, webinar, case study, etc. Once completed, the team may dissolve, particularly if the issue has been sufficiently addressed.

Newsletter

Classification: Knowledge Sharing

Description: The newsletter is written and released by the iCHORDS manager to all members. It is used to notify members of upcoming events, member highlights, highlights in the field, member surveys, and quick tips.

Welcome package

Classification: Knowledge Sharing

Description: The welcome package is emailed out to all new members upon joining iCHORDS. It serves to facilitate a sense of community and connectedness by initiating immediate contact with new members. The welcome package overviews iCHORDS' structure, guiding parameters to participation and the different opportunities at iCHORDS.

What has iCHORDS accomplished since 2020?

Considering the online community lifecycle model produced by FeverBee Ltd., iCHORDS has moved through the earlier stages of development. iCHORDS has established a mission and objectives, developed a way for members to join, it delivers frequent means for connection with members, and has become a regular resource for new and existing members. However, based on the lifecycle model, iCHORDS has room for additional growth, as iCHORDS continues to reflect on and update its deliverables and programs. For example, iCHORDS has yet to advance to the saturation phase of the model, as new members continue to join regularly and thus a plateau has not been reached. Below, is a visual representation of iCHORDS' progression through the online community Lifecycle model.

Inception

2020-2021
- The idea for iCHORDS is discussed at the Washington, D.C. Meeting
- The secretariat is developed
- The vision and mission for iCHORDS is clarified

2021-2022
- Formed the iCHORDS Steering committee
- Developed the iCHORDS website
- Trialed content and deliverables

Establishment

2022-2023
- Piloted mentorship program
- Continue to evolve and trial new content and deliverables to engage members
- Initiate iCHORDS sustainability plan

Maturity

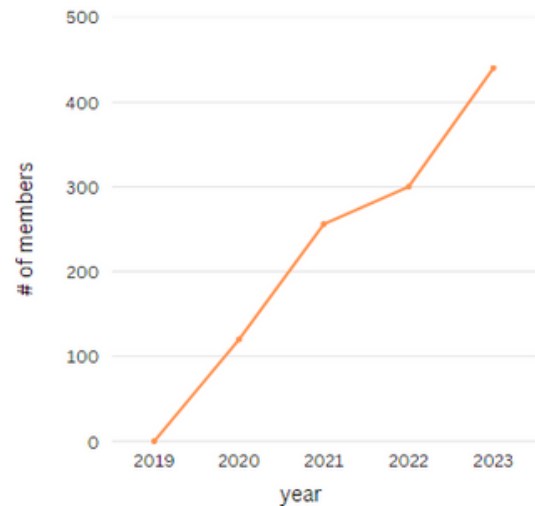# How has iCHORDS demonstrated success?

- iCHORDS membership

iCHORDS has over 445 members. The number of iCHORDS members has been steadily growing since 2020. Typically, a new member request is received each week. However, certain events can cause an influx of new members such as the mentorship program, monthly knowledge exchange cafes, a high impact Twitter post and other networking events.
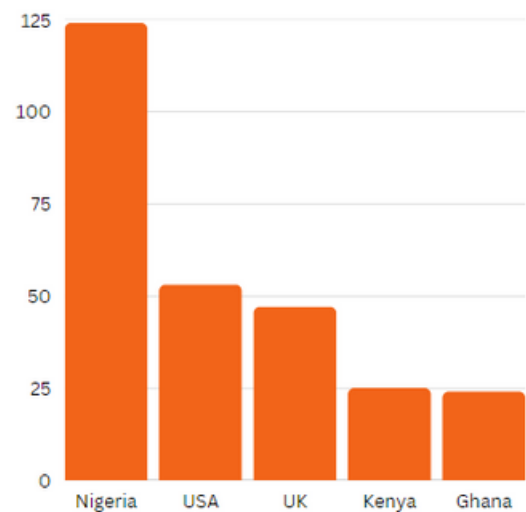
When a new member requests to join iCHORDS, the CoP manager adds their information to the members' page on the website and follows up with the new member via email to provide a welcome package, and to inform them of any upcoming events or opportunities within the CoP.

iCHORDS has members from more than fifty-five different countries, with the greatest representation from Nigeria, USA, UK, Kenya and Ghana, respectively. An interesting trend in membership is that students and early-career researchers represent the largest demographic in the iCHORDS member base. This trend suggests that iCHORDS is helping to support and connect the next generation of NTD researchers and program implementers.
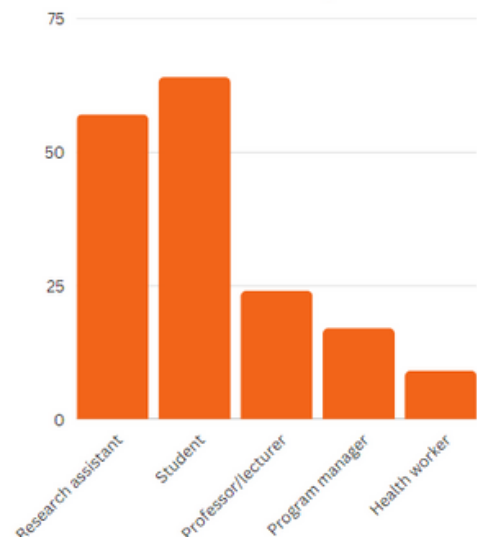
iCHORDS member growth

Top 5 member countries

Member Role/title

- ## The Last Mile Podcast

The Last Mile Podcast was established in 2021 and has had over 1100 plays. The episodes with the most plays are those that have a focus on research methods. This trend may reflect the number of students and early-career researchers seeking additional guidance and practical skills in the field of NTDs and the social and behavioural sciences.

Episode	# of plays*
1. Walking together: The value of participatory research methods	124
2. It's time for fairness in research partnerships	83
3. Tips for writing a winning research proposal	355
4. Implementation research: Rethinking our approach to NTD research	110
5. Leveraging the power of campaign integration to improve NTD programs	81
6. Research priorities for the endgame: Hearing from Kikundi community of practice	41
7. Exploring rapid ethnography to improve community programs	64
8. Let's focus on focus group discussions	51
9. Using Outcome Harvesting to evaluate NTD programs	121
10. Using qualitative research methods to enhance MDA	38
11. Using public health economics in the fight against NTDs	12

*Values as of December 11, 2023. These numbers continue to rise.

- ## Knowledge Exchange Cafes

The Knowledge Exchange Cafés were started in 2022 and have consistently been well-attended by both early-career and senior researchers and professionals. Individuals attend from all over the world, with most attending from Nigeria, Ghana, and Kenya. These sessions have shown to be an excellent way to bring members together to connect, discuss and learn from each other.
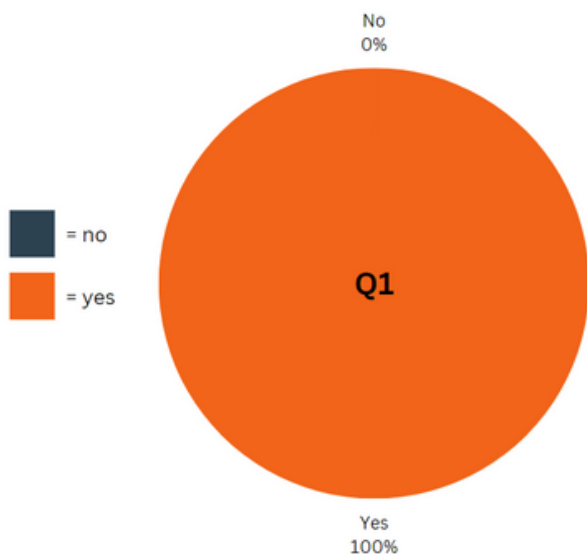
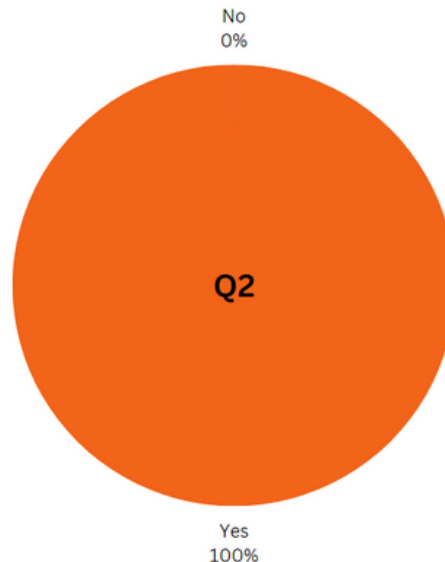| Session title	# registered	# attended
1. Designing and implementing sustainable behaviour change interventions	97	40
2. Using rapid qualitative assessments to improve mass drug administration	118	53
3. Photovoice: experiences of people living with diseases of poverty in Ghana	73	40
4. Developing drama to promote screening for Female Genital Schistosomiasis	78	30
5. Nurturing healthy habits in early childhood: playful ways to teach hygiene	67	28
6. Skin-NTD integrated models and community-based groups to meet WHO roadmap targets	72	31
7. Centering African program managers in the fight against NTDs	79	34
8. Key influences of mass drug administration implementation and scale-up	69	32
9. The use of secondary data in social research	89	34
10. MMDP in LF: a community approach	109	54
11. Accelerating onchocerciasis elimination in Mali	64	40
12. Power, participation and promoting equity in skin NTDs	92	36

Poll results

Starting in 2023, a quick poll is released at the end of each knowledge exchange café to capture attendee's feedback on the session. The pie charts below depict the responses received*.
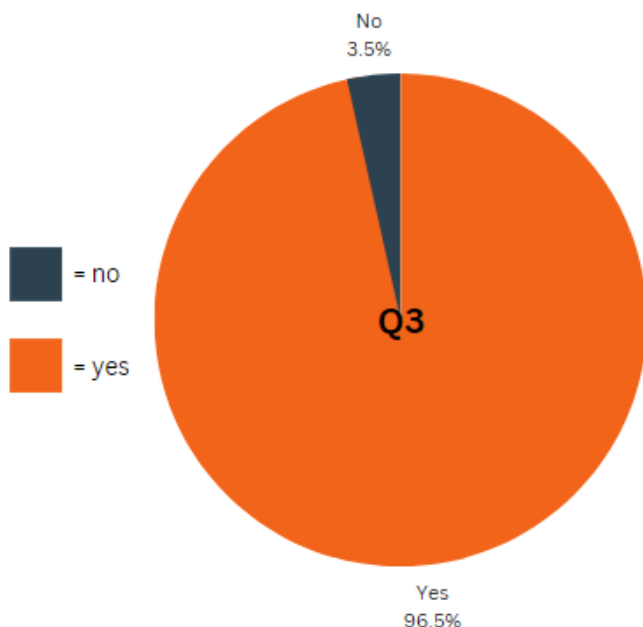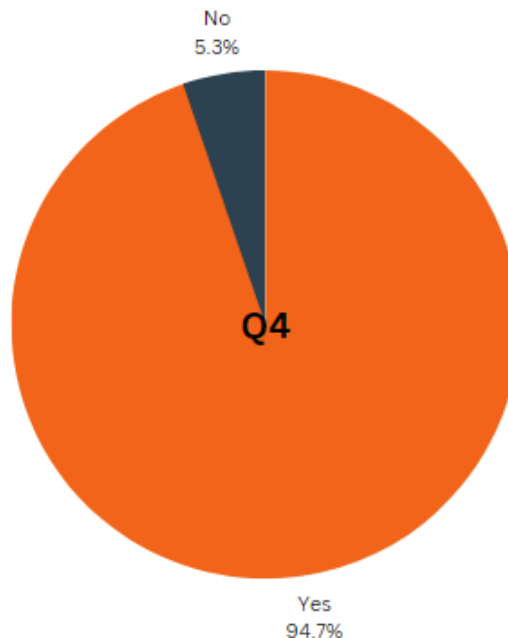
Q1: Did you enjoy today's session?

Q2: Did you learn something new from the session?

No
0%

No
0%

= no

= yes

Q1

Q2

Yes
100%

Yes
100%

Q3: Can you apply what you learned to your work, school, profession, etc.?

Q4: Did the session make you feel connected to others in the field?

No
3.5%

No
5.3%

= no

= yes

Q3

Q4

Yes
96.5%

Yes
94.7%

*based on a denominator of 114 respondents: the total number of people who responded to a post café survey in the past five cafes. This is a response rate of ~27%.

- Focus Areas

Improving MDAs using qualitative research methods

- Newest Focus Area
- Working to increase the awareness of and access to <u>RTI's guide on using qualitative methods in MDA</u>
- Holds 35 members
- Created an episode for the iCHORDS Last Mile Podcast on qualitative research methods to highlight the RTI guide.
- Connected with infoNTD to list the guide on their website
- Posted a tweet from the iCHORDS account to highlight the guide and its purpose

Understanding who has never been treated during MDA programs

- Created the guide: <u>Understanding who has never been treated during MDA programs</u>
- In collaboration with the WHO/PAHO: (in progress) Toolkit to address never treatment: ensuring no one is left behind in mass drug administration
- Holds 30 members from organisations such as the WHO, PAHO, RTI, FHI360, Erasmus University, Sightsavers, CDC, University of Ottawa, University of Ghana, ICER-Mali, University of Washington, COR-NTD

CDD Strengthening & Support

- Aims to support and facilitate the important role that community drug distributors play in the fight against NTDs
- Holds 20 members
- Created a role-play guide to help direct CDDs through challenging encounters they may face in the field. <u>Find the guide on our website</u>.

- ## Mentorship program

The mentorship program is in its second cohort and has had a total of 300 applicants and 16 mentor-mentee pairs between the two rounds. iCHORDS aims to have a yearly mentorship program to facilitate connections between early-career NTD researchers, professionals, or program implementers with those in more advanced stages of their careers.

Those who have participated in the program report a positive experience. Both mentors and mentees value the ability to connect with an individual who they may otherwise not have had the chance to meet and learn from. The feedback collected highlights the value of this program in supporting the next generation of NTD researchers, professionals and program implementers.

"It was an exciting series of knowledge sharing and relationship building with my mentor that has now gone beyond iCHORDS. I am very thankful for such an opportunity"—**mentee**

"I think [this] is the power of iCHORDS; you get to hear about different ways people work in other countries. It also allowed me to learn from my mentee because I never worked in Cameroon. "—**mentor**

"It was the opportunity to draw from her rich and practical well of knowledge in her work on the field as it relates to Trachoma and the clear direction it gave me about what I would like to focus my career on going forward. "—**mentee**

"In my career I didn't always have a mentor. So, I felt this was an opportunity to give back and help the community"—**mentor**

The 2023 mentorship program cohort

Mentors

Geordie Woods
Sightsavers, North Carolina

Dr. Doris W. Njomo
Kenya Medical Research Institute, Kenya

Helen Bokea
Rice University, Kenya

Dr. Maxwell Ayindenaba Dalaba
University of Health and Allied Sciences, Ghana

Professor Chinyelu Ekwunife
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Nigeria

Rajshree Das
PCI-India, India

Juliana Amanyi-Enegela
CBM, United Kingdom

Dr. Sarosh Jamil
WHO, Papua New Guinea

Professor Muktar A. Gadanya
Bayero University/Aminu Kano Teaching Hospital, Nigeria

Mentees

Katalin Gulyas
Global Schistosomiasis Alliance, Indonesia

Irene Chami
The END Fund, Kenya

Iliassa Ouedraogo
District sanitaire de Dano Pronince loba, Burkina Faso

Diltokka Gideon Kevin
AhmaduBello University, Nigeria

Charity Hungu
Kenyatta University Teaching Referral and Research Hospital, Kenya

Mary Maghanga
African Institute for Health and Development, Kenya

Timilehin Oladosu
WHO, Nigeria

Dr. Adebiyi Adeniran
Washington University School of Medicine, USA

Dr. Gertrudis Ribado Meñe
OCEAC, Equatorial Guinea

• Blog posts

There are 32 blog posts available on the iCHORDS website. The research methods series, in particular, has received positive feedback, as these posts allow users to review short summaries of common methods used in the NTD field.

32

Blog posts
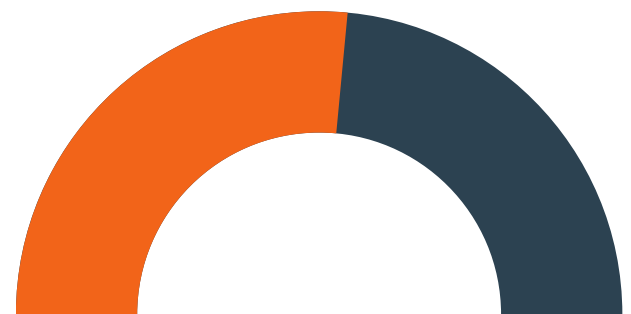
• Twitter (X) activity

820 followers

iCHORDS has been on Twitter (X) since 2021 and has over 820 followers. Like our member database, the number of followers continues to increase on a regular basis. iCHORDS predominantly uses Twitter to inform members and followers of upcoming iCHORDS events, the release of new content, highlighting member achievements, and other opportunities in the NTD field.

• The iCHORDS quarterly newsletter

iCHORDS has released three quarterly newsletters, in February, June and September of 2023. The newsletter is sent out to the entire iCHORDS member database. The quarterly newsletter and other campaigns sent out to iCHORDS members have open rates ranging from 43-53%.

campaign open rate of 43-53%

Future opportunities

As stated earlier in this document, iCHORDS is continuing to develop and grow as we are in the midst of the CoP lifecycle. In looking to the future, iCHORDS has three main directions described below.

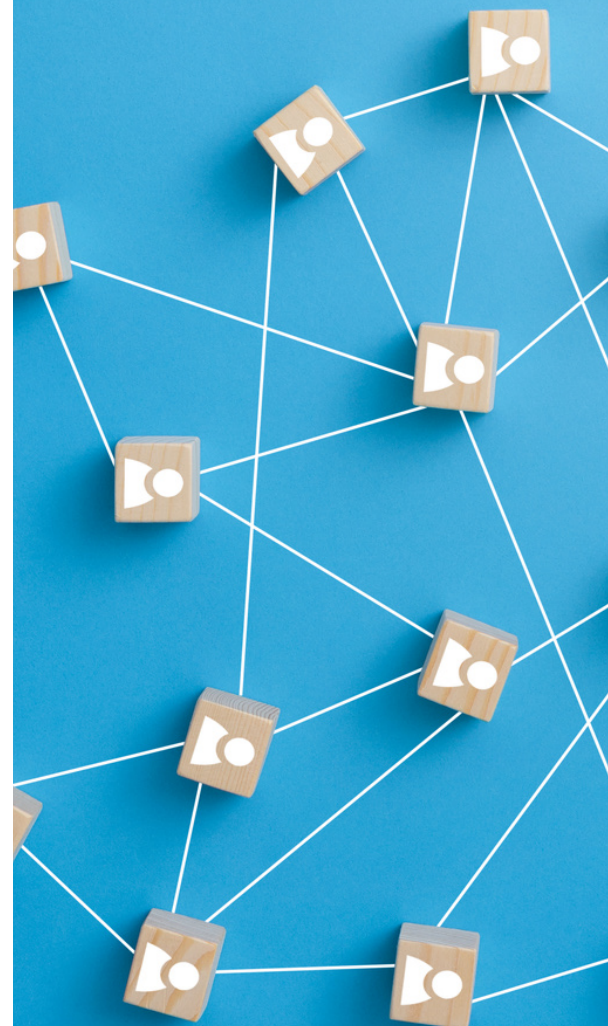## 1. Input into WHO's R&D NTD blueprint

In June 2023, the WHO held its partners' meeting in Geneva, Switzerland. In this meeting, implementation research (IR) was highlighted as a key area needed to achieve the WHO 2030 Roadmap goals. iCHORDS can play a role in training and supporting collaboration in those carrying out IR in support of programs. We will seek opportunities and collaboration in this area.

2. Expand reach to South-East Asian and Latin American Countries

Currently, iCHORDS members are primarily from countries in Africa, the UK and the US. In order to expand our presence in the Southeast and Latin American regions, iCHORDS will focus on actively seeking content that is relevant to these countries and will provide content that is compatible with the time zones of these regions.

3. Integration into Primary Healthcare

In keeping with WHO's 2030 Roadmap goals and the global drive towards universal health coverage, the integration of NTDs into primary healthcare is a priority. This process needs to be supported by social and behavioural science and IR to understand the facilitators, barriers and bottlenecks to addressing NTDs in primary care.

iCHORDS contributes to NTD elimination and control

In three years, iCHORDS has reached over 440 members from all over the world and from varying disciplines, organisations, and career stages. iCHORDS has consistent engagement across all deliverables and demonstrates momentum for ongoing growth and development.

iCHORDS acts as a facilitator for partnerships and collaboration between members and organisations. It is a resource for mobilizing research into practice, and it offers support to the next generation of NTD researchers, health workers and program implementers through free and accessible professional development materials.

iCHORDS will continue to support the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals as well as the World Health Organization's 2030 NTD Roadmap goals.

We would love to hear from you!

Do you have any feedback, suggestions or comments you'd like to share? Send us an email at:
info.ichords@gmail.com

**Stay connected.
Follow us on Twitter.**

@iCHORDS_CoP