Nothing about us without us: what we learned from launching SUCCEED Africa's free course on Co-production in mental health research



SUCCEED Consortium meeting 2023, Blantyre, Malawi (Credit: SUCCEED Africa)

On 17 July 2026, the SUCCEED Africa consortium launched ***Co-production in Mental Health Research,*** a free online course hosted on LSHTM's Open Study platform. The course features researchers and peer researchers with lived experience of psychosocial disabilities from the SUCCEED Africa project in Malawi, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe and the UK. It covers psychosocial disability, inclusion, autonomy and empowerment, and practical approaches to co-producing mental health research, all built around the principle of "*Nothing about us, without us*."



Photo: Ritsuko Kakuma (SUCCEED UK team) and Esther Moses Karama (SUCCEED's Sierra Leone team) filming content for the course in Blantyre, Malawi. Photo taken by Chuka Ononye (SUCCEED's Nigeria team)

For the first three weeks of the course, until 7th August, learners worked through the material at their own pace. Alongside it, we ran a live discussion forum moderated by peer researchers and colleagues from all five SUCCEED countries.

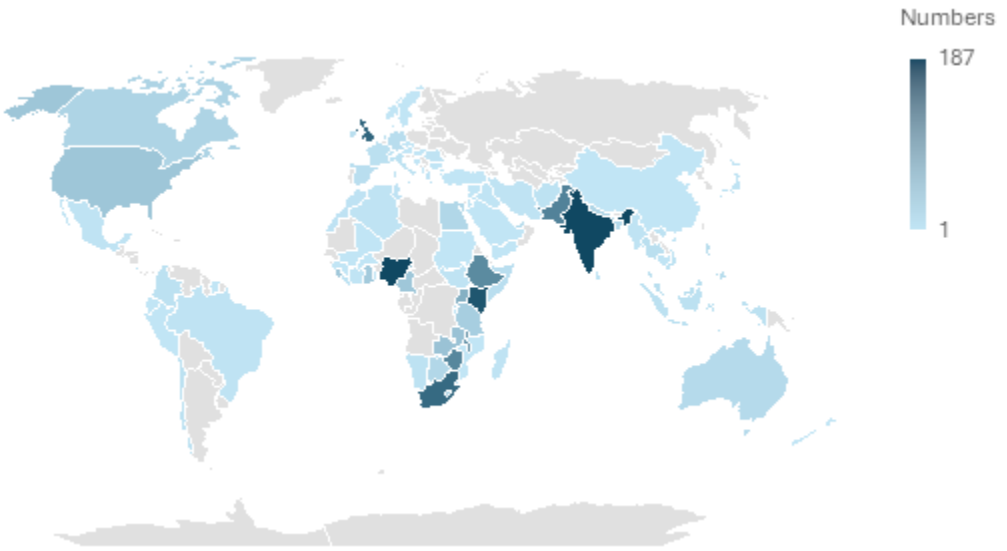


Photo: Philani Ama Kinyabo, (SUCCEED's Zimbabwe team) filming for the course by Anna Chavez

Interest far beyond what we expected

By mid-September 2026around 1,535 people had enrolled from 100 countries, and 331 had completed the course. That is roughly one in five, a strong completion rate for a free, self-paced course! We are expecting more to complete it over time. This response told us something important: **many people want practical guidance on how to do co-production well, and few places currently offer it.**

Map: Map showing number of learners who had signed up from around the world



Learners came from every inhabited continent. The largest numbers were in Ethiopia, India, Kenya, Nigeria, Pakistan, South Africa, U.K., U.S.A. and Zimbabwe. Africa.

What learners took away

Many learners posted about the course afterwards, and their reflections went well beyond general enthusiasm. One wrote that the course had changed how they think about evidence: *"A person's account of living with a mental health condition is evidence, not an anecdote to add color to a paper."* Another picked up on the course's discussion of levels of co-production, noting that "*consultation is not the same as shared ownership*", and that real co-production means people with lived experience shape the research question, the methods and the interpretation of results, "*not just the recruitment poster*." Others described plans to apply what they had learned in their own work.



SUCCEED Africa team working online, Malawi. Photo by Anna Chavez

The view from the forum

Having peer researchers moderate the forum meant learners heard directly from people who have done this work in their own communities. For the moderators, it was an experience in its own right.

Philani Ama Kinyabo, SUCCEED peer researcher in Zimbabwe, said: "*My experience moderating helped me see how far coproduction has come and also that there is still a lot more work that needs to be done to make it have more of an impact. I was astounded by how many people were interacting and that was such a positive sign. The experience opened my eyes.*"

Nancy Amanda Stevens, SUCCEED peer researcher in Sierra Leone reported that her reply to one learner's comment about the value of co-production started a large, lively discussion, and learners kept writing to her well after the course ended. She received more than 70 emails. "*It was indeed an eye-opener for me to know that there are people out there who are longing for this type of approach in research as it breaks down barriers that hinder the process of recovery,*" she said. "*I do wish this type of course can be implemented by every researcher in the mental health space so that 'WE' can show our full potential*."

The course is still open!

The moderated forums have now closed, but the course is still free and open to new learners, who can work through it at their own pace and earn a certificate on completion. Unfortunately, are unable to offer the moderator forum from now on.

Link to enrol here: **https://open.lshtm.ac.uk/enrol/index.php?id=118**

However, if you would like to interact with others interested in mental health we encourage you to join related forum at the Mental Health Innovation Network which SUCCEED Africa has worked closely with, for example by hosting the MHIN Africa Hub. Find out more here: https://www.mhinnovation.net/

For news about the SUCCEED Africa project you can follow our Linkedin page: https://www.linkedin.com/company/succeed-africa

And keep an eye on our website: https://www.lshtm.ac.uk/research/centres-projects-groups/succeed#welcome

If you work in mental health research, whether as a researcher, practitioner, or someone with lived experience, we'd encourage you to take our open learning course and share it with colleagues:

Enrol here: https://open.lshtm.ac.uk/enrol/index.php?id=118

We are very grateful to everyone who contributed to the course, to the moderators who gave their time and energy, and to the 1,571 learners who shared this journey with us! We look forward to rners joining our course in the future



Photo: SUCCEED Africa team members (Credit: SUCCEED Africa)