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What is Health Policy and Systems Research?

Health policy and systems research (HPSR) has been defined as the production and application of knowledge to improve how societies organize themselves in order to achieve health goals. It encompasses how societies plan, manage and finance health services as well as investigation of the role and interests of different actors in the health system.

HPSR systematic reviews published in the Cochrane Library



Centre for systematic reviews on the health workforce, Makerere University, Uganda



Centre for systematic reviews on the non-state sector in health, ICDDR, Bangladesh

The Alliance has continued to support four systematic review centres that it helped establish during 2007. Technical support has been provided largely by three collaborating partners – the Oslo Satellite of the Cochrane Effective Practice and Organization of Care (EPOC) Group; the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating (EPPI) Centre, Institute of Education, London; and the Effective Health Care Research Programme Consortium, Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, Liverpool.

Congratulations go out to the two teams that have recently published their reviews in the Cochrane Library: <http://www.cochrane.org/reviews/>

In Issue 1 (2009) Tracey Koehlmoos and colleagues at ICDDR, Bangladesh, published a review on the effects of social franchising. Social franchising has developed as a possible means of improving provision of health services through engaging the non-state sector in low- and middle-income countries. This review aimed to examine the evidence regarding the impact that social franchising has on access to and quality of health services in low- and middle-income countries. Multiple databases, of both published and grey literature, were searched. The review sought only randomized controlled trials, non-randomized controlled trials, controlled before and after studies and interrupted time series comparing social franchising



Centre for systematic reviews on health financing, Shandong University, China

models with other models of health service delivery, other social franchising models or the absence of health services. No studies were found eligible for inclusion in this review, highlighting the need to develop rigorous studies to evaluate the effects of social franchising on access to and quality of health services in low- and middle-income countries.

In Issue 2 (2009) George Pariyo and colleagues at the Makerere University School of Public Health, Uganda, published their review. It set out to identify pre-licensure innovations that aim to increase the number of health workers through education, with a particular interest in identifying effective strategies that could be of relevance to low- and middle-income countries. Such innovations may be applied at three different levels: 1) prior to entry into health professional training, 2) at entry into training and 3) during training. Like their colleagues in Bangladesh, Pariyo *et al.* systematically searched multiple databases, screening for only the highest quality of data. They identified two studies from the United States, both of which found that a package of student support activities – including social, academic, and career guidance and mentorship – resulted in an increase in the number of minority students who enrolled and graduated from health training institutions.

Representatives of the systematic review centres will next meet and present their most recent work at the 17th Cochrane Colloquium, which will take place in Singapore, from 11 to 14 October 2009 (<http://www.colloquium09.com/>). ■

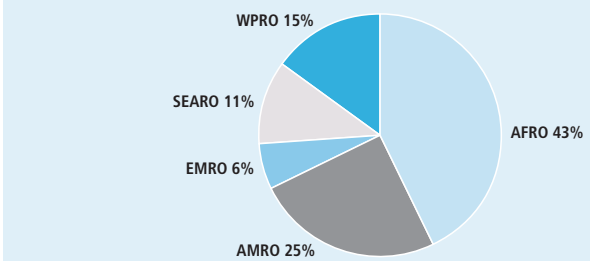
More information on the systematic review centres can be found at: <http://www.who.int/alliance-hpsr/researchsynthesis/project2/en/>

Results of the call for proposals: “Supporting national processes for evidence-informed policy in the health sector of developing countries”

The call “Supporting National Processes for Evidence-Informed Policy” was one of two calls for proposals launched by the Alliance on 8 July 2008. This call addresses the Alliance’s second objective, which is to promote the dissemination and use of health policy and systems research to improve the performance of health systems research on a national level.

Fifty-three institutions responded, representing all WHO regions. The following pie chart illustrates the regional distribution of the submitted proposals. After initial screening, 34 proposals underwent review by two independent technical reviewers.

Figure 1: Regional distribution of submitted proposals



The five best proposals were selected for funding.

The selected proposals, listed below, have a total grant amount of US\$ 785 000 and a timeframe lasting 1.5 to 3 years.

- Dr Joseph Kasonde, Zambia Forum for Health Research, Lusaka (AFRO).
- Mr Chigozie Uneke, Innovative Health Research Group (IHRG), Faculty of Clinical Medicine, College of Health Sciences, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, Nigeria (AFRO).
- Dr Pierre Ongolo-Zogo, Center for the Development of Best Practices in Health, Yaoundé Central Hospital Faculty of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences, University of Yaoundé, Cameroon (AFRO).
- Dr Daniel Maceira, Center for the Implementation of Public Policies Promoting Equity and Growth (CIPPEC), Buenos Aires, Argentina (AMRO).
- Prof. Alejandro Cravioto, International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research (ICDDR), Bangladesh (SEARO).

It is expected that the experience from each of these studies will add to the knowledge base about what strategies appear most promising to promote evidence-informed policy and how and why such strategies may be effective. ■

Young Researchers workshop, Manila, January 2009

The Alliance instituted the Young Researcher grants in 2003. This programme aims to strengthen the teaching of health policy and systems research in post-graduate courses in low- and middle-income countries, and to attract students to this field.

Further to the demand of the Young Researchers grantees, the Alliance decided to organize training workshops to enable the recipients of these grants to exchange ideas and experiences about the challenges that they face in teaching health policy and systems research, and how best to address them.

A first workshop was organized last year at the University of Cape Town. Participants included grantees from universities in Ethiopia, Ghana, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, and Uganda. For more information on this workshop, consult the Alliance Newsletter 15 available at:

<http://www.who.int/alliance-hpsr/Newsletter15.pdf>

Further to the success of this workshop, Reijo Salmela from the WHO regional Office for the Western Pacific (WPRO) in Manila and Lydia Al Khudri from the Alliance, jointly organized a workshop from 13 to 16 January 2009 for recipients of the grants from both the South-East Asia and the Western Pacific regions. Training

institutions of these regions in need of capacity development strengthening in health policy and systems research were also invited. Facilitators included Dr Rohan Jayasuriya, Australia and Dr Supasit Pannarunothai from Naresuan University, Thailand.

The objectives of the workshop were the following:

- to improve the capacity of training institutions in health policy and systems research (HPSR) in the Asia Pacific region by:
 - sharing experiences and best practices on training in health policy and systems research, emphasizing the three major themes of the Young Researchers Grants (HPSR learning, dissertation and dissemination); and
 - acquiring basic knowledge in curriculum development, research protocol development and supervision, as well as dissemination of research results to policy makers;
- to discuss and identify strategies for improving the sustainability of HPSR training programmes in countries.

The conclusions of the workshop were presented as strategies and proposed actions for institutions/countries.



Strategies and proposed actions by institutions/countries:

- 1 Establish and improve country-level arrangements to coordinate HPSR research through existing health research committees and involvement of policy-makers.
- 2 Build formal HPSR training within postgraduate programmes, independent of donor-driven research agendas.
- 3 Increase the awareness and "culture" for evidence-based policy by working with key stakeholders and policy champions.
- 4 Seek an increase in government (and donor partner) funding for HPSR.
- 5 Increase the in-country pool of researchers and trainers in HPSR through partnerships between academic institutions in-country and in the Asia Pacific Region.
- 6 Raise the standards of HPSR research in-country, using external assistance in skills-building for protocol development, supervision and writing for publication.

To respond to the participants' request, the Alliance has created an online platform to enable groups to network and share knowledge. If you are currently involved in capacity development in the HPSR field or interested in promoting this field, please send an email to alliancehpsr@who.int and request to become a member of the community. ■

The workshop's report is available at:
<http://www.who.int/alliance-hpsr/capacitydevelopment/en/>

Workshop for developing policy briefs on primary health care, Kuala Lumpur, February 2009



Workshop participants, group work, Kuala Lumpur, February 2009

The WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific convened a Workshop for the development of policy briefs, from 16 to 20 February 2009, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The workshop was funded in part by the Alliance HPSR. Participants in the workshop were researchers and policy-makers from the Evidence-Informed Policy Networks (EVIPNet) teams in Asia. EVIPNet is an innovative programme to promote better use of evidence in policy-making and healthcare practice (see <http://www.evipnet.org/php/index.php>).

The aim of the workshop was to improve capacity for the development of policy briefs and in the use of evidence for health systems decision-making. The workshop was led by John Lavis of McMaster University. Additional resource people were on hand to facilitate, including Göran Tomson from the Karolinska Institute (and the Alliance STAC) and Kent Ranson of the Alliance secretariat.

The seven teams – three from China, and one each from Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, and Vietnam – were guided through a series of exercises that included:

- Identifying and characterizing a primary healthcare problem of particular importance;
- Searching for systematic reviews on three interventions that address the problem;
- Brainstorming about likely implementation barriers, and strategies to address them;
- Writing an outline or draft of the policy brief.



Workshop participants, plenary, Kuala Lumpur, February 2009

Ultimately, the country teams will develop country-specific policy briefs. The nature of the health systems problems, and corresponding focus of the policy briefs, varied tremendously across the groups. The team from Vietnam, for example, looked at interventions for addressing the lack of qualified healthcare workers in disadvantaged areas. The team from Malaysia prepared a brief on the implementation of user fees at urban primary healthcare clinics, aimed at improving quality of care and financial sustainability. At the workshop, two regional policy briefs were also initiated. Authored by Vivian Lin and Soonman Kwon, these will examine interventions aimed at improving access to primary health care.

Over the coming months, the teams will be refining and finalizing their policy briefs. Participants in the workshop will be watching with great interest to see how the briefs are disseminated, and received by policy-makers, across the different countries.

The Alliance wishes to congratulate Reijo Salmela of the WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific and Nordin Saleh and his team at the Malaysian Institute for Health Systems Research for hosting this well-organized and important workshop. ■

For further information, consult the following website:
<http://www.evipnet.org/php/index.php>

Inaugural meeting of the African Health Economics and Policy Association, Accra, March 2009



Presentation, AfHEA meeting, March 2009

The African Health Economics and Policy Association (AfHEA) held its inaugural meeting in Accra, Ghana, from the 10 to 12 March 2009. The meeting was a resounding success, drawing over 200 health economists working in Africa or on Africa-related themes. The Government of Ghana showed its strong support through the attendance and active participation of the Vice President (Mr John Dramani Mahama), the Minister of Health (Mr G.S. Yankey) and the Director General, Ghana Health Services (Dr E.K. Sory).

During the three-day meeting, research evidence regarding the most pressing economic and financing issues were discussed and debated. Topics included: private investment in Africa's health sector; challenges of financing the prevention and control of neglected tropical diseases; countries' experiences of shifting from sector-wide approaches (SWAp) to general budget support; and recent economic and policy research aimed at improving the prevention and treatment of malaria and HIV/AIDS.

The Alliance is proud to have cosponsored this meeting. Four of the winners of the AfHEA-Alliance student paper competition presented their work on user fees on 11th March. There was striking evidence, from across countries, of the detrimental effect that user fees have had on access to health care of the poorest households.

A small breakfast for approximately 20 partners and friends was also hosted by the Alliance. After a short presentation by Alliance Technical Officer, Kent Ranson, about the Alliance's current activities, participants discussed how the Alliance might better support AfHEA and its members. Alliance STAC members Irene Agyepong and Sennen Hounton helped moderate the discussion that followed. Among other things, participants urged the Alliance to: continue its support for the development of HPSR training materials and curricula through the Young Researchers programme; extend its reach in French-speaking West Africa; support in-country networking between researchers and policy-makers; and facilitate capacity-building for grant writing and submission.

We wish to extend our thanks and congratulations to Dr Chris Atim and the team who helped him in organizing and running the meeting. If this lively and well-organized meeting was any indication, we can expect great things from AfHEA in the years to come! ■

Further information concerning AfHEA, as well as the texts of the winning student papers, can be found at: <http://afhea.org>

New Board member and STAC members

The Alliance is delighted to welcome a new Board member and four new members of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC).

New Board member:



Saul Walker - is currently a Senior Policy Advisor on Access to Medicines in the Policy and Research Division at the Department for International Development, UK. He leads on DFID's policies to increase access to medicines in developing countries. This includes innovation for new products, the international policy environment and strengthening health systems to deliver medicines. Prior to moving to DFID in 2007, he was Executive Director for Global Public Policy at the International Partnership for Microbicides (an international non-profit HIV prevention research organization) and previously a Senior Policy Advisor at the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative and the National AIDS Trust (UK). He is a Trustee Director of NAM Publications, a community-based HIV information provider (<http://www.aidsmap.com>).

The Alliance welcomes four new STAC members: Lucy Gilson, Sennen Hounton, Soonman Kwon and Prasanta Mahapatra.



Lucy Gilson - is currently Professor of Health Policy and Systems at the University of Cape Town and at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, is also an honorary professor at the University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa. She has a particular interest in health and healthcare equity, and her research has focused on issues of healthcare financing, organization, management and policy change. She is currently Associate Director of the Consortium for Research on Equitable Health Systems, a seven-partner consortium funded by the UK's Department for International Development. Lucy has been involved in a range of capacity development activities throughout her career, including mentoring, post-graduate teaching and PhD supervision. She also coordinates the Knowledge Network on Health Systems for the Commission on the Social Determinants of Health.



Sennen Hounton - is a medical epidemiologist with a broad range of analytical and managerial skills, health systems and programmes evaluation expertise. He is currently the Program Coordinator of the regional Field Epidemiology and Laboratory Training Program for French-speaking countries in West Africa. (CDC/AFENET: <http://www.afenet.net>). Prior to this position he was the Regional Monitoring and Evaluation Technical Advisor for a cluster randomized trial in three sub-Saharan African countries to study the responsiveness of district hospitals to maternal audits, and the Monitoring and Evaluation Officer of the global safe motherhood research program, IMMPACT, in Burkina Faso. He served as epidemiologist at the Oklahoma State Department of Health on the Oklahoma Turning Point programme and has provided technical assistance to several organizations, including the World Bank, WHO and USAID. His research work covers HIV behavioural aspects, surveillance, cost-effectiveness analysis of maternal and child health strategies.



Soonman Kwon - is currently Professor and Former Chair of the Department of Health Policy and Management at the School of Public Health, Seoul National University. He is the Director of the BK (Brain) Center for Aging and Health Policy. Prof. Kwon has served on numerous health policy committees of the government of Korea and has occasionally worked as a short-term consultant to WHO, World Bank, and GTZ on health systems and financing in low-income countries. He is currently the editor-in-chief of the Korean Journal of Public Health, and on the editorial boards of leading international journals such as Social Science and Medicine, Health Economics Policy and Law, and Health Systems in Transition (HiT).



Prasanta Mahapatra - is a medical doctor and is currently the Commissioner Inquiries, Government of Andhra Pradesh, and Honorary President of the Institute of Health Systems. He has published articles and books in the field of burden of disease, health

system performance assessment, health informatics, and rural development. Dr. Mahapatra established, for the government of Andhra Pradesh, the first University of Health Sciences in India, at Vijayawada. As a Director, he was responsible for statewide coordination and management of tertiary hospitals and medical education services. Dr Mahapatra recognized the importance of health systems research in the 1980s. In 1990 he established the Institute of Health Systems, which he directed for five years. Today, the Institute is recognized as a premier centre of health systems research in the South East Asian Region. ■



■ ALLIANCE FOR HEALTH POLICY AND SYSTEMS RESEARCH World Health Organization in collaboration with the Global Forum for Health Research

We welcome your comments and suggestions on any of the topics covered in this newsletter and relating to the Alliance HPSR in general. If you would like to subscribe/unsubscribe to this newsletter please email us at alliancehpsr@who.int. See our full contact details below:

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Calls for Expressions of Interest: Assessing efforts towards universal financial risk protection in low- and middle-income countries (Deadline for submission: 30 June 2009)

The Alliance HPSR and the Health Systems Financing Department (WHO) are launching a new programme of work that aims to explore and compare country-specific experiences in developing and implementing universal financial risk protection, with a focus on the factors that have helped or hindered the expansion of financial protection mechanisms. We are interested in learning from both positive and negative experiences. It is envisaged that the final product of this programme of country case-study work will be a book encompassing all of the case-studies, and highlighting cross-cutting policy lessons and issues that are applicable beyond the case-study countries.

Research teams are encouraged to submit Expressions of Interest (Eoi) by 30 June 2009. These Eoi will be technically reviewed. Research teams that submit the most promising Eoi will be invited to a proposal development workshop, where applicants will work with technical advisers to develop proposals for 12 to 18 months of work. Researchers in low- and middle-income countries are eligible to apply to this call for proposals. The full call is available on the following link:
http://www.who.int/alliance-hpsr/AllianceHPSR_CallUniversalCoverage.pdf

The Alliance is rolling out its new advocacy plan

As a direct extension of its 10-year strategic plan, the Alliance has recently developed an advocacy strategy to help raise the profile of health policy and systems research with key target audiences. The new advocacy strategy will guide the work of the Alliance in promoting increased investment in HPSR as part of global health and health systems strengthening. The main target audiences for the Alliance's advocacy work will be health policy-makers in low- and middle-income countries, and potential funders of health systems research.

The major challenge to be addressed by the strategy and plan will be to give life and meaning among non-specialist audiences to the field in general and to the work of the Alliance in particular.

JoAnne Epping-Jordan (<http://www.eppingjordan.com>), drafted the advocacy strategy and work plan, based on input and feedback from the Alliance Secretariat, Board and STAC members.

International Health Economics Association (IHEA) meeting in Beijing

The Seventh World Congress on Health Economics will be taking place in Beijing 12 to 15 July 2009 on the theme "Harmonizing Health and Economics". The list of abstracts accepted for the Congress is now available online (<http://www.healthconomics.org/congress/2009/>), providing a good sense of the likely technical content of the meeting. Many of the accepted abstracts are from colleagues in low- and middle-income countries. The Alliance will be represented and will display its most recent communications products.

Global Forum for Health Research, Havana, Cuba, 16 to 20 November 2009.

The theme of the Forum 2009 is "Innovating for the Health of All". It will be an extraordinary event for research and innovation for health.

The forum targets policy-makers, scientists from health and science ministries, researchers, academia, the private sector and the media. Previous global forums have attracted around 800 participants. The forum provides a platform for all countries, particularly countries from the South, to network, interact and exchange experiences. For more information on the forum, please consult the following link:
<http://w2.globalforumhealth.org/en/Forums/Annual-Forums/Forum-2009/Registration>.

Join the Alliance HPSR at:

http://www.who.int/alliance-hpsr/partners/partner_form/en/index.html



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