

## CONTENTS

1

**Proposal development workshop on universal coverage, Cape Town, March 2010**

2

**Moving "systems thinking" forward**

2

**Strengthening Access to Medicines Policy Research**

3

**SUPPORT Tools for evidence-informed health policymaking**

4

**Towards evidence-informed policies in the Eastern Mediterranean Region**

5

**Priority setting exercise in Mongolia**

5

**Spotlight on Alliance grantees:  
- Sponsoring National Processes in Kyrgyzstan  
- Young Researcher Grant, Jimma University, Ethiopia**

7

**Research on the Global Health Initiatives: National and subnational – HIV/AIDS coordination**



Alliance for  
Health Policy and  
Systems Research



World Health  
Organization

## Proposal development workshop on universal coverage, Cape Town, March 2010

In April 2009, the Alliance with the Health Systems Financing (HSF) Department in WHO, jointly issued the Call for Proposals, "Assessing efforts towards universal financial risk protection in low- and middle-income countries". Sixty-three Expressions of Interest (Eols) were submitted and after a technical review ten teams were selected to attend a proposal development workshop in Cape Town from 22-26 March, 2010.

The purpose of this workshop was to:

- refine and move towards finalizing proposals;
- promote the exchange of ideas and strategies between participants; and
- foster methodology standardization to facilitate cross-country comparisons.



Workshop participants, Cape Town, South Africa, March 2010

At the meeting, teams were presented with written feedback provided by external technical reviewers. They all had the opportunity to read and comment on the strengths and weaknesses of Eols prepared by other teams. In addition to receiving some formal teaching sessions – for example, around policy analysis and measuring the extent to which expenditures are "catastrophic" or "impoverishing" – teams worked independently on their proposals. Dr Lucy Gilson spent a full day teaching policy analysis and assisted teams in developing related aspects of their proposals. During the week, Drs McIntyre, Honda and Ranson answered questions and provided written and verbal comments on proposals.

Following the workshop, teams were tasked with presenting a full proposal. The proposals have since been reviewed and graded, with seven out of the ten accepted. Names of the seven grantees will be announced shortly on the Alliance website. The Alliance wishes to thank the workshop's participants and the Health Economics Unit team, University of Cape Town for their technical support. ■

## Moving “systems thinking” forward

Every two years, the Alliance produces a Flagship Report on a cutting-edge topic that keeps the Alliance “ahead of the curve”. The latest Flagship Report, “Systems Thinking for Health Systems Strengthening” was officially launched at the Global Forum for Health Research in Havana, Cuba in November 2009. Since then, the Report's editors have led a number of presentations on the topic, including:

- at a seminar at WHO headquarters (26 February 2010);
- at the Geneva Health Forum (19-21 April 2010);
- at the “Technical Experts Meeting on Health System Performance Assessment” in Barcelona, Spain (20-22 January 2010); and
- during the Development Partner Group for Health meeting in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania (3 February 2010).

*How can we start thinking in “systems” in order to strengthen them? How can we better understand the effects an individual intervention may have on the overall health system?*

*And how can we evaluate our efforts given the inherent complexity of systems and the way interventions affect the various building blocks of a health system?*

For answers to these questions and more, read the full Report at <http://www.who.int/alliance-hpsr/systemsthinking/en/index.html>

Since its publication, there has been a strong demand for moving this kind of “thinking” forward. The Report has already been cited in publications and high impact journals<sup>1</sup> and “systems thinking” is indeed becoming a widely accepted approach in both understanding and strengthening health systems<sup>2</sup>. The Alliance has also developed a video featuring a community of researchers and funders discussing the concept, which will be launched publicly in May 2010. *Systems Thinking* will also feature at the upcoming First Global Symposium on Health Systems Research, where several esteemed panellists will help to deepen the thinking on this emerging and important topic. ■

1 Peterson, S. Assessing the scale-up of child survival interventions. *The Lancet*, Volume 375, Issue 9714, Pages 530 – 531, 13 February 2010.

2 Implementation of the Global Health Initiative: Consultation document. Pefpar, USA, February 2010. Available at: <http://www.pepfar.gov/documents/organization/136504.pdf>

## Strengthening Access to Medicines Policy Research

Reliable access to affordable and high quality medicines is an essential component of a functioning health system. However, access to and use of essential medicines is often poor in developing countries, with particular challenges faced by the poor and vulnerable segments of the population. Medicines account for a high proportion of health spending (20-60%) and 50-90% of expenditure on medicines is out-of-pocket. This creates significant access barriers for the poor and may lead to catastrophic health expenditures. Rational use of medicines is a problem in both public and private health services but reliance on unregulated private provision is also very high in many LMICs. There is an urgent need for developing sound policy options to improve Access to Medicines (ATM) in various settings.

Data on access to and use of essential medicines is typically weak. Published evidence often focuses on issues specific to high-income countries where most of the capacity for ATM research can be found. When data is available, it is seldom used as an evidence base to inform ATM policy. Therefore, it is also essential to support the production and translation of adequate evidence on ATM policy.

In 2010, with support from DFID, the Alliance for HPSR will start a 5-year policy research project focusing on Strengthening Access to Medicines. The purpose of the project will be to increase the use of evidence in policies to improve Access to Medicines in LMIC and particularly for the poor.

In particular, the project will:

- support production of new evidence and analyses to inform ATM policy;
- build capacity of institutions in LMIC to undertake high quality ATM policy research;
- increase demand from LMIC for policy research; and
- increase the number of countries actively using research and evidence for ATM policy formulation and implementation.

The project design puts a particular emphasis on integrating ATM in the broader health systems agenda, as well as opening up policy research into social-access issues, including equity and gender-disaggregated perspectives.

The first year of the project will concentrate on synthesizing existing evidence through production of systematic reviews and policy briefs. Country-driven priority-setting exercises will also help to define the ATM research agenda. ■

For further information on this project, contact Dr Maryam Bigdeli who is leading this programme of work at the Alliance. Her email is: [bigdelim@who.int](mailto:bigdelim@who.int)

## SUPPORT tools for evidence-informed health policy-making

The 'SUPPORT tools for evidence-informed health policymaking' were published in December 2009 as a supplement in *Health Research Policy and Systems*. This open-access publication provides a set of tools that can be used by those involved in using research evidence to support evidence-informed health policy-making.

The series of articles addresses four broad areas: supporting evidence-informed policymaking; identifying needs for research evidence; finding and assessing research evidence; and, going from research evidence to decisions.

The supplement contains 17 tools that are structured using a set of questions that can guide the use of research evidence

to inform health policy decisions. The tools were developed by the SUPporting Policy relevant Reviews and Trials (SUPPORT) project, an international collaboration funded by the European Commission's 6th Framework with partners in Africa, Europe, North America and South America.



Screenshot of the *Health Research Policy and Systems Supplement's* webpage

The Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), the Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research, and the Milbank Memorial Fund funded a peer-review meeting where an earlier version of the series was discussed. John Lavis, member of the Alliance's Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee, authored several articles in this series.

According to Andy Oxman of the Norwegian Knowledge Centre for the Health Services, who led the project, "In this series of articles, our aim is to improve the effectiveness, efficiency and equity of health policies through the better use of research evidence to inform decisions about health systems." ■

Chinese, French, Portuguese and Spanish translations of the tools will be available in May-June 2010. Links will be posted to the translations on the SUPPORT website ([www.support-collaboration.org](http://www.support-collaboration.org)) as well as on the Alliance website when they are ready.

The supplement can be found in English at:

<http://www.health-policy-systems.com/supplements/7/S1>

There is also a book version available at:

<http://www.kunnskapssenteret.no/Publikasjoner/8879.cms>

## Towards evidence-informed policies in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

A priority-setting exercise in health policy and systems research was undertaken in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region in nine LMICs in 2008. This exercise identified regional policy concerns and research priorities related to health care financing, human resources and the non-state sector. The specific purpose of this work was to identify and rank regional policy concerns and research priorities related to the three thematic areas as perceived by policy-makers, researchers and academics, health professional groups, non-governmental organizations, civil society representatives and consumers. This research project was jointly funded by the Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research and Canada's International Development Research Centre. The results of this research have recently been published in *Health Policy and Planning*<sup>3</sup>.

With the support of the World Health Organization, study findings have contributed to the development of the Evidence-Informed Policy Network – East Mediterranean Region (EVIPNet EMR), which now includes 14 countries in the region: Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, Palestine, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen.

As a next step for the priority-setting exercise, Dr Fadi El-Jardali from the Department of Health Management and Policy at the American University of Beirut is coordinating a new research programme in collaboration with EVIPNet EMR and the Program in Policy and Decision-Making at McMaster University in Canada. This research programme is supported by the Global Health

Research Initiative (GHRI) and the Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office of the World Health Organization (WHO EMRO).

The research team is currently conducting a survey of policy-makers, key researchers and directors of applied health research institutions in 14 EVIPNet countries to learn more about how policy-makers, researchers and research institutions have viewed and experienced policy-making in health systems and the role of health research in the policy-making process. Data collection is currently underway and is expected to be completed by the end of June 2010.

In addition, the team is also conducting a baseline assessment that will profile the production of health system and policy research including systematic reviews published between 2000 and 2008 in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. This endeavor includes an examination of the degree to which existing research can address the priorities identified in the priority-setting exercise, and determine the knowledge gap that future research can fill. The baseline assessment is expected to be complete by the end of June 2010.

Pending approval of the conference committee, the outcome of the above research will be presented at the First Global Symposium on Health Systems Research in Montreux, Switzerland. ■

For further information, contact Dr Fadi El-Jardali at: [feljardali@yahoo.ca](mailto:feljardali@yahoo.ca)

<sup>3</sup> El-Jardali, F., Makhoul J., Jamal, D., Ranson M.K., Kronfol, N.M. and Tchaghchagian, V. Eliciting Policymakers' and Stakeholders' Opinions to Help Shape Health System Research Priorities in Nine Low and Middle Income Countries in the Middle East and North Africa Region, *Health Policy and Planning*, 2010, 25 (1):15-27



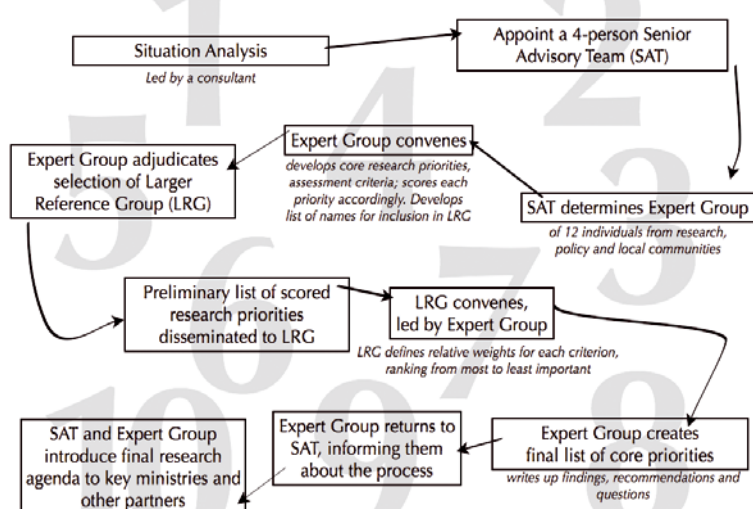
Launch of EVIPNet in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, Beirut, Lebanon, January 2009

## Priority setting exercise in Mongolia

A May 2009 conference in Ulan Bataar, Mongolia highlighted the need to establish a mechanism that could set priorities for the national health research agenda. As the conference focused on mining and health issues, delegates discussed the priority issues around the largely unknown health and socio-economic impacts of mining in Mongolia. What is known and what needs to be known? How do we use already existing knowledge on the mining impacts on health in Mongolia? How has and how will mining affect the Mongolian health system? Who determines what issues should be researched?

Through an opportunity fund programme grant, the Alliance is currently supporting a priority-setting process to shed some light on the above questions. The overarching purpose of this process is to guide future investments in health research in Mongolia, with particular attention to the intersections of health and mining. Currently underway, the process will generate an agreed-upon, multi-stakeholder research agenda through expert discussion, analysis and the creation and application of criteria to weight and rank research questions. This agenda will be actively disseminated, with a mix of public and private funds supporting investigation into the top-ranked issues and questions. Importantly, it will involve and address the needs of Mongolian policy-makers, researchers, and communities.

As there is no uniform methodology for different priority-setting processes, a Mongolian team determined the need for the following 10 steps as illustrated in the flow chart below (drawing upon the experience of the Alliance as shown in its Briefing Note on the topic).



To date, the first three steps have been achieved. As the project leader Dr Oyun Lkhagvasuren of Mongolia's Department of Health notes, "Priority setting for health system research is a very new area for our public health professionals and researchers. A few have confused it with the health research system and have a poor understanding and knowledge about it...", "... we are entering an exciting new era of our health system, and hope that we will come out enriched with our new knowledge, experience and with tools that can be used in future planning of health systems research in Mongolia." ■

For further information, contact Dr Oyun Lkhagvasuren at: [L\\_oyun2002@yahoo.com](mailto:L_oyun2002@yahoo.com)

## Spotlight on Alliance grantees

### Sponsoring National Processes in Kyrgyzstan

The Alliance provided a grant to influence the development of national health policies through the generation and use of research evidence. This will ultimately contribute to the knowledge base for best practices in Kyrgyzstan's policy-making.



Health Policy Analysis Center Team, Kyrgyzstan

In the context of recent health reforms in the Kyrgyz Republic, significant importance has been given to monitoring and evaluation (M&E). Since 2000, the Health Policy Analysis Project (HPAP), which became the Health Policy Analysis Center (HPAC) in July 2009, supported by both WHO and DfID, has played a key role in M&E. HPAP began implementing its Alliance-supported work in 2008, with particular focus on strengthening the linkages between research and policy-making through:

- strengthening communication capacity;
- training policy-makers in identifying and applying evidence to decision-making;

- supporting regular communication mechanisms between policy-makers and researchers; and
- monitoring communication processes and practices and evaluating their impact on evidence-informed policy-making.

The Kyrgyz Ministry of Health received an Institutional Development Fund (IDF) grant from the World Bank to develop M&E training at the national and regional levels. Thus, the decision was made to fuse both the Alliance and the IDF grants for the successful conduct of the training activities. This move benefitted the training content and contributed to involving more participants coming from the seven regions of the country.

The monitoring of communication processes and practices shows that M&E is now fully integrated into the decision-making process; and that health policy research is an essential element of it. However some difficulties have also been identified. For example, these can be seen in the process arrangement and priority-setting for health policy research, and in the use of research evidence at all levels of the decision-making process.

The experience gained out of the project's implementation provides an opportunity for decision-makers and the HPAC team to improve their M&E knowledge and skills. In terms of next steps for the project, the following will be considered:

- the development and delivery of an advanced M&E training course to further improve the capacity of policy-makers to cope with evidence-based information for policy-making; and
- further development of evidence-informed decision-making through better and greater dissemination of research evidence, both at the national and regional levels.

For more information, contact Dr Gulgun Murzalieva ([gulgun@manas.elcat.kg](mailto:gulgun@manas.elcat.kg)), Health Policy Analysis Center, Kyrgyzstan

## Young Researcher Grant – Jimma University, Ethiopia

After having been a successful grantee of the Alliance's Young Researchers Grant Programme in 2008, Jimma University successfully completed the second Grant covering the period from December 2008 to March 2010. The aim of this second grant was to improve the institutional and individual capacity building, particularly via training for the Master's Degree programme in Health Policy and Systems Research (HPSR).



Dr Morankar and team, Jimma University, Ethiopia

The Alliance grant was used to support six research grants placed under the supervision and guidance of academic research instructors. The grants were awarded based on a competitive basis through the submission of research proposals, which covered research topics in the fields of:

- 1 health service delivery (satisfaction and utilization);
- 2 health financing (health insurance scheme);
- 3 quality assessment of health services;
- 4 human resources for health;
- 5 monitoring and evaluation of health services; and
- 6 health information – production, distribution and utilization.

These research topics were identified through a priority-setting exercise conducted at a 2009 National Workshop on capacity building for HPSR in Ethiopia, involving national, regional, and international stakeholders and donor organizations.

Capacity building on an individual level is well evidenced in the increased number of dissertations, and the publication of all research results in a peer-reviewed journal, the Ethiopian Journal of Health Sciences (accessible at: <http://www.ejhs.ju.edu.et>). In addition to the six research papers mentioned above, 15 additional manuscripts relating directly to HPSR and written by other students from Jimma University were submitted for publication. The submission of those 21 manuscripts prompted the publication of a special issue of the Ethiopian Journal of Health Sciences under the heading of "Health Systems Research by Jimma University".

The next steps in HPSR teaching and learning at Jimma University will be to:

- develop knowledge translation mechanisms, for example through the publication of research articles, community-based pamphlets and policy briefs targeting various stakeholders and the mass media;
- develop knowledge-sharing capacity through the dissemination of research findings using various channels and fora; and
- promote the use of knowledge by identifying immediate and long-term partners for implementation. ■

For more information, contact: Professor Morankar Sudhakar, College of Public Health and Medical Sciences, Jimma University, Ethiopia at: morankarsn@yahoo.com

## Research on the Global Health Initiatives: National and subnational HIV/AIDS coordination

The Alliance helped to support research on global health initiatives (GHIs). Recently published in *Globalization and Health*, a study by Spicer et al (2010) synthesizes the effects of GHIs – the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), and the World Bank’s HIV/AIDS programmes including the Multi-country AIDS Programme (MAP) – on national and subnational health systems in seven different LMICs, with a particular focus on the coordination of responses to HIV/AIDS. “Positive effects of GHIs,” they stated, “included the creation of opportunities for multisectoral participation, greater political commitment and increased transparency among most partners. However, the quality of participation was often limited, and some GHIs bypassed coordination mechanisms, especially at the subnational level, weakening their effectiveness.” The authors conclude by identifying “residual national and subnational obstacles to effective coordination and optimal use of funds by focal GHIs” – obstacles that the GHIs, other donors and country partners “need to collectively address”. ■

For the full text of this open-access article, please visit <http://www.globalizationandhealth.com/content/6/1/3>

Spicer N et al. National and subnational HIV/AIDS coordination: are global health initiatives closing the gap between intent and practice? *Globalization and Health*. 6(1), 2010.

### ■ ALLIANCE FOR HEALTH POLICY AND SYSTEMS RESEARCH World Health Organization

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](mailto:alliancehpsr@who.int) See our full contact details below:

Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research  
World Health Organization  
CH-1211 Geneva 27, Switzerland  
Tel. : +41 22 791 29 73, Fax : +41 22 791 48 17  
E-mail: [alliancehpsr@who.int](mailto:alliancehpsr@who.int)  
Alliance HPSR Website: <http://www.who.int/alliance-hpsr>

### ■ BOARD

**Sara Bennett**, John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Baltimore, United States of America

**Jonathan Broomberg**, Discovery Health, Sandton, South Africa

**Somsak Chunharas**, National Health Foundation, Bangkok, Thailand

**Carissa Etienne**, World Health Organization, Geneva, Switzerland

**Sania Nishtar**, Heartfile, Islamabad, Pakistan

**John-Arne Røttingen**, (Chair), Norwegian Knowledge Centre for the Health Services, Oslo, Norway

**Saul Walker**, Department for International Development, United Kingdom

### ■ SCIENTIFIC TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE (STAC)

**Irene Akua Agepong**, (Chair), Ghana Health Service, Accra, Ghana

**Lucy Gilson**, University of Cape Town, South Africa, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, United Kingdom

**Sennen Hounton**, UNFPA, New York, United States of America

**Soonman Kwon**, Department of Health Policy and Management at the School of Public Health, Seoul National University, South Korea

**John Lavis**, McMaster University, Hamilton, Canada

**Prasanta Mahapatra**, Institute of Health Systems, India

**Goran Tomson**, Karolinska Institute, Stockholm, Sweden

### ■ ISSN 1819-4648

### ■ © WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION 2010

All rights reserved. Publications of the World Health Organization can be obtained from WHO Press, World Health Organization, 20 Avenue Appia, 1211 Geneva 27, Switzerland (tel: +41 22 791 3264; fax: +41 22 791 4857; email: [bookorders@who.int](mailto:bookorders@who.int)). Requests for permission to reproduce or translate WHO publications – whether for sale or for noncommercial distribution – should be addressed to WHO Press, at the above address (fax: +41 22 791 4806; email: [permissions@who.int](mailto:permissions@who.int)).

The designations employed and the presentation of the material in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the World Health Organization concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. Dotted lines on maps represent approximate border lines for which there may not yet be full agreement.

The mention of specific companies or of certain manufacturers’ products does not imply that they are endorsed or recommended by the World Health Organization in preference to others of a similar nature that are not mentioned. Errors and omissions excepted, the names of proprietary products are distinguished by initial capital letters.

All reasonable precautions have been taken by the World Health Organization to verify the information contained in this publication. However, the published material is being distributed without warranty of any kind, either expressed or implied. The responsibility for the interpretation and use of the material lies with the reader. In no event shall the World Health Organization be liable for damages arising from its use.

Designed by Tushita Graphic Vision Sàrl, CH 1226 Thônex, Switzerland

Printed in Switzerland

**Choked Pipes:  
Reforming Pakistan's Mixed Health System**

This recently released book from Oxford University Press comes at a critical time as interest evolves in global health from 'diseases' towards 'systems'. By describing the Mixed Health Systems Syndrome, the book has drawn attention to the systemic challenges in health systems where publicly-funded government health delivery coexists with privately-financed market delivery. The roadmap for reforming Pakistan's health system is relevant to health reform in many other resource-constrained developing countries with mixed health systems. The author Sania Nishtar, founder of Heartfile in Pakistan, is an Alliance Board member.

Details about the book can be accessed at:  
<http://sanianishtar.info/choked-pipes.html>



Dr Sania Nishtar during launch of Choked Pipes by the Oxford University Press, Islamabad, Pakistan, March 2010

**First Global Symposium on Health Systems  
Research, 16-19 November 2010**

The deadline for abstracts has passed, but two important deadlines remain:

- "Calling Young Researchers". Deadline 17 May 2010. The theme of this essay competition for young researchers is "Health Systems Research: towards universal health coverage". Young professionals working in or interested in the wide spectrum of health systems research are invited to submit essays covering one or more of the following areas

of inquiry: political economy of universal coverage; health system financing; scale-up of health services; and knowledge translation.

For more, including important eligibility information and submission rules, see <http://www.hsr-symposium.org/index.php/young-researchers-call>

- Satellite Meetings. Deadline 30 June 2010. These will take place in the conference centre but are fully organized and coordinated by the organization hosting the satellite.

For more, see <http://www.hsr-symposium.org/index.php/satellite-meetings>

**SUPPORT Summaries**

40 summaries of systematic reviews produced and available on the SUPPORT website. One of the Alliance-supported Systematic Review Centres – the Chilean Methodology Centre – has worked with the EU-funded SUPPORT project to produce summaries of existing systematic reviews of health systems interventions. These summaries extract the most relevant information from systematic reviews, evaluate the information and present it in a user-friendly manner so that decision-makers can quickly review the evidence and decide whether a particular innovation is likely to be effective in their own context. To date, 40 summaries of systematic reviews of health systems interventions have been produced and are available on the SUPPORT project website and through a link on the Alliance's website.

**Join the Alliance HPSR at:**

[http://www.who.int/alliance-hpsr/partners/partner\\_form/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/alliance-hpsr/partners/partner_form/en/index.html)



**Visit our website**

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