



REVIEW ARTICLE

Enhancing clinical and translational research in Africa: a comprehensive exploration of challenges and opportunities for advancement

Gbolahan Olatunji¹, Kokori Emmanuel¹, Osadebamwen W. Osaghae², Isarinade Timilehin¹, Nicholas Aderinto^{3*}, Muili Opeyemi Abdulbasit³

¹Department of Medicine and Surgery, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria, ²Department of Public Health, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Baltimore, United States of America, ³Department of Medicine and Surgery, Ladoko Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomosho, Nigeria

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*Corresponding author:

Nicholas Aderinto

Department of Medicine and Surgery, Ladoko Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomosho, Nigeria.

E-mail: nicholasoluwaseyi6@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Background: Clinical and translational research in Africa faces challenges from limited infrastructure, resource scarcity, and a high disease burden. However, the continent offers promising opportunities with diverse populations, unique genetics, biodiversity, and traditional medicine practices.

Aim: This research aims to comprehensively understand the challenges and opportunities in clinical and translational research in Africa.

Conclusion: We highlight the immense potential for advancing clinical and translational research in Africa while addressing researchers' challenges. By leveraging opportunities, investing in research infrastructure, and prioritizing participant protection, African countries can make significant strides in health-care advancements and contribute to global research efforts. This study presents a roadmap for policymakers, stakeholders, and researchers to collaboratively work toward enhancing clinical and translational research in Africa, ultimately leading to improved health-care outcomes and addressing the continent's unique health needs.

Relevance for Patients: Strengthening clinical and translational research in Africa allows the investigation of disease factors specific to African populations, leading to the development of evidence-based interventions that are more effective in addressing the continent's health challenges. This will ultimately improve health-care outcomes for African patients and impact global scientific knowledge.

1. Introduction

Clinical and translational research stands at the forefront of modern medicine, serving as a crucial catalyst for advancing global healthcare and ultimately improving patient outcomes [1]. It bridges fundamental scientific discoveries and their practical application in clinical settings, enabling the translation of scientific knowledge into tangible benefits for patients [2]. Clinical and translational research results from the bedrock of evidence-based medicine, empowering health-care professionals to make informed decisions and provide high-quality care [3]. Despite significant progress in clinical research worldwide, there remains a striking disparity in the advancement of clinical and translational research within the African continent. Africa is emerging as a significant player based on its size, demographics, economic growth, and commitment to improving healthcare and life expectancy [4]. With a population of over 1.34 billion people, projected to reach two billion by 2038 and 2.5 billion by 2050, Africa constitutes over 17% of the global population [5]. Moreover, it bears the highest disease burden globally, accounting for approximately 25% of all diseases [6]. These factors create an opportune environment for conducting clinical

trials. However, despite these advantages, Africa's contribution to the total number of clinical trials remains dismally low, accounting for <2% of the global total [7]. This disparity poses a formidable challenge, as it impedes the health-care sector's ability to effectively address the African population's unique and diverse healthcare needs. Moreover, it hinders the development of context-specific solutions that are tailored to the intricacies of African communities, cultures, and environments. Consequently, the gaps in clinical and translational research in Africa impact the region and have broader implications for global health equity and cooperation [8]. The multifaceted nature of this challenge becomes evident when considering the rich diversity of Africa's health-care landscape. The continent is home to many cultures, languages, and health systems, each presenting complexities and intricacies [9]. The burden of infectious, non-communicable, and emerging health threats increases the urgency of strengthening clinical and translational research endeavors [6]. Moreover, Africa's unique genetic diversity necessitates region-specific studies to unravel the genetic basis of diseases and their treatment responses, which can differ significantly from other parts of the world [10].

Investing in clinical and translational research in Africa is essential to uncover invaluable knowledge and cultivate effective healthcare interventions to overcome this disparity. Investing in clinical and translational research in Africa is vital, as it promises to uncover invaluable knowledge and cultivate effective solutions. By conducting rigorous research specific to the African context, researchers can gain insight into the intricacies of these diseases, their impact on diverse populations, and the most effective strategies for prevention, diagnosis, and treatment [10]. Such research is essential for developing evidence-based guidelines and treatment protocols tailored to unique health-care needs. Without comprehensive research, health-care providers may rely on interventions primarily tested in other regions, which may not fully address the complexities and nuances of African healthcare [11].

Nevertheless, several significant obstacles exist for clinical and translational research in Africa. One of the most pressing challenges is the lack of adequate funding, which hampers the scale and scope of research initiatives. In addition, the need for more research infrastructure and limited access to cutting-edge technologies impedes the efficiency and effectiveness of research efforts. The brain drain phenomenon further exacerbates the challenge, leading to losing essential expertise within the continent. Addressing these issues requires collaborative efforts and innovative solutions that harness the strengths of international partnerships while fostering local research capacity and retention strategies.

Beyond the practical challenges, cultural barriers and regulatory dilemmas often impede clinical and translational research in Africa [12]. The diversity of cultural norms and beliefs necessitates a sensitive and nuanced approach to research design and implementation [6]. Similarly, the ethical implications of research involving vulnerable populations must be carefully navigated to protect participants' rights and dignity. This study aims to identify and address the barriers hindering the progress of

clinical and translational research in Africa. By analyzing current challenges related to research infrastructure, funding, brain drain, cultural considerations, and regulations, the study will provide valuable insights to guide future efforts. The goal is to propose targeted solutions and strategies that enhance research capacity, foster collaborations, and ensure ethical practices. Ultimately, this study seeks to unlock Africa's full research potential and improve health-care outcomes for the diverse African population.

2. Current State of Clinical and Translational Research in Africa

Clinical and translational research in Africa is progressing significantly and experiencing remarkable growth [13]. However, it is important to note that the research landscape varies between different countries and regions of the continent [14]. Africa faces a unique set of challenges and opportunities in the field of research, including limited resources, inadequate infrastructure, political instability, and a high burden of infectious diseases [15,16]. Despite these obstacles, notable developments and initiatives have strengthened African clinical and translational research efforts [17].

One crucial aspect of these efforts is the ongoing focus on improving research infrastructure and building research capacity in African countries. Collaborations between African institutions, international partners, and organizations such as the African Academy of Sciences and the African Union have been pivotal in driving these initiatives [18]. Through collaborative initiatives, partnerships have been formed between African institutions, global organizations, and international research institutions to promote collaboration and knowledge sharing. Notable examples of such initiatives include the African Network for Drugs and Diagnostics Innovation, the African Collaboration Centre for Pharmacovigilance (AFRO-Pharm), and the African Partnership for Chronic Disease Research [19]. These collaborations have led to significant outcomes, including establishing training programs, research networks, and infrastructure development projects [19]. The primary objective of these initiatives is to enhance the abilities of African researchers and institutions to conduct high-quality research. By providing training opportunities, researchers are equipped with advanced research methodologies, data analysis skills, and a strong understanding of ethical considerations, enabling them to address their respective fields' unique challenges and opportunities effectively.

In addition to infrastructure and capacity building, research networks have emerged as valuable mechanisms for fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange among African researchers [20]. These networks connect scientists from different institutions and disciplines, facilitating sharing ideas, resources, and expertise. Through collaborative research projects and multicenter studies, research networks promote interdisciplinary approaches and enhance the overall quality and impact of research results.

Recognizing the importance of physical and technological resources in conducting high-quality research, infrastructure

development projects have become a key component in improving research capacity in Africa [21]. These projects focus on establishing or upgrading laboratory facilities, research centers, and clinical trial sites, ensuring researchers have access to modern equipment, well-maintained facilities, and reliable resources. This infrastructure support enables researchers to carry out their work efficiently and effectively.

Collaborations with international partners benefit research capacity building in Africa [22]. These partnerships often provide funding, technical assistance, and mentorship, further strengthening the research capabilities of African institutions [22]. The transfer of knowledge, expertise, and technology from international partners to African researchers contributes to the overall growth and advancement of research in the region. The ultimate goal of these collective efforts is to empower African researchers and institutions to conduct impactful research that addresses the specific health challenges African populations face. By investing in research infrastructure and capacity building, African countries can generate locally relevant evidence, inform health policies, and improve health-care delivery. Consequently, these efforts lead to better health outcomes for African communities.

3. Challenges in Clinical and Translational Research in Africa

Clinical and translational research in Africa faces several significant challenges that must be addressed to foster progress and development in the field Table 1. One primary challenge is the limited availability of research infrastructure and resources. Despite remarkable contributions from some African-led research centers, many African universities and institutions still need more cutting-edge laboratories, advanced technology, and well-equipped facilities for conducting rigorous clinical trials and translational research [23]. This dearth significantly hampers the scope and quality of research conducted on the continent, impeding scientific advancements and hindering the realization of Africa's full research potential. In contrast, research institutions in developed nations often boast state-of-the-art laboratories with cutting-edge technology and facilities that enable groundbreaking

research [24]. This disparity needs to be improved for African researchers, limiting their ability to compete globally and collaborate effectively with international counterparts.

Nevertheless, some shining examples of African-led research centers have made substantial contributions to the scientific community. One such example is the South African Tuberculosis Vaccine Initiative (SATVI), a world-renowned research center dedicated to developing new vaccines for tuberculosis [25]. SATVI's pioneering work showcases the potential for African-led research to drive innovation and address critical healthcare challenges that disproportionately affect the continent. Similarly, the African Institute for Mathematical Sciences (AIMS) stands as a pan-African network of centers of excellence that provide advanced education in mathematical sciences to students from across the continent [26]. By nurturing talent and fostering interdisciplinary collaborations, AIMS exemplifies the transformative impact of African-led initiatives in promoting research and knowledge dissemination within and beyond the region. Despite these notable success stories, the need for cutting-edge research facilities and advanced technology is a significant barrier to fully unlocking Africa's research potential. Addressing this scarcity requires targeted efforts from both local and international stakeholders, including governments, funding agencies, and private institutions. By investing in developing and modernizing research infrastructure, Africa can enable researchers to thrive and contribute meaningfully to global scientific advancements.

More financial support and the need for grants present formidable barriers to clinical and translational research endeavors in Africa. These projects require substantial funding to cover essential aspects such as personnel remuneration, purchasing laboratory supplies, efficient data management, and participant recruitment. Unfortunately, funding availability is often limited, leading to project delays, compromised research outcomes, and difficulties in attracting and retaining highly skilled researchers [27]. Remarkably, Africa receives a mere 1% of the global investment in research and development (R&D), with Egypt, Nigeria, and South Africa contributing up to 67% of the total domestic spending on R&D in the region while holding a meager 0.1% of the world's patents [28]. Such

Table 1. Challenges, opportunities, and policy recommendations in advancing clinical and translational research in Africa

Challenges	Opportunities	Policy recommendations
Limited research infrastructure	Diverse populations and unique genetic backgrounds	Increase research funding and budget allocation
Scarcity of resources	Abundant biodiversity	Establish research partnerships and networks
High burden of diseases	Traditional medicine practices	Promote ethical research practices and oversight
Ethical considerations and regulatory hurdles	Collaboration and knowledge sharing among institutions	Enhance data management and sharing mechanisms
Data collection and management challenges	Public-private partnerships	Foster collaboration between African institutions and international partners
Lack of trained healthcare professionals and researchers	Integration of digital health technologies	Invest in health-care workforce training and capacity building
Access to advanced technologies and equipment	Leveraging international collaborations	Provide access to advanced technologies and equipment
Language and cultural barriers	Strengthening research capacity and training	Address language and cultural barriers
Funding constraints	Investing in research infrastructure	Develop sustainable funding mechanisms and grants
Political and socioeconomic factors	Patient-centric approach to research	Create a supportive policy environment for research

a stark disparity underscores the significant funding gap that the continent faces.

Furthermore, ethical and regulatory challenges pose significant implications for clinical and translational research in Africa, affecting the conduct of studies involving human subjects [6]. Establishing and maintaining strong ethical guidelines and regulatory frameworks are paramount to safeguarding the rights, welfare, and safety of research participants while upholding the integrity of research data. However, implementing and enforcing these standards vary significantly across African countries, leading to inconsistencies, delays, and ethical dilemmas [29]. Establishing and maintaining strong ethical guidelines and regulatory frameworks are crucial to protect research participants' rights, welfare, and safety of research participants and ensuring the data's integrity. However, implementing and enforcing these standards can vary across African countries, leading to inconsistencies, delays, and ethical dilemmas [29]. One example of such challenges is the variation in ethical review processes [6]. Countries often have different procedures for reviewing research protocols, obtaining informed consent from participants, and ensuring the ethical conduct of studies [6]. This inconsistency can create confusion and hinder the timely initiation of research projects.

One prominent challenge in research ethics governance is the historical context of its development [29]. Research governance structures have often been a reactive response to past unethical research practices [30]. Despite increased research activity in Africa over the past decade, driven by pressing psychosocial and health-related challenges, improvements in the governance and oversight of human research practices have yet to be commensurate with this growth [31]. This has, unfortunately, created a window for exploitative research funded by resource-rich countries, conducting studies in Africa that might be considered unethical in countries with more established and stringent research regulatory frameworks.

In some cases, lengthy review processes can delay the start of studies, affecting the ability to address urgent health concerns or introduce new interventions. The availability and accessibility of research ethics committees (REC) often differ across African countries [32]. Some regions may need more resources and infrastructure to establish and maintain RECs, which can delay the approval of research projects [32]. This situation can hinder the progress of studies and discourage researchers from conducting research in those areas. In addition to the challenges related to ethical review processes, there are disparities in the understanding and applying ethical principles and guidelines among researchers, health-care providers, and participants [32]. Cultural beliefs, language barriers, and limited awareness of research ethics can influence participants' understanding of the risks and benefits of participating in studies [33,34]. This lack of understanding impacts the validity and quality of informed consent, potentially compromising participant autonomy and the reliability of research findings. Similarly, linguistic and cultural barriers also challenge clinical and translational research in Africa [33]. The continent is characterized by linguistic diversity and cultural variations, which inhibit effective communication, participant recruitment, informed

consent procedures, and data collection efforts [33]. Cultural beliefs, traditions, and stigmas also influence the willingness of individuals to participate in clinical studies [35].

Brain drain and limited research capacity present significant obstacles to clinical and translational research in Africa. Disturbingly, Africa's contribution to the world's scientific output has dwindled from 0.5% to a mere 0.3%, reflecting the region's struggles in retaining scientific talent [36]. The continent is grappling with a continuous brain drain of scientists, engineers, and technologists, further exacerbating the research capacity gap. Africa accounts for only 3.6% of the world's scientific workforce, indicating a severe shortage of research professionals [36]. The overwhelming concentration of 80% of scientific research in a handful of industrialized countries underscores the stark disparity in research capabilities worldwide [36]. This disparity is particularly acute in sub-Saharan Africa, where the migration of young and educated professionals significantly affects an already scarce pool of human capital [37]. The departure of skilled individuals from the region robs Africa of much-needed expertise, hindering the establishment and growth of research initiatives and institutions. This brain drain phenomenon significantly impairs Africa's capacity to conduct clinical and translational research at the level needed to effectively address the continent's diverse health-care challenges. Losing talent to more developed regions denies Africa the expertise required to innovate, develop context-specific solutions, and drive scientific advancements. The departure of skilled researchers and health-care professionals from the continent seeking improved opportunities and resources has significant consequences. This ongoing exodus results in a loss of valuable expertise, leading to a weakened research capacity that impedes Africa's ability to effectively address its communities' unique health challenges.

The critical deficit of scientists and researchers in Africa is a pressing concern that requires urgent attention. The need for more skilled professionals directly affects the region's ability to conduct impactful research and develop innovative solutions to address the specific health needs of its diverse populations. With a sufficient pool of researchers, the ability to generate locally relevant evidence and implement context-specific interventions is greatly improved. The consequences of this brain drain are far-reaching. The loss of talented individuals deprives African countries of the intellectual capital needed to advance clinical and translational research and hampers the overall progress of the health-care system. The absence of skilled researchers and health-care professionals diminishes the quality of care provided, reduces the capacity for scientific discoveries, and undermines the development of effective health policies and interventions tailored to the local context.

4. Policy Recommendations and Future Directions

Improving the health infrastructure in Africa is crucial to meet the demands of clinical and translational research on the continent. Adequate health infrastructure, including hospitals, clinics, laboratories, and specialized care facilities, is essential to

conduct high-quality research and provide the necessary resources for researchers and health-care professionals (Figure 1).

Investing in research facilities and laboratories is paramount in advancing clinical and translational research capabilities in Africa. Beyond enabling cutting-edge research, these state-of-the-art facilities are pivotal in attracting and retaining skilled researchers and scientists within the region. By providing researchers with an environment replete with advanced technologies and resources essential for their work, these facilities retain local talent, mitigate the adverse effects of brain drain, and cultivate a vibrant research community that augments scientific progress in Africa. Optimizing the impact of research facilities necessitates emphasizing capacity building and training initiatives [38]. The effective utilization of these resources is ensured by affording researchers, technicians, and support staff access to specialized training in operating advanced laboratory equipment and employing state-of-the-art research techniques. These training programs should encompass technical skills and underscore the significance of research ethics in upholding rigorous scientific integrity and responsible research conduct.

Promoting collaboration and networking among research institutions within Africa and with international partners constitutes a pivotal strategy in enhancing research capabilities across the continent. One prominent initiative facilitating such collaborations is the African Research and Education Network (AfREN), an ambitious project aiming to accelerate the development of African National Research and Education Networks while serving as a catalyst for global research and education cooperation [39]. Spearheaded by the Association of African Universities and generously funded by the European Union, the AfREN project adopts a visionary approach by aligning its objectives with the United Nations sustainable development goals, thus ensuring a holistic and impactful research agenda that addresses pressing societal needs. In tandem with AfREN, other research networks have emerged in Africa, further enriching the research landscape and contributing to the continent's scientific progress. One noteworthy example is the Tertiary Education and Research Network of South Africa (TENET), which has been at the forefront of providing exceptional research and education networking services for over two decades [40]. Through its collaborative inter-networking approach, TENET has facilitated seamless communication and data sharing among universities, science councils, and related research institutions, fostering a climate of cooperation and knowledge exchange that enhances research capabilities and educational opportunities. In addition, the African Research Universities Alliance exemplifies the power of collaboration in forging a common vision among universities from diverse countries and historical backgrounds [41].

These research networks epitomize the continent's commitment to promoting research collaboration and fostering an environment that nurtures academic excellence. By facilitating networking and inter-institutional partnerships, these initiatives create opportunities for researchers and students to engage in joint research projects, participate in cross-disciplinary endeavors, and gain exposure to diverse perspectives and methodologies.

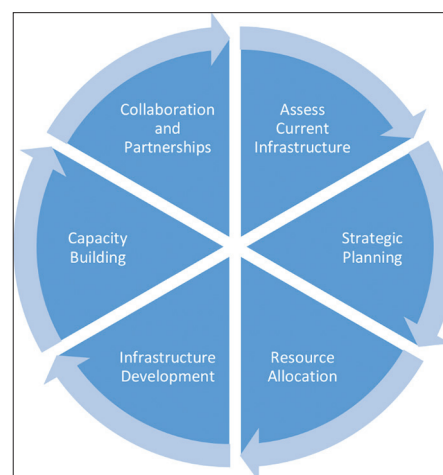


Figure 1. Research infrastructure strengthening process.

Moreover, networking extends beyond Africa's borders, enabling fruitful collaborations with international partners, thus positioning African research globally and enriching the broader scientific discourse. Collaborative partnerships with established research institutions from other regions facilitate knowledge exchange, access to funding opportunities, and the undertaking of joint research endeavors [42]. Such collaborations foster a convergence of global expertise and best practices, elevating the quality and scope of African research.

Nonetheless, several challenges may impede the successful implementation of research facility investments. Foremost among these challenges are funding constraints, as the establishment of state-of-the-art laboratories necessitates substantial financial resources, which may pose difficulties, particularly in resource-limited settings [43]. Policymakers and stakeholders must prioritize research funding and explore innovative funding mechanisms to ensure sustainable support for developing research infrastructure. Moreover, vigilant attention must be accorded to infrastructure maintenance once research facilities are established. Timely maintenance and upgrading equipment and infrastructure are indispensable in avoiding suboptimal research outputs that could hinder scientific progress. Robust maintenance plans and the allocation of resources for ongoing support are, therefore, essential considerations.

Furthermore, the assurance of a proficient workforce competent in operating and leveraging advanced laboratory equipment assumes critical importance. Brain drain and limited research capacity in Africa could precipitate a shortage of qualified professionals, necessitating focused efforts on education, and training initiatives. Capacity-building programs should encompass academic training that equips students and researchers with the necessary skills and knowledge to utilize research facilities and conduct high-quality research effectively. In addition, navigating complex regulatory and administrative processes could present challenges in establishing research facilities and obtaining requisite approvals. Streamlining these processes and fostering a conducive regulatory environment are vital to expedite research progress and create a research-friendly atmosphere.

In addition to physical infrastructure, integrating digital health technologies is a pivotal enabler for advancing clinical and translational research in Africa. By embracing electronic medical records, telemedicine platforms, and health information systems, the continent can unlock new dimensions of research potential. These transformative technologies play a multifaceted role in enhancing various aspects of the research landscape, ultimately revolutionizing clinical and translational studies' quality, efficiency, and scope [44].

Digital health technologies offer a wealth of benefits to research endeavors in Africa. One primary advantage is their capacity to streamline data collection, management, and analysis processes [45]. Electronic medical records provide a standardized and efficient record-keeping approach, facilitating seamless patient data access across health-care facilities [46]. This enhances the continuity of patient care and enables researchers to access comprehensive and real-time health information for their studies. As a result, data accuracy and completeness are greatly improved, ensuring the validity and reliability of research findings.

Furthermore, telemedicine platforms offer a groundbreaking solution to the geographical barriers often faced in researching vast and diverse African landscapes [47]. Researchers can remotely consult with patients and health-care professionals through telemedicine, enabling a more inclusive and representative participant pool. This virtual connectivity expedites the recruitment process and ensures broader participation, encompassing remote and underserved regions. Consequently, research studies become more representative of the African population, leading to more generalizable and applicable results. The efficient sharing of health data facilitated by digital health technologies fosters unprecedented collaboration among researchers, healthcare institutions, and policymakers. By breaking down silos and promoting data interoperability, these technologies create a collaborative ecosystem where research findings can be shared and disseminated rapidly. This not only accelerates the pace of research but also cultivates a culture of knowledge exchange and scientific cooperation within the African research community.

However, despite the promising potential of digital health technologies, implementing these innovations comes with challenges. The first significant hurdle is the need for robust data privacy and security measures. Safeguarding sensitive patient information is paramount to maintaining trust and compliance with ethical standards [48]. Therefore, policymakers must invest in establishing robust data protection frameworks, ensuring that patient privacy is prioritized throughout the research process. Moreover, technology adoption requires substantial initial investments and ongoing maintenance costs [48]. For many African countries with limited resources, securing adequate funding for these technologies can take time and effort. Policymakers and stakeholders must collaborate to devise sustainable financing models, exploring public-private partnerships and international cooperation to bridge the funding gap. Integrating digital health technologies also demands a skilled and tech-savvy workforce [49]. Training health-care professionals, researchers, and research coordinators in utilizing these technologies effectively are essential

to maximize their impact on clinical and translational research. This training should encompass technical skills and emphasize research methodologies, data management, ethics, and adherence to Good Clinical Practice (GCP) guidelines. Ensuring continuous professional development and supporting capacity-building initiatives can nurture a competent research workforce capable of harnessing the full potential of digital health technologies.

Public-private partnerships and collaborations between African institutions, international organizations, and private sector entities hold immense potential for enhancing health infrastructure across the continent. The African Development Bank (AfDB) has taken a proactive step in addressing Africa's health infrastructure deficits by releasing its Strategy for Quality Health Infrastructure in Africa 2021 – 2030 [50]. This strategy is a response to the urgent need to improve national health infrastructure, which has been underscored by the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and other health crises. The AfDB, drawing on its core expertise in infrastructure development, aims to bridge the existing gaps and provide essential support to regional member countries seeking to strengthen their health-care systems. Such partnerships can bring additional resources, funding, and expertise to support developing and maintaining health-care facilities and research infrastructure [31]. For example, collaborations with pharmaceutical companies or medical equipment manufacturers can provide access to cutting-edge technologies and resources that might otherwise be challenging. However, despite the promising potential of these strategies, several challenges may impede their successful execution. Key barriers include limited financial resources, bureaucratic hurdles, and varying regulatory environments across African countries. To overcome these challenges, stakeholders must align their efforts and work together to overcome barriers. Policymakers and international organizations must be crucial in facilitating dialogue and fostering an enabling collaborative environment.

Moreover, it is essential to prioritize the equitable distribution of health infrastructure across regions and populations within African countries. By ensuring that research facilities and resources are accessible to underserved areas, rural communities, and marginalized populations, clinical and translational research benefits can reach a broader population segment. This inclusivity helps address health disparities and ensures that research findings apply to diverse populations.

Governments in African countries must display an unwavering dedication to research advancement by allocating a substantial portion of their budgets to support clinical and translational research endeavors. Regrettably, public funding for research in many African countries has been inadequate. African countries must grapple with more financial support for research initiatives. In 2006, member countries of the African Union committed to spending 1% of their gross domestic product (GDP) on R&D, a pledge to foster scientific progress and innovation. However, the continent's actual funding for research stood at a mere 0.42% by 2019, starkly contrasting the global average of 1.7% [28]. The disparity in research funding is evident in individual African countries as well. For instance, Kenya allocates approximately

0.8% of its GDP to research, South Africa dedicates 0.75%, and Egypt invests 0.6% [28]. These figures highlight the considerable variation in financial commitment to research among African nations. To address this issue, governments must prioritize research and acknowledge its critical role in advancing healthcare, technology, and overall socioeconomic development. Meeting the 1% GDP target of the African Union sets is a pivotal step towards fostering a thriving research ecosystem across the continent. Such increased funding will enable the establishment and expansion of research facilities, the recruitment and retention of skilled researchers, and the implementation of cutting-edge research projects.

Moreover, governments should consider adopting long-term national research funding strategies that prioritize research across various sectors, including healthcare, agriculture, technology, and the environment. Consistent and sustained funding is crucial for fostering a culture of scientific inquiry and innovation, leading to tangible benefits for the population. While allocating increased funding is essential, governments should also focus on the transparent and efficient utilization of research resources. Strengthening research governance and implementing rigorous financial management practices will ensure that funds are optimally utilized and directly contribute to meaningful research outcomes. African governments should actively engage with international organizations, development agencies, and private sector partners to attract additional research support. Collaborative funding initiatives can provide much-needed resources for research projects that address critical health challenges and contribute to global scientific knowledge.

However, achieving substantial increases in research funding takes time and effort. Governments may need to work on competing priorities, limited resources, and bureaucratic complexities. Addressing these barriers requires effective advocacy by the research community and establishing partnerships with key stakeholders. Governments must recognize that investing in research yields long-term benefits, including improved health-care outcomes, economic growth, and the development homegrown solutions to regional challenges.

International collaboration and donor support are pivotal in augmenting funding for African research [51,52]. Governments and research institutions should seek partnerships with international organizations, donor agencies, and philanthropic foundations. By cultivating robust relationships with these entities, African countries can access additional resources and secure sustainable funding for research initiatives. Engaging with funders with a vested interest in African health issues is imperative, and capitalizing on their expertise and financial support is imperative.

Advocacy and raising awareness about the importance of research are instrumental in garnering support and funding. African governments, research institutions, and advocacy groups must collaborate to highlight the significant impact of clinical and translational research on health outcomes and development in the region. Educating policymakers, communities, and the general public about the value and potential of research increase

the likelihood of securing increased funding and resources. To attract private sector investment, African countries can establish an enabling environment for collaboration between research institutions and industry. This can be achieved by establishing public-private partnerships that incentivize private-sector involvement in R&D. Governments can offer tax incentives, streamline regulatory processes, and provide intellectual property protection to encourage private sector engagement and investment in clinical and translational research.

Strengthening research capacity and infrastructure is crucial for attracting funding. African countries should invest in the training and development of local researchers, thus creating a skilled workforce capable of driving high-quality research. Furthermore, improving the research infrastructure, including state-of-the-art laboratories, well-equipped research centers, and suitable clinical trial sites, is essential for conducting rigorous studies. By demonstrating their commitment to building research capacity, African countries can instill confidence in funders and attract increased financial support.

Promoting and nurturing collaborations among African research institutions is essential to advancing clinical and translational research. By fostering a culture of cooperation and knowledge sharing, African researchers can harness the power of collective expertise and resources to achieve greater scientific advancements. Collaborative research projects provide a platform for pooling diverse perspectives, expertise, and methodologies, leading to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of complex health challenges specific to the region [53]. One of the key advantages of collaborations lies in the ability to undertake larger and more impactful studies [53]. By uniting their efforts, African research institutions can tackle ambitious research questions that require extensive data, resources, and multi-site collaborations. Such joint endeavors enhance studies' statistical power, yielding more robust and reliable research outcomes. In addition, collaboration facilitates the exchange of ideas and best practices among researchers. Sharing knowledge and experiences across institutions and disciplines promotes continuous learning and innovation. Through such interactions, researchers can learn from each other's successes and challenges, identify novel research approaches, and adapt successful interventions to different contexts.

Interdisciplinary collaborations, in particular, hold significant promise for clinical and translational research. Researchers can approach complex health issues from multiple angles by bringing together experts from diverse fields such as medicine, public health, social sciences, and engineering. This integrative approach often leads to more comprehensive solutions that address the multifaceted nature of health challenges in Africa. Furthermore, collaborations increase the attractiveness of research projects for funding opportunities. Funding agencies and donors often prioritize projects with a strong collaborative component due to their potential for greater impact and sustainability. By presenting a unified front, African researchers can attract funding from international organizations, philanthropic foundations, and governmental bodies, bolstering their research capacity and accelerating scientific progress.

Developing robust regulatory bodies is essential to promote and oversee clinical and translational research in Africa. These bodies play a crucial role in ensuring the safety of research participants, upholding ethical standards, and maintaining the integrity of research data. However, establishing and strengthening regulatory bodies in Africa are an ongoing process that requires concerted efforts and collaboration among various stakeholders. One key step in developing regulatory bodies is enacting comprehensive legislation that provides a legal framework for research activities. This legislation should encompass informed consent, participant protection, data privacy, and ethical review processes. Regulatory bodies can effectively regulate research practices and hold researchers accountable for ethical misconduct by having clear and enforceable laws. Another crucial aspect of developing regulatory bodies is the establishment of independent ethics review committees or institutional review boards (IRBs) [54]. These committees are responsible for evaluating the ethical aspects of research protocols, ensuring that the rights and welfare are protected, and providing oversight throughout the research process. To ensure a comprehensive and unbiased evaluation of research proposals, IRBs should comprise diverse experts, including health-care professionals, ethicists, legal experts, and community representatives.

In addition to legislation and IRBs, capacity building is vital for the effective functioning of regulatory bodies. Training programs should be developed to enhance the knowledge and skills of regulatory staff, researchers, and members of ethics review committees [55,56]. These programs can cover various topics, including research ethics, regulatory compliance, data management, and GCP. By investing in capacity building, regulatory bodies can ensure their members have the experience to navigate the complex clinical and translational research landscape. Furthermore, collaboration between African countries is essential to harmonize regulatory standards and facilitate mutual recognition of research approvals [57]. The African Union and other regional organizations can be essential in promoting collaboration and harmonization efforts. By establishing common guidelines, sharing best practices, and creating platforms for knowledge exchange, regulatory bodies can work together to streamline research processes, improve efficiency, and enhance the credibility of research conducted in Africa. It is important to note that adequate resources and infrastructure should accompany the development of regulatory bodies [58]. Governments, funding agencies, and international partners need to allocate sufficient funding to support the establishment and operation of regulatory bodies. This includes providing financial resources for staff salaries, training programs, infrastructure development, and the implementation of monitoring and evaluation systems.

Inter-individual and international partnerships and collaborations are vital in promoting cultural sensitivity and diversity in research. African researchers can benefit from different perspectives, methodologies, and approaches by engaging researchers from diverse backgrounds, disciplines, and countries. These collaborations foster cross-cultural understanding, facilitate knowledge exchange, and encourage incorporating

diverse perspectives into research design, data analysis, and interpretation. Consequently, the research findings become more culturally adaptable and applicable to the specific contexts and populations studied. Cultural adaptation of research findings is particularly important in a culturally diverse region such as Africa. It involves tailoring research approaches, interventions, and recommendations to align with the target population's cultural beliefs, values, and practices [30]. This ensures that the research findings are scientifically sound but also acceptable, feasible, and relevant locally. Community participation is vital. Engaging local communities in the research process fosters a sense of ownership, empowers individuals, and ensures that research priorities and methods align with community needs and values. Community members can provide valuable insights, cultural perspectives, and contextual knowledge contributing to the research's cultural sensitivity and relevance. In addition, conducting needs assessments before starting research helps identify specific cultural considerations and tailor research approaches accordingly. This includes understanding local beliefs, social structures, health-care practices, and traditional healing systems. Pilot studies can be conducted to test the feasibility, acceptability, and effectiveness of research interventions within the cultural context. Feedback from pilot studies can inform necessary adaptations and modifications before scaling up research activities.

African translational researchers must prioritize incorporating cultural sensitivity and diversity throughout the research process. This involves awareness of their biases, continuous cultural competency training, and fostering a respectful and inclusive research environment. By embracing diversity and cultural sensitivity, African researchers can contribute to developing more comprehensive and contextually relevant interventions and policies that address unique health challenges.

Enhancing capacity building and retention of skilled resources is vital to strengthening African clinical and translational research. African countries can build sustainable research capacity and foster scientific excellence by investing in developing and retaining a skilled workforce.

Capacity-building initiatives should focus on training and equipping researchers with the necessary knowledge, skills, and competencies to conduct high-quality clinical and translational research. This includes providing comprehensive research training programs, workshops, and mentorship opportunities. By nurturing local talent, African countries can cultivate a pool of qualified researchers who understand the region's unique health-care challenges and cultural context.

Creating an enabling environment that values and supports research careers is essential to retain skilled resources. This involves providing competitive salaries, career advancement opportunities, and supportive work culture. In addition, offering incentives such as research grants, fellowships, and research awards can motivate and recognize the contributions of talented researchers. Partnerships and collaborations with international institutions can also contribute to capacity building and resource retention. African researchers can benefit from the expertise, resources, and networks of international partners through joint research projects,

knowledge exchange programs, and collaborative mentorship. These collaborations can facilitate skill transfer, exposure to advanced research techniques, and opportunities for publication and career advancement.

Furthermore, establishing research centers of excellence and specialized training programs can help attract and retain skilled resources. These centers can provide state-of-the-art facilities, access to cutting-edge technologies, and a supportive research environment. By creating centers for excellence in specific research areas, African countries can become attractive destinations for skilled researchers within and internationally.

Mentorship programs play a crucial role in capacity building and retention by providing guidance and support to early-career researchers. Established researchers can mentor and nurture the next generation of scientists, fostering their career development and helping them navigate research challenges. Mentorship programs should be structured, offering regular interactions, guidance on research methodology, publication strategies, and career advice. In addition, addressing the brain drain phenomenon requires policies and interventions to incentivize researchers to stay in Africa. This includes providing competitive research funding, facilitating access to research resources, and improving working conditions and infrastructure. Policies should also create opportunities for researchers to contribute to policy development, decision-making processes, and shaping the research agenda in their respective countries.

Partnerships and international collaboration are paramount in advancing African clinical and translational research [59,60]. By collaborating with international organizations, research institutions, and funding agencies, African researchers can benefit from a wide range of opportunities and resources lacking in the local context. These partnerships and collaborations facilitate knowledge exchange, allowing African researchers to gain exposure to advanced methodologies, cutting-edge technologies, and best practices in research. This exposure improves the quality and rigor of African research, promoting scientific excellence and ensuring that research outputs meet international standards. In addition, international collaborations create opportunities for joint research projects that address global health challenges. By pooling their knowledge and resources, researchers from different regions can tackle complex health issues that require multidisciplinary and multi-country approaches. This collaboration enables the development of comprehensive research studies, improves data collection and analysis, and enhances the generalizability of research findings.

Securing financial resources is crucial for supporting research activities in Africa, and partnerships with international funding agencies play a significant role. Many global funding agencies have specific programs and grants supporting research in low- and middle-income countries. By leveraging these opportunities, African researchers can access the necessary funding to conduct high-quality research, invest in research infrastructure, and attract and retain skilled researchers.

Furthermore, international collaborations contribute to research capacity building in Africa. Through mentorship programs, exchange initiatives, and training opportunities,

African researchers can acquire new skills, expand their networks, and improve their professional development [16]. This capacity building strengthens the research ecosystem in Africa, fostering a sustainable environment for ongoing research efforts.

Partnerships and collaborations also play a critical role in knowledge translation and dissemination. By working with international partners, African researchers can reach broader audiences, publish their findings in high-impact journals, and share their research with the global scientific community. This increased visibility enhances the reputation of African researchers and raises the profile of research conducted in Africa, leading to greater recognition and opportunities for collaboration. Moreover, partnerships and collaborations foster cultural sensitivity and diversity in research. By engaging with international partners, African researchers can incorporate diverse perspectives, experiences, and cultural considerations into their research design and implementation. This approach ensures that research findings are relevant, applicable, and respectful of the local context and cultural nuances. By embracing cultural sensitivity, researchers can develop more effective interventions tailored to the African population's needs, ultimately leading to improved health outcomes.

5. Limitations and Strengths of the Study

The study presents both limitations and strengths in its analysis. A notable limitation is that the continent's heterogeneity in health-care systems, infrastructure, and socioeconomic conditions may pose challenges in implementing uniform strategies. On the other hand, the study's strengths lie in its evidence-based and actionable recommendations, comprehensive approach encompassing physical infrastructure development, integration of digital health technologies, and capacity building, which enhances the study's credibility and potential for impact. The study offers a holistic perspective on enhancing health-care outcomes in Africa by addressing multiple facets of clinical and translational research.

6. Conclusion

Clinical and translational research in Africa holds immense potential for advancing healthcare and addressing global health inequities. However, several challenges, such as inadequate infrastructure, limited funding, regulatory complexities, restricted access to high-quality healthcare, cultural barriers, and brain drain, hinder the progress of robust research on the continent. To unlock opportunities for advancement, stakeholders must prioritize and invest in African research. This requires increased interest and support from international organizations and collaborations, leveraging the diverse patient populations in the region and nurturing local innovation. By addressing these obstacles and taking advantage of these opportunities, Africa can emerge as a vibrant hub for clinical and translational research, contributing to improved health outcomes and reducing global health disparities. Therefore, it is a call to action for stakeholders to allocate resources and funding to support research in Africa. This commitment is essential not only for the continent's development

but also for addressing the urgent need to tackle health inequities globally. Investing in clinical and translational research in Africa can drive transformative change, enhance health-care outcomes, and foster a more equitable and sustainable future for all.

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Conflicts of Interest

All authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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