



**BREACHING DISCIPLINARY AND SECTOR BOUNDARIES:**  
Perspectives on Early Child Developmental & Health Interventions

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## Objectives

- ▶ My central message—Just in case I run out of time, as is typically the case with scholars who compensate for being vertically challenged with long presentations!!
- ▶ Brief introduction to the Institute for Human Development at Aga Khan University
- ▶ Breaching boundaries: Which boundaries
- ▶ Working assumptions
- ▶ Integrative approaches to intervention and translational science
- ▶ Catching up with the reality of the *epidemiological transition* from infectious disease to chronic, degenerative, NCD causation of mortality across the life span
- ▶ The pediatrician as gateway to a multi-disciplinary, cross-sector health and developmental intervention culture.

## The Central Message Briefly Stated

- ▶ What role does an African field of pediatrics want to play *in shaping the intervention sciences* to become more *inclusive* of simple, workable strategies for educating families, communities in our parts of the world about the prevention of NCDs?
- ▶ SELFISHLY, what can I take with me to the Institute for Human Development from esteemed Pediatrician colleagues as I embark on the arduous but exciting task of working with others to build a culture for cross-disciplinary collaborative research that can be placed at the leading edge of integrative approaches to health and developmental interventions?

## Brief Introduction to the Institute for Human Development at Aga Khan University

*“Our children carry in their hands our future and our hope for a pluralistic, peaceful, harmonious, life-enriching world; we better invest to build a strong foundation to support them, or there is no future to talk about.”*

- ▶ To generate and disseminate knowledge on early human development that simultaneously (1) has relevance for our local contexts and (2) contributes to a better rounded global science of human development and interventions.

TZ’s President Nyerere (1966) on the “local development value” of the African University

The university in a developing country must put the emphasis of its work on subjects of immediate moment to the nation in which it exists, and it must be committed to the people of that nation and their humanistic goals . . . We in poor societies can only justify expenditure on a University—of any type—if it promotes real development of our people. (p. 296)

## Breaching/Crossing Boundaries: Which Boundaries

- ▶ Disciplines/fields
- ▶ Conceptual frameworks (themselves embedded in, and shaped, by disciplinary and paradigmatic orientations)
- ▶ National development and service delivery sectors



# Working Assumptions (1)

## ON THE ADVANCEMENT OF SCIENCE

- ▶ Disciplinary specialization drives the advancement of science through its laser-focused attention to questions of scientific and societal importance

## ON KNOWLEDGE UTILIZATION/APPLICATION

- ▶ Knowledge application and professional practice occur at the confluence of multiple knowledge bases
- ▶ ON THE EPIDEMIOLOGICAL TRANSITION FROM INFECTIOUS TO CHRONIC, DEGENERATIVE OR NON-COMMUNICABLE DISEASE CAUSATION OF PREMATURE MORTALITY ACROSS THE LIFE SPAN
  - ▶ It has been quite a while since medical science acknowledged this transition; yet it appears we are more responsive to infectious disease causation

## Working Assumptions (2)

- ▶ ON THE PARALLEL GROWTH TRAJECTORIES OF TRADITIONS OF INTERVENTION SCIENCE
  - ▶ We know a lot through strong scientific research about developmental and health interventions—even if that knowledge is uneven in geographic and/or disciplinary origination;
  - ▶ Despite the fact that the Intervention and translation sciences have grown in leaps and bounds over the past two decades in particular, much of that work occurs in parallel fashion and remain domiciled within single fields and disciplines
  - ▶ The limited integration of across disciplines exposes us to the danger that we each see advances in our own field as the only and/or solution in town.
- ▶ Pediatricians concerned about the astronomically growing threat of NCDs are a key gateway to systems-oriented approaches to child health and developmental interventions

## Sign of Growing Responsiveness to Integrated Approaches

- ▶ Intervention research combining health, nutrition, and developmental stimulation
- ▶ Development work and donor organizations becoming increasingly committed to integrated approaches—story of Accordia (next slide)



## Beyond Single-Sector Policies & Interventions: The Story of the Accordia Global Health Foundation's work in Africa

- ▶ Strengthening the health sector:
  - ▶ Infectious Diseases Institute (IDI), Makerere University, Uganda
    - ▶ At the height of the HIV and AIDS epidemic
  - ▶ West African Infectious Diseases Institute (WAID), Nigeria
    - ▶ collaborative initiative to support and improve locally driven research and training across all infectious diseases
- ▶ **Beyond Health: The Institute for Child Wellness in Africa (TICWA), University of Malawi**
  - ▶ Build cross-cutting systems across sectors to improve children's health and wellbeing in developing countries:
    - ▶ **Health • Education • Social welfare • Agriculture • Business • Technology**
  - ▶ Test and demonstrate new, *integrated approaches to ensuring child health and wellness*
  - ▶ Build capacity to scale integrated approaches

## TOWARD AN INTEGRATED KNOWLEDGE BASE FOR HEALTH & DEVELOPMENTAL INTERVENTIONS: ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE OF MULTI-CONTEXT, CROSS-NATIONAL, INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH

- ▶ **Core Assumption:** *A great deal of what we know about human development is bound up within individual disciplines and fields with some but not ideal level of integration on the application end*
- ▶ **Core Objective:** *To build a comprehensive database to be mined for **integrated** understandings of early human development*
- ▶ **Examples of Areas of Integration (at the level of conceptualization as well as design)**
  - ▶ Early brain development (neuroscience)
  - ▶ Maternal, newborn/child health—including **mental** health
  - ▶ Developmental Medicine/Developmental Pediatrics
  - ▶ Nutrition science
  - ▶ Developmental/Psychological/Behavioral Science
  - ▶ Development economics/Economics of human capital development
  - ▶ Context-sensitive conceptions and applications of early developmental and educational interventions
- ▶ **Key Research Strategy:**
  - ▶ Establish comprehensive large-scale international, multi-context studies integrating variables across fields and utilizing comparable measures (rigorously designed/selected for contextual appropriateness across settings)
- ▶ **Added value of such research**
  - ▶ Assessment and validation of assumptions of universality and context-specificity
  - ▶ Promotion of context-specific applications of science to early developmental interventions
  - ▶ Advancement of a relatively more global interdisciplinary science of early human development informed by multiple conceptions of reality, developmental phenomena, societally valued outcomes