

Inaugural Regional Meeting of the SAMRC Research Capacity Development (RCD) Beneficiaries Hosted by the University of Zululand

In an effort to strengthen collaboration and partnership among grant holders, the South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC)'s Division of Research Capacity Development (RCD) organized the first regional meeting of RCD beneficiaries. This significant event was hosted by the University of Zululand in Umhlanga, KwaZulu-Natal, under the theme "Fostering Research Capabilities through Local Partnership and Collaboration."

The meeting brought together RCD grant holders and their teams based in the KwaZulu-Natal region, including those from the University of Zululand (UNIZULU), Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT), the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), and the African Health Research Institute (AHRI) to showcase the progress of their research projects. Additionally, this year's regional meeting included RCD grant holders from the University of Limpopo and researchers from the SAMRC Biomedical Research and Innovation Platform (BRIP), as it coincided with the second annual joint collaborative meeting between UNIZULU, the University of Limpopo, and SAMRC BRIP.



Participants of the inaugural regional meeting of SAMRC RCD Beneficiaries held in Umhlanga, KwaZulu-Natal. (for more pictures of the event, [click here](#)).

During the opening session, Prof K.C. Lehloenya, Dean of the Faculty of Science, Agriculture and Engineering, and Prof S. Songca, Head of the Department of Biochemistry and Microbiology, both at the University of Zululand, warmly welcomed the participants. They expressed gratitude to SAMRC for its longstanding support and emphasized the importance of collaboration in enhancing research capabilities to address regional challenges. Prof Johan Louw, Senior Unit Director of the SAMRC Centres and Platforms, highlighted the history of SAMRC research capacity development at historically disadvantaged institutions (HDIs), especially the contribution of BRIP at the University of Zululand, and underscored the significance of joint meetings in fostering collaboration.

Dr. Abeda Dawood, Divisional Manager of the RCD Division, reflected on the division's achievements in building capacity and transforming the next generation of health researchers. She encouraged beneficiaries to provide input on how the RCD can better support them in achieving their objectives and

enhancing the impact of their work beyond just providing project funding and scholarships. In the same context, Dr. Frederic Nduhirabandi, Programme Manager of RCD Career Grants, delivered a comprehensive presentation on effective research capacity development and the importance of collaboration, further showcasing the strategic achievement of the RCD grants in strengthening research teams.

As part of the scientific programme, postgraduate students and postdoctoral fellows working on the principal investigator (PI) projects presented the results of their studies. Following student's presentations, RCD-funded PIs, including two early investigators, three PIs in the RCD Initiative (HDI) and two mid-career scientists (Prof Marakalala J Mohlopheni from AHRI and Prof L Mkhize-Kwitshana from UKZN), shared updates of their ongoing research projects, highlighting the progress and achievements made possible through SAMRC RCD funding. Prof. Rabia Johnson, Co-Deputy Director of the SAMRC BRIP, presented an overview of BRIP's research, emphasizing their readiness to host students and collaborate with RCD beneficiaries. Dr. Pritika Ramharack, a Senior Scientist at SAMRC BRIP, also presented the new training opportunities available at BRIP.

After the presentations, seven students with the best oral presentations received awards in three categories. In the Master's category, the top presenters were Ms Sithembile Sithole (UNIZULU), followed by Ms Siphelele Thethwayo (UNIZULU), and Ms Tshedimosho Kgoadi (UL). In the PhD category, the best presenters included Ms. Roxanne Pillay from MUT (1st place), Ms. Dolly Kgakishe from UL (2nd place), and Mr. Neo Aphang from UL (3rd place). Ms. Tshwarelo Mohale, a PhD student from UL, won the trophy for the overall best presentation.



Ms. Tshwarelo Mohale, the winner of the overall best presentation, Dr Abeda Dawood (RCD Division Manager) and Prof. S. Songca (UNIZULU).

Besides the excellent scientific presentations, the regional meeting facilitated networking and exchange of ideas among researchers from different institutions and disciplines, marking an important milestone in promoting regional multidisciplinary research initiatives and boosting partnerships among local researchers funded by SAMRC. It also offered an opportunity for students and PIs to meet and strengthen their connections while exploring potential collaborations with SAMRC BRIP and other funded PIs. The beneficiaries had the chance to discuss the progress of their projects with RCD officials and explore ways RCD could better support them.

The event concluded with a farewell dinner organized by UNIZULU to honour the exceptional contributions of Prof. Christo Muller (BRIP), who is retiring after more than a decade of service in supervising and mentoring students in the Department of Biochemistry, which hosts two RCDI PIs beneficiaries.

Overall, the inaugural regional beneficiary meeting was highly successful, leaving participants and the RCD division with a strong sense of satisfaction. The event promoted a spirit of collaboration and established a solid foundation for future regional meetings.

For pictures of the event, [click here](#).

Contribution: Division of Research Capacity Development (RCD)

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UL Team



UKZN Team



UNIZULU Team

