

**Towards Financial Sustainability: A Case Study of the Regional
Institute for Population Studies at the University of Ghana.**

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Executive Summary

The Regional Institute for Population Studies (RIPS) was created by the United Nations in 1972, within the University of Ghana to cater for the training needs of Anglophone Africa. RIPS was designed to offer graduate programs leading to the award of an MA, MPhil, or PhD. As a subsidiary of the Economic Commission for Africa, RIPS was almost fully supported by the UNFPA but the financial sustainability model was weak. Member states were supposed to make contributions to RIPS to progressively replace UN funding, but this never materialized fully. When UNFPA withdrew funding from RIPS in 1999, the Institute was left extremely vulnerable and set in motion a downward spiral. The appointment of Professor Francis Dodoo, a Ghanaian with a tenured position at Pennsylvania State University, as the director of RIPS in 2006 began an institutional transformation process which has turned RIPS into a premier research and postgraduate training program in Africa.

The purpose of this case study is to inform the Hewlett Foundation and other demographic training programs of the steps necessary and success factors for developing a strong research program and establishing the financial sustainability of an academic program within a university. Although the case study covers the time period from the founding of RIPS to the present day, the main focus is on the evolution of the RIPS' business model after the UN withdrew its funding. The main methods of the inquiry were interviews with the former and current director, faculty, alumni and students, senior university managers, and external stakeholders.

Since 2002, RIPS has admitted more than 230 students on its MA program. Nearly 50 students have proceeded to MPhil or PhD study. Between 2007 and 2015, the faculty and students of RIPS produced more than 100 journal articles in international peer-reviewed journals and about 70 book chapters and books.

The main success factors that were identified through the interviews and document reviews were:

- a) Visionary leadership. The appointment of Professor Dodoo as director brought energy to the fledgling institute. The courage and determination of the director to push through with reforms to the curriculum, staffing, the caliber of students, and infrastructural changes has transformed RIPS into a vibrant institute of research and postgraduate training. After serving the statutory two-terms, Professor Dodoo handed over the directorship to Professor Samuel Codjoe in 2013. Professor Codjoe is also a highly successful international researcher who is continuing to promote the research culture of RIPS.
- b) The faculty's commitment to RIPS' vision and mission (the "*RIPS culture*") is another important factor in RIPS' success story. The culture is about investing heavily in the students through mentoring, promoting self-belief, and rigorous training. The reward is high-quality research produced by RIPS' students and graduates.
- c) Selectivity of students by setting high entry and progression standards. The standards for enrolment on the MA have been kept high and there is an expectation of excellence and high standards which encourages students to work even harder. Only about 10-15% of the students on the MA are promoted to the MPhil level. The incentives for the highest

performers, which include overseas placement, encourage competition among students and drive up the quality.

- d) Inculcation of a strong research culture among faculty and students. RIPS has successfully transformed from being research-inactive to a vibrant research institute. In addition to the strong research leadership, an incentive system of topping up salaries from project grants, the creation of a positive and enabling environment for research, and improvements in research infrastructure are the major factors that are responsible for this.
- e) The initial grant from the Hewlett Foundation was a life-line since it enabled infrastructural improvements such as faster internet, regular supply of electricity, and funds for stipends and scholarships. It is unlikely that the MPhil/PhD program would have taken off at RIPS without this funding which enabled students to undertake research training on a full-time basis.

From this case study, we deduce that an injection of funding for infrastructural transformation and scholarships, visionary leadership, selectivity of students and high progression standards, and a strong research culture were necessary conditions for RIPS' successful transformation to a strong research and postgraduate training institute. Collaborations with strong research groups in the West, and the strong commitment of the faculty to mentoring students are additional factors that have contributed to RIPS' success.

Finally, RIPS has embarked on a journey to achieve financial sustainability by creating an endowment fund to provide funding for the Institutes' running costs and scholarships. Generous interest rates on the fund, a transparent trustee structure to manage the fund, and flexible overhead funding arrangements have enabled RIPS to build up this endowment fund. Going forward, RIPS will still need financial support if it is to continue to provide full scholarships to MPhil/PhD students. RIPS also needs to continue to provide high-quality facilities for its faculty and students and opportunities for institutional visits and conference attendance.

1. Introduction

The Regional Institute for Population Studies (RIPS) was created by the United Nations (UN) in 1972, within the University of Ghana to cater for the training needs of Anglophone Africa. The Institut de Formation et de Recherche Démographiques (IFORD) in Cameroon and the Cairo Demographic Center, also creations of the UN, catered for the French and Arab-speaking parts of the continent, respectively. RIPS was designed to offer graduate programs leading to the award of MAs, MPhils, or PhDs. By 1994, the program was recruiting 25 MAs, 2 MPhils, and 2 PhDs per annum (United Nations, 1995¹). As subsidiaries of the Economic Commission for Africa, these organizations were almost fully supported by the UNFPA. The financial sustainability model of RIPS under the UN was weak. Member states were supposed to make contributions to RIPS to progressively replace UN funding, but this never materialized fully. When UNFPA withdrew funding from RIPS in 1999, the Institute was left extremely vulnerable and set in motion a downward spiral.

By 2004, the University of Ghana was contemplating closing the Institute. Professor Francis Dodoo, a Ghanaian national with a tenured position at Pennsylvania State University, was head-hunted as the director to lead the institutional reform process which was enabled by a grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. The ultimate goal of the reform was to develop a self-sustaining interdisciplinary research and postgraduate training program in population sciences. As part of the institutional reform, RIPS became a national unit owned by the University of Ghana. This change freed the University of Ghana from the restrictive governance system of multi-country ownership set up by the United Nations. However, this resulted in drying up the intake of students from other African countries.

The academic curriculum was revised from a mostly technical demography one to a broader and more interdisciplinary program with a representation of quantitative and qualitative perspectives. Also, in conformity with its location in the Faculty of Social Sciences, RIPS greatly increased the quota of social scientific research methodology coursework in the curriculum (students now have to take courses in research logic, qualitative methodology, and quantitative methodology). Collaboration was formed between RIPS and Pennsylvania State University to allow RIPS' research students to undertake placement in the USA. Part of the transformation was to bring back a strong research culture among future staff which emphasized publications in international peer-reviewed journals and applying for and winning competitive grants. Last, but not least was infrastructural improvements to internet access, computers, office space, and electricity. RIPS has transformed to become one of the best in the region for demographic research training and is able to compete for research grants from a diverse range of funding organizations. After the statutory two three-year terms as director, Professor Dodoo relinquished the directorship to Professor Samuel Codjoe.

¹ United Nations. Background Information to RIPS (1994/95).

<http://www.un.org/popin/popdiv/tssp/handlist/africa/ghana.htm>

The purpose of this case study is to inform the Hewlett Foundation and other demographic training programs of the steps necessary and success factors for developing a strong research program and establishing the financial sustainability of an academic program within a university (see Appendix 1 for Terms of Reference). Although the case study covers the time period from the founding of RIPS to the present day, the main focus is on the evolution of the RIPS' business model after the UN withdrew its funding.

2. Methods

The main areas of inquiry for this case study were to understand what enabling factors were responsible for the transformation of RIPS into a strong research and training program, and to assess the financial sustainability model of the unit. To ensure that the investigation covered all relevant areas, we used 'capitals' financial sustainable assessment to guide the interviews, with particular emphasis on RIPS' ability to develop and manage the following:

a) *Human capital*, where emphasis was on the skills, abilities, and capabilities of the faculty and students, how faculty's skills matched the needs of the Institute, and how these were being continually developed.

b) *Organizational capital*, focusing on evidence of efficient and effective functioning of the unit in the core areas of research, teaching, and knowledge translation.

c) *Financial capital*, to assess the sustainability of funding for the Institute's research and training activities and management of resources.

d) *Intellectual capital* – focusing on RIPS' areas of strength in research and training expertise, and how this capital is protected and exploited.

The methods of assessment were mainly interviews and document reviews. The interviews were conducted, broadly in this order, with the following:

- *Professors Doodoo and Codjoe* as immediately past and current directors, respectively. Specific areas that were addressed were: the transformation process, the directors' vision for RIPS, staff skills mix, staff development, financial standing of RIPS and the strategy for financial sustainability, their expectations of the core capabilities of a RIPS graduate, managing of intellectual capital including research outputs, stakeholder engagement, and potential threats and risks to continued growth
- *Faculty*. The interviews focused on self-assessment of their standing as scientists, access to facilities and resources, perceptions of RIPS' standing regionally; factors contributing to RIPS' success, and areas that need improvement.
- Newly qualified alumni staff and current students. Questions included their experiences as students at RIPS', access to facilities and resources, opportunities for continuing professional development (for alumni on the staff of RIPS), opportunities for collaboration and

stakeholder engagement, their perception of the enabling factors to RIPS' success, and potential threats and risks to RIPS' continued progress.

- Administrative staff including the Provost of the College of Humanities, the current Registrar, immediately past Registrar, and immediately past Administrative and Grants Officer at RIPS. Questions to administrative staff included how RIPS fits into the University's vision, funding for RIPS, comparison of RIPS to other University institutes, and succession planning. For the Grants Officer, questions sought to understand the support given to faculty for grant-writing and grant management, financial management of overheads, and existence of policies and manuals for financial transactions.
- Five external stakeholders who are familiar with the work of RIPS including staff at Pennsylvania State University, research collaborators, and a previous member of RIPS' advisory board. For this group, focus was on their perception of the visibility of RIPS regionally and internationally, factors that had enabled RIPS to transform, areas where RIPS could improve, and potential threats and risks to RIPS' continued success.

Appendices 2a-2f contain the guides that were used for these interviews and Appendix 3 lists all the interviewees.

The documents that were reviewed were as follows:

- a) RIPS' website
- b) United Nations summary background information on RIPS dated 1995
- c) Faculty list, including qualifications
- d) Publication list
- e) Record of current grants
- f) RIPS' Strategic Plan

3. The current status of RIPS

Student recruitment

It is estimated that during the 27 years of UN funding, RIPS admitted more than 600 students but the records of the actual numbers who graduated during this period are not readily available. From the United Nations (1995) summary document about RIPS, the program had a target recruitment of 25 students for the MA and 2 each on the MPhil and PhD programs. Nearly all of the students were funded by UNFPA, but they had to be nominated by their governments. The cost per student was estimated to be about \$12,500 per annum. Since 2002, RIPS has admitted more than 230 students on its MA program and achieved an outright pass rate of 66%. 94% of the students have been Ghanaians. Recruitment on the MA is kept around 20 deliberately (see Appendix 4 for student numbers). Since 2006, 46 students have

proceeded to MPhil or PhD study. These students are funded by scholarships from RIPS, with a stipend of around \$6,000 to ensure that they undertake full-time research training.

Faculty

In 2015, RIPS had ten full-time members of faculty and three part-time lecturers. All have PhDs (see Table 1). Seven faculty members have PhDs in demography/population studies, two in population geography, two in social statistics, and one in social psychology/public health. The four main research strengths of RIPS identified by faculty and stakeholders are: population studies, climate change, urban health, and non-communicable diseases. From the skills mix, we see that RIPS is doing well in terms of demography expertise, but there may be need to ensure that there are more people who can supervise PhDs in the other areas of strength. One interviewee identified economic demography as a desirable area for future recruitment.

Table 1. Faculty Roster, 2015

| Name | Date employed |
|--|----------------------------|
| Associate Professor S.N.A. Codjoe, PhD in Population Geography & Social Science, University of Bonn | 2004 |
| Associate Professor Ama de Graft Aikins, PhD in Social Psychology, public health emphasis, London School of Economic and Political Science | 2009 (part-time from 2007) |
| Dr Mumuni Abu, PhD in Population Studies, University of Ghana, (MPhil, RIPS) | 2014 |
| Professor F.N.A. Doodoo, PhD in Demography, University of Pennsylvania | 2006 |
| Dr Naa Dodua Doodoo, PhD in Demography, University of Ghana, (MPhil, RIPS) | 2014 |
| Dr Delali Badasu, PhD in Geography & Resource Development, University of Ghana (MA or MPhil, RIPS) | 2007 |
| Dr Faustina Frempong-Ainguah, PhD in Social Statistics, University of Southampton (MPhil, RIPS) | 2006 |
| Associate Professor S.O. Kwankye, PhD in Population Studies, University of Ghana (MPhil, RIPS) | 1995 |
| Dr Pearl Kyei, PhD in Demography, Pennsylvania State University | 2014 |
| Associate Professor John Anarfi, PhD in Population Studies University of Ghana | 1997 |
| Part-time | |
| Associate Professor E.O. Tawiah, PhD in Sociology/Demography, Duke University | 1989 |
| Dr Philomena Nyarko, PhD Demography & Social Statistics, University of Southampton. | 2001 |
| Associate Professor Andrew Aryee | |

Research productivity

In keeping with the strategy of the first director after the Hewlett Foundation intervention, the research publications of the faculty cover a broad range of population studies and related disciplines, and many are interdisciplinary. The topics covered include fertility, migration, mortality, reproductive health, public health including non-communicable diseases, sociology of health, the environment, and climate change. Data from the University’s Office of Research Innovation and Development shows that between 2007 and the first quarter of 2015, staff at RIPS published over 100 journals articles. The range of journals also varies, from usual the demography/sociology journals such as *Genus*, *Demographic Research*, *Marriage and the Family* to public health journals such as *The Lancet*, *Social Science and Medicine*, *Health and Place*, to environment journals such as *Population and Environment*, *Natural Hazards*, and *Climate Change*. Faculty also produced 48 chapters in edited books, 9 books, and 12 working papers or technical reports. There was only one policy brief produced during the period.

| Year of publication | Journal articles | Book chapters | Books | Working papers or Technical reports |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|--------------|--|
| 2015 | 7 | 3 | | |
| 2013/14 | 26 | 19 | 4 | 3 |
| 2011/12 | 29 | 6 | 1 | 4 |
| 2009/10 | 23 | 14 | 3 | 3 |
| 2007/2008 | 16 | 3 | 1 | 1 |
| 2006 | 7 | 3 | | 1 |
| Total | 101 | 48 | 9 | 12 |

Grant income

From a single grant from UNDP in 2004 worth about \$39,000, the Institute has come a long way in grantmanship. According to the official RIPS’ website, the Institute raised over \$5.6 million in grant income between 2005 and 2011. Current research and training grants total nearly \$2.5 million (\$4 million if we include grants which were completed in 2014). Estimates from the current director are that the average annual grant income is around \$0.5 million. The majority of these grants are for multiple years. The largest single current grant is for more than \$1 million and it started in 2015. The Institute’s grants have come from a range of funders including NIH, ESRC/DFID, European Union, IDRC, DFID, the Hewlett Foundation, and sub-contracts from Macro International, and the INDEPTH Network. Many of these funders have provided RIPS with repeat grants, which is a good sign of financial sustainability. A policy of RIPS is to include studentships on large, multiple-year grants where the funders allow. For example, in a recently completed grant from IDRC, RIPS was able to include scholarships for eight MPhil students and four PhDs.

Perceptions of RIPS’ standing regionally

The views from the external stakeholders on RIPS' standing regionally were very positive. Most of the stakeholders were aware of the change in fortunes of RIPS between its creation in 1972 to the present. All of the stakeholders agreed that the transformation process had been highly successful, and all were of the view that if the RIPS model could be transferrable, then this would be good for training centers on the continent. The major difference between RIPS and other training centers in Africa was said to be the research culture among staff and students, which is *"rarely found on the continent"*. Linked to this was the rigor in research methods which was evident in conference presentations and in published work. Although there are other regional research centers on the African continent who are producing good work, all the stakeholders commented that the quality of research from RIPS was higher. To quote two stakeholders:

"RIPS is producing really exciting and interesting students. The "RIPS impact at PAA" is very visible. The presentations of RIPS' students show methodological rigor, and what is important is that this is not a "colonial" product. There is no other institute in Africa to compare RIPS with".

"RIPS is a regional institute that is among the best in Anglophone Africa, probably in the top two and definitely in the top three. It sits with the demography training units in South Africa in terms of quality although RIPS's masters and PhD students have been more visible on the conference circuit".

Another stakeholder comment on the training at RIPS as follows:

"The training part has been very successful. I can see the narrowing of the gap between RIPS' and US graduate students".

Similarly, views from the senior university administrators were very positive about RIPS. RIPS' success in research and training was recognized, and so too was its research productivity which stood out among the other institutes. RIPS was seen to be in line with the University's vision of becoming a research-intensive university by 2020 and re-orientation of programs to 50% postgraduates.

4. Enabling factors for the transformation of RIPS

The primary purpose of the interviews was to understand from internal and external stakeholders what the RIPS model was. Specifically, the questions aimed to obtain information on success factors which have enabled RIPS to transformation, and how progress can be sustained. The responses on factors that have contributed to RIPS's success were very consistent and can be summarized as follows: visionary leadership; the faculty's commitment to RIPS' vision and mission; inculcation of a strong research culture among faculty and students; and availability of funding for infrastructural improvements and scholarships. These factors were repeatedly mentioned during the interviews with faculty, the directors, administrators,

and external stakeholders. Another important factor identified within RIPS was the high selectivity of students enrolled on the MA and expectations of excellence and high standards among students.

Leadership

After the withdrawal of the UN funding, RIPS was left with a skeleton of staff since the entire international faculty left. Furthermore, there was no institutional funding for any of the programs. The appointment of Professor Dodoo as director brought about some energy to the fledging institute. Driven by a strong belief that African scholars can be just as highly productive as any other scholars given the right incentives and an enabling environment, Professor Dodoo started an organizational and infrastructural transformation process, investing in facilities and human capital, and re-orienting the program to a broader population studies agenda instead of the heavy emphasis on technical demography that had existed during the UN era. The personal standing of the director as an esteemed international scholar, and his extensive collaborations in Africa, USA, and Europe were seen by external stakeholders as important in *“getting funders to look at RIPS”*.

Other consistent themes on leadership were: the ability to recognize talent and tackling difficult issues. For example, an early decision taken by the new director after the Institute received Hewlett funding was to change the mean age of the students on the MA program by attracting younger applicants. Prior to Hewlett funding, those who were able to afford the fees for the MA were mid-career professionals who needed refresher courses or continuing professional development. Thus there was no pool from which to select MPhil and PhD candidates. After attracting younger cohorts, RIPS was quick to recognize talent amongst its top students and it has nurtured and managed their transitions into the faculty. As two external stakeholder put it,

“RIPS’s leadership has not afraid to take tough decisions; they have not taken shortcuts in implementing, sometimes unpopular decisions. These include letting go those who are not true researchers”.

“Leadership is a major contributory factor to RIPS’ success. Francis changed the orientation of the program to research and teaching instead of teaching only. The University gave him space to re-orient the program.”

The former director also took bold steps to change the gender composition of the faculty because of his beliefs in how important that was for a rounded instruction of students. When Professor Dodoo was hired at RIPS, he became the fifth male on a faculty that had no women. He then proceeded to hire Dr Philomena Nyarko, Dr Delali Badasu, Dr Ama de-Graft Aikins, Mrs Faustina Frempong-Ainguah to (gender) balance out the faculty. With women and men both being promoted through the student ranks, it has been easy to hire additional women in the last

couple of years, two of whom, Dr Naa Dodua Dodoo and Dr Adriana Biney (her appointment is being finalized) are RIPS' products.

The former university Registrar, Mr Ted Konu, who was in office in 2004 was also seen by RIPS' staff as instrumental in the reversal of RIPS' fortunes. He is credited with the change in the governance structure of RIPS to become a University of Ghana institute, and he enabled the successful negotiation which led to the appointment of a strong 'first' director at a time when the University was contemplating closing RIPS.

After serving two three-year terms, the directorship was transferred from Professor Dodoo to Professor Sam Codjoe, a geographer with research interests in climate change. Professor Codjoe has ensured that the strong research culture of RIPS continues and he is leading by example in successfully winning million dollars of grant income. Sam Codjoe is also vice-president of UAPS and he will assume the presidency in 2015.

Faculty's commitment to RIPS' vision and mission

The human capital, in the form of staff and its students, are core to RIPS' sustainability. The "RIPS culture", as one of the interviewees dubbed it, is about commitment to the Institute and to its students. It is about an open door policy, and familial-type relationships between staff and between staff and students. This culture has been in existence even before the change in RIPS' fortunes, as Professor Dodoo commented about RIPS' faculty, "*Seriousness to teaching and mentoring students; this is a culture that predates me*". Similarly the current director of RIPS, Professor Codjoe, saw the commitment of the faculty to the vision and mission of RIPS as a key factor to RIPS' success. To quote him,

"Ever since I joined RIPS, it has been like a family. We are all committed to push our students to do their best, to do research. It has not changed. New staff– most of them were part of the program, so they know what the expectations are".

The dedication of staff to mentoring students was appreciated most by new staff, alumni, and current students. Students learnt not only from the formal classes and meetings but also through informal interaction with the faculty. Furthermore, students, alumni, and junior faculty appreciated the opportunities for hands-on research training through participation in projects and commended strongly the collegiate and strong emphasis on mentorship. Comments such as "*Staff are very commitment to RIPS*", "*People care about RIPS*", and "*Staff who inspire students to become leaders*", were made in multiple interviews.

Asked about RIPS' expectation of the core capabilities of a RIPS graduate, the current director of RIPS highlighted two aspects, saying that,

“ He/she should be able to compete in a global world, that is why we really push them. All these conference attendances are requirements. When they go to Penn State or North Carolina, we require them to attend conferences”, and

“They should be able to compete anywhere, they should not be timid. We teach them to be able to do this. How to attract grants etc. Then they can compete anywhere”.

RIPS is also committed to developing the skills of its faculty to enable them to realize their full potential. At university level, there exist training programs such as induction for new staff and how to deliver lectures. Within RIPS, staff development includes scientific writing and methodological training. Such courses are often open to the wider university academic staff. The faculty were generally happy with the information provided to them regarding human resources procedures, expenditure manuals, criteria for promotion and so on. RIPS's administrative staff, including the Academic Registrar, were said to be *“very knowledgeable”* and helped new faculty to transition smoothly into their roles. RIPS encourages its faculty to collaborate with international researchers. Currently, RIPS has active research collaborations with Penn State, North Carolina, New York University, Southampton, Washington State and Oxford.

This *“RIPS culture”* is not confined to academic staff only. The Institute's administrators were also perceived to be very dedicated to RIPS and often *“went out of their way to make things happen”*. Upgrading the skills of its administrative staff is one way that RIPS ensures that its faculty and students are adequately supported. RIPS' administrative, computing, and IT staff are encouraged to network with researchers in the US or Europe, *“to learn how to be a professional”*. Penn State and Southampton have, in recent years, hosted RIPS' staff in these crucial areas. The Institute uses some of its research overheads to enable such training and secondments. Another important role that the administrators play is to support grant management by dealing with the contractual obligations to the funders.

Selectivity of students

As part of the institutional transformation, RIPS set very high standards for entry into the MA program. Equally, it set a very high bar for excellence and quality and people rose and met that standard. Progression to the MPhil remains very selective; only the top 10-15% from the MA are promoted into the MPhil, and only the top 3 are rewarded with opportunities to spend a year abroad. Simultaneously, RIPS has been strict with regards to assessment, sticking to a high threshold pass mark so that those who deserve to fail are failed. As a result, students quickly learnt to take their training seriously and put in effort into their studies.

Strong research culture

After UN funding was withdrawn, RIPS had six years of high staff-student ratios and heavy teaching workloads. Consequently there was no research culture. In a context where people considered their salaries to be very low, the burden of high student numbers typically inclined many faculty to engage in other income-earning ventures, including commerce, farming, and so

on. Research was seen as a “*matter of choice*” and “*extra*” to your contracted work. The closest such venture to academia was teaching extra loads in other departments and universities, and doing consultancy work. The extra teaching was at the expense of research and the majority of the consultancy work was not research because it did not provide room for scientific publication nor re-use of data by the students. Thus, the former director sought to reorient the culture more towards academia and academic research, and to nudge his colleagues in the direction of scientific research and multi-year, investigator-led grants. To change the culture, he set into motion a number of things:

- a) Firstly, RIPS’ new leadership negotiated with the University to allow staff who brought in research grants to top up their salaries from the research grants (inspired by the USA model where faculty are paid for 9 months, allowing them to self-pay the remaining three months of salary from project grants).
- b) Another strategy was to invest in the facilities. With the funding from Hewlett, RIPS improved its internet speed for both staff and students by making an additional subscription to a private provider; it bought a generator to ensure that there was continuous supply of electricity, and subscribed to online journals. The faculty and students were then able to access almost any journal that they needed.
- c) A third strategy was to encourage staff to be “entrepreneurial” so that they went after large, multi-year individual research grants. RIPS’ leadership recognized very quickly the need to start preparing for the day when funders would expect it to be self-sustaining and therefore they set up a notional total research income target of about \$300,000 per annum with anticipated overheads of around 15%. The overheads were to pay for the recurrent costs such as internet subscriptions, fuel, computers, copiers, other office equipment and student stipends.
- d) Actively cultivated research collaborations with universities in the USA, UK, and Europe. These collaborations were seen as vital for sustained research income growth and further transformation of the research culture since the faculty’s interaction with staff from other universities improved their grant-writing skills and professional academic life. In the early years, the then-new director matched his young and eager colleagues with more grant-experienced colleagues from Northern institutions, who effectively mentored them on grant writing. This was achieved through collaborative proposals that initially had the young RIPS colleagues as co-investigators. Over a short time, the order changed, as RIPS faculty gained experience, and they became lead investigators on grants.
- e) Arranging internships for its best non-research students (who planned on leaving RIPS after their Masters degrees). This was formalized in a partnership with the R3M group of international NGOs (i.e., Population Council, Marie Stopes, and Ipas), and with regular

placements at the Ghana AIDS Commission, the National Population Council, Ghana Statistical Services, INDEPTH Network, and other Ghanaian organizations.

- f) Marketing the comparative advantage that RIPS has over other renowned African institutions. RIPS, being part of the University of Ghana, has comparatively lower overheads rates and lower salary levels than some of the well-known African non-governmental institutions. RIPS' bills for office space, electricity, and support staff are paid by the government, meaning that, dollar-for-dollar, more of RIPS' grants go directly to research.

While research is thriving, there is currently less emphasis on policy engagement although the leaders are aware of the need to develop this aspect of academic work. The intellectual property of the Institute is preserved by timely dissemination of research findings via journal articles, book chapters, books, working papers, and technical reports. A few of the publications are listed on the Institute's website with links to retrieve the electronic versions of the papers. The current director reported of a positive testimonial from one of RIPS' major funders, saying:

"A lot of stories from IDRC telling me that wherever they travel, they meet RIPS' students and they do fantastically well and they publish in high-impact journals. Initial funding support from Hewlett was instrumental".

Most of the faculty are publishing in top journals and many have their own research grants. Every staff member that was interviewed spoke about the need to write research proposals to support their research. This was seen as part of their work as RIPS employees, demonstrating a true reversal in the culture.

Students on the MA program wishing to become researchers recognize that they need to work hard to be selected for the MPhil and PhD. The one-year institutional visit to Penn State is a very strong incentive for students to work hard. So strong is the research culture that many MPhil/PhD students are co-authoring papers with their advisors before they graduate. In the last five years, there have been about 19 publications which include research students. Those that visit Penn State are required to submit an abstract to PAA during their year there and most of them end up presenting posters, with many getting oral presentation papers accepted.

Availability of funding for infrastructural improvements and scholarships

The university provides staff salaries, office space, water, electricity, central computing and internet services, and a central library. However, computing and library facilities are inadequate for a unit such as RIPS which is competing with top training institution in the continent and internationally. The initial grant from the Hewlett Foundation was a life-line for RIPS, without which it would have been extremely difficult for the unit to turn its fortunes around. With the Hewlett funding, RIPS improved its facilities. The interviews we conducted with students and new staff who had studied either in the UK or USA confirmed that facilities at RIPS were generally good. One person reported of being "*pleasantly surprised*" by the facilities at RIPS.

Making infrastructural changes was sometimes not straightforward because RIPS is embedded within the larger university structure which comes with bureaucracy and slower decision-

making processes. Because of its original mandate as a regional institute, RIPS was allowed to own a banking account, separate from the central university accounting system. Thus, it was able to make quicker financial transactions within the framework of the university's financial regulations. RIPS also hires proper auditing firms as additional assurance to funders.

The initial Hewlett funding enabled RIPS to offer scholarships so that students could undertake MPhils and PhDs on a full-time basis. Apart from the vibrant research culture and prospects of an international student visit, scholarships are the main attraction to RIPS' MPhil and PhD programs. In addition, research students and faculty confirmed the availability of travel grants for conferences and opportunities to learn about the research experience hands-on by participating in the Institute's projects.

5. Financial sustainability

In assessing the financial sustainability of RIPS, it is important to understand its income streams and costs. As stated above, the University of Ghana pays all staff salaries (except salaries of those employed on projects), and it provides office space and basic utilities such as water and electricity. Normally, RIPS does not get any portion of the fees paid by the students although there is a possibility that they may get \$10,000 in 2015. Electricity in Ghana can be erratic. Therefore, there is need for RIPS to have back-up electricity. Similarly centrally-provided internet facilities are slow, so faster internet access has to be paid from recurrent funds. The University provides some conference funding and seed funding on a competitive basis, but this is seen by both RIPS staff and the senior University administration as being inadequate. Thus, for RIPS to provide facilities for high-quality training and research, it needs some flexible income, which currently comes from research overheads and the Hewlett grant. Scholarships are another cost, and continuation of the MPhil and PhD programs is dependent on RIPS being able to provide scholarship for students to undertake full-time research training.

RIPS has set up an endowment fund from research overheads. The money is invested in perpetuity, with 50% of the interest gained every year invested back. A board of trustees governs the use of the funds, and at present its usage is confined to students' scholarships and support for professional development of non-academic staff of the Institute. Currently the interest rates are very favorable at 28%, but interest rates can fluctuate downwards. RIPS exposes itself financially (and in terms of capacity, given the small and heavily tasked faculty) each time it takes on a cohort of PhD entrants that is too large. If RIPS were to expand its MPhil/PhD intake, and in particular to increase intake from other nationalities, it would need more funds than can be provided from the endowment fund. Alternatively, RIPS might consider asking students to make a small contribution by offering partial scholarships. Overall, the future expansion of the PhD program will need additional financial support beyond the endowment fund.

The views from the external stakeholders on RIPS' financial sustainability were less informed than those of RIPS' faculty. That said, the issue of dedicated funding for scholarships was seen as quite important. Even with studentships that are built into projects, there is usually a need

for bridging funds since it often takes a while to identify potential students and more often than not, the thesis takes longer than the lifetime of the grant. Thus, it is important to note that even with RIPS's successful transformation, there is still room for sustained financial sustainability. One stakeholder likened RIPS' progress to the "adolescence" stage, stating that,

"RIPS has done so well—there is no comparator in the region. However, it should not be compared with northern institutions in terms of their rate of publications and grant income. It is an "adolescent with promise of transitioning into a highly productive independent adult". Perhaps it should be compared to the population center at Minas Gerais".

6. Areas for improvement and potential threats

All those who were interviewed were asked to specify areas where RIPS needed to make improvements. Interviewees were also asked to identify potential threats or risks that might prevent RIPS from becoming even more successful. Four main areas for improvement were identified and two potential threats/risks were mentioned.

The areas where RIPS can make improvements were:

- a) The curriculum should be rebalanced (slightly) to increase the quantitative material. This should be achievable with the return from PhD studies of lecturers such as Dr Frempong-Ainguah. In addition, RIPS might want to re-examine the number of courses that students on the MA take as there was a perception that the load was too much.
- b) Several external stakeholders commented that the website could be improved to reflect better the wealth and breadth of research and training expertise offered by RIPS. Similarly, RIPS could consider investing in marketing and communications expertise to ensure that its research is disseminated to non-academic stakeholders and that its programs attract more students from other African countries. RIPS' message ought to be: *"You can get a 1st rate PhD education at RIPS"*. This could help to address the brain-drain in the continent.
- c) On the students' overseas placements, it was clearly that this opportunity is highly valued by the students. The recommendation to RIPS is to see how students' placements might be expanded to allow more students to participate, and perhaps encouraging faculty-to-faculty interaction with the hosting departments so that the overseas visit is more fully embedded into the PhD program. In addition, RIPS could consider developing additional student placement arrangements with other universities to give the students and future staff greater diversity.
- d) Postgraduate research training requires a lot of staff-student supervision time. For a sustainable postgraduate research training program, RIPS should aim to have at least two full-time equivalent academic staff for each research areas where RIPS has distinctive strengths.

The external funding environment was listed as a threat to RIPS' success. Notwithstanding RIPS' success in creating a vibrant research culture among its faculty, its ability to win future grants is dependent on external factors such as grant success rates and funders' priorities. Another potential risk for RIPS that was mentioned by faculty is reputational risk if they compromise on

quality when recruiting students. A new University vision to increase postgraduate students across the board might affect RIPS if it is required to take on more research students without additional staff and resources.

7. Summary

In summary, RIPS has been very successful in transforming from a fledging institute on a downward spiral into a premier research and postgraduate training program in Africa. From this case study, we conclude that the necessary factors for transforming a training institution are as follows:

- a) An injection of funds to enable infrastructural upgrading. Without such funding, RIPS would not have been able to attract high-quality staff. Furthermore, faculty and students would not have had access to journals, information about funding, nor to links with external research collaborators.
- b) A visionary leader is necessary for major transformation. RIPS needed a leader who was able to inject energy and enthusiasm in the pursuit of a 'true' research culture. It needed a leader who could navigate the bureaucracy of university structures to quickly effect changes to the curriculum, staffing, and the organization of the unit.
- c) Selectivity of students by setting high entry and progression standards. The quality of students enrolled on the MA has been kept high and there are expectations of excellence and high standards. Only about 10-15% of the students on the MA are promoted to the MPhil level. The incentives for top performers, which include overseas placement, further drive up competitiveness and high quality.
- d) Research training is quite hard if not full-time (even in the western world). However, full-time registration is often financially difficult for most students who are self-funded. To be able to produce cohorts of highly trained PhD graduates on time, there is need for stipends so that research students can concentrate on their research training without worrying about how they will finance their studies.
- e) For PhD training, faculty must be research active. RIPS' strong research culture is responsible for the high-quality of its PhD students and graduates, many of whom are publishing in international journals before they graduate. The credibility of the directors as researchers in their own right has enabled RIPS to obtain research grants on a competitive basis from a range of funders.

This case study has identified other unique factors which enabled RIPS to transform so successfully. These are:

- The faculty's commitment to the vision of RIPS and to mentoring students. All the stakeholders who had visited RIPS commented on this commitment which predates the arrival of Professor Dodoo. This culture contributes to the students' belief in themselves and in their desire to excel.

- At RIPS, there is an open, friendly, and familial feel which is apparent even to outsiders. Students are made to feel that they are part of RIPS and its success.
- The initiation of research collaborations with internationally recognized groups was important in getting RIPS' junior faculty visible in the early phases of the transformation. As RIPS' faculty has become more successful in publishing and winning grants, the relationships with collaborators have become more egalitarian.

Finally, RIPS has embarked on a journey to achieving financial sustainability by creating an endowment fund for the Institutes' running costs and scholarships. Generous interest rates on the fund, a transparent trustee structure to manage the fund, and flexible overhead funding arrangements have enabled RIPS to build up this endowment fund. Going forward, RIPS will still need financial support to continue to provide full scholarships to MPhil/PhD students and to ensure that they have access to high-quality facilities and opportunities conference attendance and institutional visits.

Appendix 1: Terms of Reference

STATEMENT OF WORK

Description of the Work

Consultant shall document the financial sustainability model the Regional Institute for Population Studies at the University of Ghana by developing a case study based on interviews with RIPS staff and stakeholders and document review. The purpose of the case study is to inform the Hewlett Foundation and other demographic training programs of the steps necessary and success factors for developing a strong research program and establishing the financial sustainability of an academic program within a university. It is specifically agreed that the Work shall include a final report to be delivered to the Foundation on or before the Termination Date.

Appendix 2a: Interview Guide for Directors

'First' Director

Tell me the background to RIPS, from the time UN funding ceased.

Why did you take up role as director? What motivated you?

What did you do upon taking on the role of director?

Training programs? Research? Infrastructure?

What have been the major achievements?

What were the challenges?

If you could tell me three things that have contributed to the transformation of RIPS what would these be?

How are staff supported to realize their full potential?

How can RIPS become financially sustainable?

What are potential threats or risks to RIPS' success story?

Current Director

RIPS' standing

Your perspective of RIPS current standing

What do you attribute to the successful transformation of RIPS after cessation of UN funding?

Quality of staff and staff development

Staff that you have and their expertise, do you feel you have enough and the right mix?

Are staff committed to the vision or mission of RIPS?

How are you yourself doing a scientist?

Does the university provide professional development training for staff e.g. induction for new staff?

Do you have RIPS' specific policies (HR, workload policies etc). Are these university level or local policies?

Does the university appreciate RIPS' achievement and international standing?

RIPS graduates

What are the core capabilities a RIPS graduate?

Financial management and sustainability

What does the university pay for? What does RIPS pay for?

What about scholarships? Do you have international students? How are they funded?

Intellectual capital and its management

Intellectual Capital of the Institute- apart demography and climate change, any other areas where RIPS is making a big mark?

How do you exploit your intellectual capital? How do you publicizing your research?

Engagement with stakeholders e.g. government?

Potential threats or risks

What potential factors might affect RIPS' performance adversely?

Anything else I should have asked?

Appendix 2b – Interview Guide for Established Staff

A Case Study on the Financial Sustainability of the Regional Institute for Population Studies, University of Ghana

About yourself

Please tell me about yourself: E.g. What is your specialization: How long you have worked at RIPS, etc.

What motivated you to apply for a position at RIPS?

How are you doing as a scientist? Did joining RIPS improve your productivity? Give you opportunities for collaborations?

Do you have access to adequate resources to enable you to function as a scientist and lecturer? Do you have opportunities for professional development?

About RIPS programs

What do you think is RIPS' standing as a training and research center in the continent?

What do you see as the major strengths of the RIPS programs? MA, MPhil, PhD, research

What do you think about the quality of students?

Who are the major funders for RIPS' research? Training? What do you think of RIPS's ability to continue to attract such funding in the next 5 years say?

RIPS' standing

What are three main factors that have contributed to RIPS' successful transformation after the cessation of the UN funding??

What must RIPS do to maintain or exceed its current standing?

What do you see are the weak areas that need improvement?

Risks and threats

What do you see as major risks that could affect RIPS' sustainability?

Thank you

Appendix 2c – Interview Guide for Alumni Staff

A Case Study on the Financial Sustainability of the Regional Institute for Population Studies, University of Ghana

About yourself

Please tell me about yourself- your specialization, your current role etc.

Your time as a student at RIPS

What motivated you to come to RIPS as a student?

During your time as a student at RIPS did you have access to resources such as computers, software, internet, and books?

Are there areas in your training program at RIPS that you now feel could have been better? Or any gaps?

Transition to staff

How was the transition from student to staff? Were there any training or induction programs to ease you into your new role?

Do you have a mentor? Is the relationship effective?

Now as lecturer and researcher, do you have access to resources such as books, internet, conference funds, seed funds for pilot projects?

Do you have opportunity for interacting with other scholars outside of RIPS? With stakeholders?

Are you sufficiently informed about what is expected of you, for example HR regulations, financial regulations, criteria for promotion etc?

RIPS' sustainability

What three factors have contributed to RIPS' successful transformation?

What do you see as major risks that could affect RIPS' financial sustainability and standing?

Anything that I haven't asked?

Thank You

Appendix 2d – Interview Guide for Current Students

A Case Study on the Financial Sustainability of the Regional Institute for Population Studies, University of Ghana

About yourself

Please tell me about yourself- your year of study, how you came to be studying at RIPS etc.

How is your course going?

Do you have access to the internet, computers, books etc?

Do you have access to conference funding (for PhD students)

Do you have access to staff?

Are there areas in your training program at RIPS that you now feel could be better? Or any gaps?

What are your career plans after RIPS?

Appendix 2e- Interview Guide for Senior Managers (Provost, Registrars, RIPS' Administrator)

NB: Check their role in the university

How does RIPS compare with similar institutes within the University of Ghana?

How does RIPS fit into the University of Ghana's strategy?

How does the University support RIPS?

Is there succession planning for the leadership of RIPS?

How will the University support RIPS to become financially sustainable?

What has contributed to RIPS' successful transformation from the time after UN funding was withdrawn to now?

What are the potential threats or risk for RIPS that might prevent it from progressing further?

Is there anything else that you want to say?

Thank you.

Appendix 2f: Interview Guide for External Stakeholders

A Case Study on the Financial Sustainability of the Regional Institute for Population Studies, University of Ghana

Questions for External Stakeholders

About yourself

Please tell me about yourself: your institutional affiliation, your position, how long you have been in that position.

What is your involvement with RIPS?

How long have you been involved with RIPS?

Overall assessment of RIPS' standing and performance

How has RIPS performed since your first interaction with the Institute?

What would you say is the standing of RIPS in the continent? Please explain your answer.

Enabling Factors

What factors have contributed to RIPS' performance?

How would you describe RIPS' unique strengths?

(Note: these can be organizational, areas of research expertise, training programs etc).

What must RIPS do to maintain or exceed its current standing?

To maintain or increase the quantity and quality of its students?

Research funding?

Areas for improvement

In what areas does RIPS need to improve?

Threats

What internal/external threats might affect RIPS' performance in the future?

General

What do you think about RIPS' ability to attract international students to its programs?

Any other comments or observations that you wish to make?

Thank you

Appendix 3 – List of interviewees

Staff

Professor Francis Dodoo
Professor Samuel Codjoe
Dr Delali Badasu
Professor Stephen Kwankye
Professor Emanuel Tawiah
Dr Philomena Nyarko

New staff/Alumni/students

Dr Naa Dodua Dodoo
Dr Adriana Biney
Dr Pearl Kyei
Ms Hleziwe Hara (informal comments)
Ms Sandra Boatemaa

Managers and Administrators

Professor Samuel Agyei-Mensah
Mr Ted Konu
Mrs Mercy Haizel-Ashia
Ms Mary Twum-Barima

External stakeholders

Professor Zoe Matthews
Dr Eliya Zulu
Professor Gordon de Jong
Professor Melissa Hardy
Dr Jenny Trinitapoli

Appendix 4: Regional Institute for Population Studies, University of Ghana - Student Numbers, 2002-2014

| Year | Degree program | Number enrolled | Nationalities | | Number passing | Proceeding to MPhil or PhD |
|---------|----------------|-----------------|---------------|---|--|----------------------------|
| | | | Ghanaians | Other (specify) | | |
| 2002/3 | MA | 11 | 10 | 1 (Lesotho) | 11 | Not known |
| 2003/4 | MA | 8 | 7 | 1 (Lesotho) | 8 (1 referred) | Not known |
| 2004/5 | MA | 34 | 32 | 1 (Swaziland) 1 (Liberia) | 34 (3 referred) | Not known |
| 2005/6 | Not known | Not known | Not known | Not known | Not known | Not known |
| 2006/7 | MA | 22 | 21 | 1 (Nigeria) | 11 (8 did not graduate, 2 transferred to MPhil, 1 no information) | 9 |
| 2007/8 | MA | 15 | 14 | 1 (Lesotho) | 12 , (2 withdrawn, 1 no information) | 3 |
| 2008/9 | MA | 19 | 19 | 0 | 14 , (3 withdrawn, 2 no information) | 4 |
| 2009/10 | MA | 18 | 18 | 0 | 14 (2 deferred, 1 referred, 1 withdrawn) | 1 |
| 2010/11 | MA | 25 | 22 | 1 (Cameroon) 1 (Nigeria) 1 (Uganda) | 20 (5 withdrawn) | 10 |
| 2011/12 | MA | 24 | 23 | 1 Uganda) | 23 (1 withdrawn) | 12 |
| 2012/13 | MA | 29 | 25 | 2 (Nigeria) 1 (Tanzania) 1 (Cameroon) | 8 (2 withdrawn, 1 deferred, 2 rewrite, 16 no information) | 3 |
| 2013/14 | MA | 28 | 27 | 1 (Malawi) | 22 (5 rewrite, 1 withdrawn) | 4 |