Evidence of Impact: Case Study 4

Strengthening implementation research capacities for improved health systems in Global South

**Challenge**
Driven by the Global North, many health systems interventions are largely ineffective when applied to low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). Developing appropriate solutions requires leadership from local research institutions with the capacity to produce locally relevant evidence and engage directly with local policymakers.

**Actions**
- Strengthen research networks across LMICs.
- Increase capacity in LMICs to undertake policy-relevant research and engage with policymakers.
- Provide regional health policy and systems research training, with a focus on implementation research and systems thinking.

**Result**
- Created the WHO-Tropical Disease Research Regional Training Centre for Implementation Research in the Western Pacific Region, together with the University of Malaya and the Institute of Health Systems Research.
- Provided access to implementation research and gender training by designing and implementing Massive Open On-Line Courses aimed at health policymakers, implementers and researchers from LMICs.
- Created a mentorship and small grants programmes for course participants.

**Moving Forward**
Continue to strengthen regional and global networks of health researchers, implementers and policymakers from the Global South, equipped to generate and utilize evidence to improve health policy outcomes.

**Challenge**
While the significant burden of disease is experienced in the Global South, proposed public health solutions almost always originate in the Global North. However, interventions and policies can only be successful and sustainable when adapted to the local context and designed with a continuous learning cycle. To address health systems barriers effectively, health interventions, programs and policies need to be locally developed, based on data and evidence specific to the communities and populations, and embedded in the health system context. Implementation research conducted in the Global South, by Global South researchers, can inform the design and implementation of effective solutions, so they are feasible, culturally appropriate, and responsive to local needs.
Actions
UNU-IIGH is developing and providing training for health policymakers and implementers to strengthen implementation research skills, and has formed collaborations with research institutes in the Global South to facilitate and establish research networks. These networks support South-South knowledge production and sharing to strengthen research capacity and the use of evidence for decision-making.

✓ Building on Malaysia’s research capacity and highly functioning national healthcare system, UNU-IIGH, together with the Malaysian Ministry of Health Institute for Health Systems Research and the University of Malaya created the Malaysian Global Health Consortium (MGHC). MGHC brings together policymakers and researchers from government, non-government, and higher education sectors to support capacity building, research, advocacy, and knowledge exchange. MGHC has launched the Regional Training Centre for implementation research in the Western Pacific.1 Funded by WHO’s Tropical Disease Research partnership (TDR), the center serves as WHO’s regional training hub in the Western Pacific Region. It develops and delivers online courses based on regional needs, utilizing existing expertise in disease-endemic countries.

✓ Together with TDR and other partners, UNU-IIGH developed a Massive Open On-Line Course (MOOC), training over 2000 participants in total. Topics include “Implementation research for researchers in LMICs”, with a focus on infectious diseases of poverty; “Incorporating an Intersectional Gender Perspective into Implementation Research. Targeting public health researchers, decision-makers, disease control programme managers, and “Implementation research for policymakers and implementers” with case studies from Malaysia and Indonesia”.

✓ UNU-IIGH hosted a remote mentorship programme for awardees of the Infectious Diseases of Poverty Small Grants Scheme, a joint initiative between TDR and WHO’s Western Pacific Regional office. The programme strengthens individual and institutional capacity in implementation research for the control and elimination of infectious diseases of poverty.2 Through online networking events, participants exchange lessons and experiences in conducting research.

Results
UNU-IIGH has strengthened capacity for evidence-based decision-making and built a strong network of researchers, policymakers and implementers from the Global South equipped to generate and utilize evidence to improve health policy and programmes outcomes.

Moving forward
In the coming year, UNU-IIGH will expand its training programs for policymakers and researchers, with two new MOOCs – one on Gender-intentional design of digital health interventions and another on Ethics and Equity in Global Health. UNU-IIGH will continue to publish knowledge products tailored to the needs of LMICs, and develop existing and new partnerships with institutions in the Global South to build regional capacity in health policy and systems research, with a focus on Africa, and the Asia Pacific region.

1 TDR. New partners in Malaysia and Senegal join TDR’s network of research training institutions. March 22, 2021.
Photo credit: UNU-IIGH
DOI: https://doi.org/10.37941/BN/2023/4