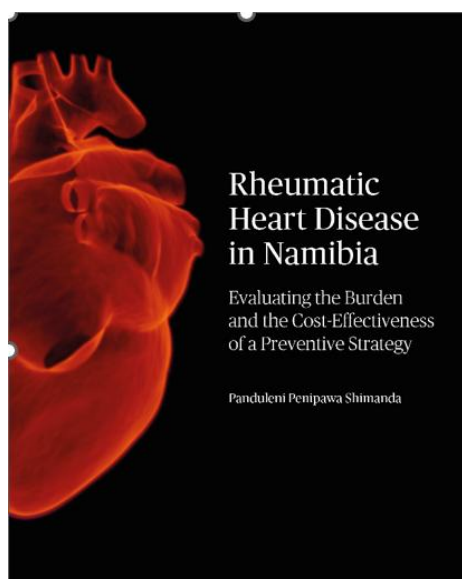


**Final report for the program
Forming new leaders in Global
Health: a scholarship program
funded by the Erling Persson
Foundation.**



“The main product of the doctoral project is not the thesis ... ”

Final report, 260410,

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International doctoral education is often described in terms of publications, degrees and qualifications. But when former fellows and their supervisors are asked to reflect on what their doctoral studies have actually entailed, a different picture emerges. The focus is not primarily on the thesis, but on the people who have grown in the process – and the relationships that have developed along the way. This compilation is based on reflections from fellows who have defended their dissertations within the framework of the Erling Persson Foundation’s initiative and from their supervisors at the Department of Epidemiology and Global Health, Umeå University. Together, they provide a picture of the benefits of the program, as experienced by those who have been directly involved.

Att utvecklas till självständig forskare

The stories of the fellows are marked by a clear shift in professional identity. Several describe how

“The doctoral training deepened my understanding and helped me see my own assumptions in a more critical way.”

their doctoral studies have meant a step from being primarily recipients of knowledge to becoming independent actors – researchers who can formulate relevant questions, evaluate evidence and engage in qualified dialogue with decision-makers, authorities and other societal actors. For many, this has opened up new career paths, both within academia and in public service, often in roles where research and practice meet.

At the same time, descriptions of a more personal change recur: strengthened self-confidence, greater intellectual humility and a deeper understanding of complexity. All scholarship holders have completed their doctoral studies within the framework of a so-called sandwich arrangement, with continued employment in their home country and with stays in Sweden limited to parts of the training period. This has meant that the doctoral education has been conducted in parallel with professional activities and responsibilities in their own context. Living and working between different contexts has also meant strain. Several mention loneliness, taking responsibility and difficulties with readjustment after defending their dissertation. However, these experiences are also highlighted as significant for maturity, judgment and the ability to bear responsibility in demanding professional roles.

“The doctoral program strengthened my ability to collaborate with decision-makers and to translate research-based knowledge into practical policy processes.”

Being a supervisor – and a learning research colleague

“The supervisory role also meant learning for me, where my own perspectives were challenged.”

The supervisors' reflections clearly show that the benefits have not been one-sided. For many, the supervision has meant professional renewal. Meetings with other health systems, research questions shaped by completely different societal conditions, and doctoral students with extensive practical experience have challenged established perspectives and deepened the understanding of what global health means in practice. It has also contributed to a more nuanced view of the strengths and shortcomings of their own institutions.

Several supervisors describe how the collaboration has led to new research directions, long-term international collaborations and an increased commitment to issues of application, policy and capacity building. Some also express that supervision has been among the most meaningful things they have done in their academic career. At the same time, there are reflections on difficulties, uncertainty and situations where expectations have not been self-evident – experiences that in themselves have contributed to developed leadership and the ability to navigate complex professional relationships.

“The encounter with other health systems and research questions shaped by completely different societal conditions also gave me new perspectives on our own context.”

The meeting that changes both – managing friction

Cross-cultural collaborations are rarely frictionless. Differences in academic culture and in the view of responsibility, autonomy and hierarchy can lead to misunderstandings and disappointments. This is not least true in doctoral education, where expectations of own initiative and critical approach can vary depending on previous experiences and institutional contexts.

“When problems arose, the lack of established institutional connections became a clear challenge, as there was no common platform to start from.”

However, the reflections show that these tensions should not be understood as failures, but as part of the learning process. The ability to manage implicit expectations, to give and receive criticism across cultural boundaries and to re-establish cooperation after friction emerges as an invaluable skill – not only in international contexts, but in all qualified professional work.

In this context, it also becomes clear that the goal of the initiative has not been to shape researchers according to a Swedish model. Swedish academic culture has functioned as a frame of reference, not as a template. The fellows are to return to contexts where other institutional logics prevail and where hierarchy is often a necessary part of the organization. The ambition has instead been to provide

“Especially at the beginning of my doctoral studies, the Swedish, more non-hierarchical culture was difficult to relate to.”

access to more ways of working, leading and collaborating – tools that can be used, adapted or consciously renounced depending on the context. In practice, our own accustomed working methods and institutional frameworks have sometimes set limits to how far this ambition has been realized, but it has functioned as a clear guiding star in the work.

Relationships and commitments that last over time

A recurring observation is that doctoral education has proven to be an effective way to build long-

“While we build capacity among students, we also build knowledge and competence among ourselves as teachers, researchers and supervisors – something that helps to keep us relevant and active in our roles in global health in the future.”

term international relationships. Each fellow constitutes a living link between institutions, research environments and social systems. Many are today active in key positions within academia, government and international organisations, where the relationships with Umeå University continue long after the public defence. What they have in common is that these positions are not primarily described as career goals in themselves, but as opportunities to work on issues relating to equality, access to healthcare and the conditions for society's most vulnerable groups in their own home countries. The reflections naturally reflect the experiences and interpretations that fellows and supervisors themselves

have chosen to highlight; at the same time, the consistency in how commitment, responsibility and societal relevance are described is striking.

Compared to shorter exchanges, delegations or time-limited projects, doctoral training creates relationships with depth, continuity and mutual responsibility. With relatively limited resources, the initiative has contributed to networks and collaborations that would otherwise have required significantly larger investments – and which in practice are often difficult to plan at all.

“The relationships did not end with the doctoral student period, but have continued to shape collaborations even after that.”

Development potential – lessons learned from the meeting

The reflections from fellows and supervisors contain not only descriptions of what the initiative has made possible, but also insights into what only becomes visible in the concrete collaboration. Several of these should be understood as lessons learned that arise precisely because the initiative is based on real cross-cultural encounters, rather than on ready-made structures. According to both fellows and supervisors, differences in culture, views on independence and hierarchy only became clear in the joint work. The reflections indicate that these differences could not have been easily

handled through advance preparation. On the contrary, the encounter with the unexpected and the need to orient oneself in it appears to be a central part of the learning process.

A clearer area of development concerns the period after the public defense. Several fellows describe the need for continued contact, mentoring or networking to support the transition to new professional roles. Such support could strengthen both the individuals' opportunities and the long-term effects of the initiative.

The reflections also highlight the value of creating better conditions for relationship building over time, especially within the sandwich arrangement where stays in Sweden are limited. Regular follow-up or joint forums are mentioned as ways to further strengthen collaborations that have already proven to be viable..

“Some aspects of Swedish culture were initially challenging to adapt to, especially the strong individualism and more restrained social interactions, which contrasted with the more collective and expressive social norms I was used to in my home country.”

Finally, the importance of actively safeguarding the diversity of goals and outcomes that

“In an ideal situation, I would like to have sufficient resources for so-called twin recruitment. It would be very beneficial for the quality of the education.”

Twin recruitment: recruitment of a Swedish–non-European doctoral student pair with parallel anchoring in the host institution and home university

characterize the initiative is emphasized. The value lies not in shaping researchers according to a uniform model, but in the fact that research expertise is used in different ways in different contexts. Maintaining this openness appears to be a central prerequisite for continued broad and long-term benefit.

When philanthropy makes a difference

In an era where state-funded international research and development work has declined, philanthropic actors play an increasingly important role. The type of long-term, relationship-based investments that this scholarship program represents rarely fit within traditional research grants or short project cycles.

The Erling Persson Foundation's support has enabled meetings, processes and learning that do not naturally fit within established academic and resource-distributing structures, and which has thereby contributed in a decisive way to sustainable competence and relationship building.

“In recent years, funding for collaborations in low-income countries and fragile states has become increasingly limited. This can reinforce an already unequal academic and development policy structure and reduce opportunities for long-term development in these environments.”

Final words

Theses and publications constitute important and measurable results. But the collective reflections from fellows and supervisors point to a broader value: people who have grown in judgment and responsibility, supervisors and institutions that have been renewed, and relationships that continue to endure long after the formal end of the project - which ties in with the quote in the introduction: **the main product is not the thesis, but the people.**

Appendix 1

Thirteen doctoral students fully or partially funded by the Erling Persson Family Foundation.

Student	Country	Sex	Supervisor	Title
Adam Silumbwe	Zambia	Man	Klara Johansson	Rolling the wheels of collaboration: tobacco control policy development and alcohol policy implementation in Zambia
Dissertation in April 2025				
Alieu Sowe	Gambia	Man	Per Gustafsson	Closing the vaccination gap: actionable targets and impact of interventions to improve coverage and urban-rural equity in the Gambia
Dissertation in February 2025				
Angela Kisakye	Uganda	Kvinna	Isabel Goicolea	A Gender analysis of the health workforce in Uganda: Implications for policy, planning and Human Resource development.
Dissertation in December 2027				
Edwinah Atusingwize	Uganda	Kvinna	Maria Nilsson	Alcohol consumption and social media use: connections and the pressure to trend among university students in Uganda
Dissertation i Januari 2026				
Edy Rolando Quizhpe Ordóñez	Ecuador	Man	Anni-Maria Pulkki-Brännström	The health system reform in Ecuador: Has it contributed towards Universal Health Coverage?
Dissertation in Oct 2024				
Elia Asanterabi Swai	Tanzania	Man	Klas Göran Sahlen	Being young and physically impaired: Voicing the needs and challenges of children, adolescents, and their carers in northeastern Tanzania.
Dissertation in May 2025				

Ester Steven Mzilangwe	Tanzania	Kvinna	Faustine-Kyungu Nkulu-Kalengayi	SEXUAL VIOLENCE AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN TANZANIA: EXPERIENCES, PREVALENCE, AND PERCEPTIONS OF RESPONSE SYSTEMS
Planned public defense in autumn 2027				
Huzeifa Aweesha	Sudan	Man	Miguel San Sebastian	Effective Development Cooperation: improving health system governance. Efforts, challenges and opportunities in Sudan.
Planned public defense in May 2026				
Joseph Lule Kyanjo	Uganda	Man	Kristina Lindwall	Livelihood strategy choices and dynamics: Towards addressing food insecurity and malnutrition of children under 5 years and their female caregivers in the Karamoja border region of Kenya and Uganda
Planned public defense in Dec 2026				
Vu Thi Quynh Mai	Vietnam	Kvinna	Klas Göran Sahlen	A feasibility and applicability study of a health-related quality of life measurement in Vietnam.
Dissertation in January 2025				
Nu Anh Vu	Vietnam	Kvinna	Sun Sun	Establishing national threshold value for cost effectiveness analysis in Viet Nam
Planned public defense in May 2027				
Penipawa Panduleni Shimanda	Namibia	Man	Fredrik Norström	Rheumatic heart disease in Namibia: Evaluating the Burden and the Cost-Effective of a Preventive Strategy.
Dissertation in October 2024				
Yosephin Anandati Pranoto	Indonesia	Kvinna	Julia Schröder	Food insecurity and social networks in aging populations: a global and Indonesian exploration.
Planned public defense in Dec 2027				

Appendix 2

Financial position

	<i>Summa Förbrukat</i>	<i>Summa Rekvirerat</i>
2018 Delrapport 1	409 968	
2019 Delrapport 2	1 045 869	2 673 000
2020 Delrapport 3	2 416 428	2 673 000
2021 Delrapport 4	3 462 257	4 768 000
2022 Delrapport 5	5 133 239	5 768 000
2023 Delrapport 6	7 283 442	7 068 000
2024 Delrapport 7	9 029 859	9 368 000
2025 Delrapport 8	9 683 282	11 130 000
2026 Slutrapport 20260312	9 722 552	
Remaining to be consumed	1 407 448	

At the time of writing this final report, there is SEK 1,407,448 left to spend on the account. However, the money is fully mortgaged as described below.

<i>Student</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Planned public defense</i>	<i>Fördelade medel</i>
Nu Anh Vu	Vietnam	2027 Maj	400 000 kr
Ester Steven	Tanzania	2027 Sept	300 000 kr
Angela Kisakye	Uganda	2027 Dec	300 000 kr
Huzeifa Aweesha	Sudan	2026 Maj	100 000 kr
Joseph Lule Kyanjo	Uganda	2026 Dec	150 000 kr
Yosephin Anandati Pranot	Indonesien	2027 Dec	200 000 kr
			1 450 000 kr

