Indian HDSS meeting on policy relevant public-health research initiatives

SUMMARY REPORT

Report of "Indian Health and Demographic Surveillance System (HDSS) meeting on policy relevant public health research initiatives" that was organized by Vadu HDSS. This meeting gave a platform to INDEPTH member centres in India to interact with each other, government officials, policy makers and media personnel.

INDIAN HDSS MEETING ON POLICY RELEVANT PUBLIC-HEALTH RESEARCH INITIATIVES

SUMMARY REPORT

INTRODUCTION:

HDSS centres in India are looking forward to provide policy relevant output in the field of health and demography and envisage complimenting government's efforts for enhancing public health research in India that will help develop evidence based, health policies and public health programs. A brain storming on how to leverage HDSS strengths for better policy and program was required to move towards this purpose; hence Vadu HDSS organized a meeting funded by INDEPTH Network on 6th January 2015 in KEMHRC Auditorium. The purpose of this meeting was to bring the members of all HDSS sites, national and local government officials, policy makers and media in India together and inform them about value added by HDSS to government's efforts of improving population health. Overall meeting agenda focused on discussing importance of HDSS and how it could leverage public health policy.

MEETING OBJECTIVES:

1. Inform Indian policy makers about the INDEPTH Network and INDEPTH Research to Policy working group
2. Inform the policy makers on the importance of HDSS and how HDSS in India could partner to work towards policy relevant research
3. Identify gaps between research by HDSS and policy

INDEPTH RESEARCH TO POLICY WORKING GROUP – AN INTRODUCTION

The INDEPTH research to policy WG was re-launched to fulfill the network's objective for tailoring, packaging and directing research outputs, as appropriate, for different audiences and stakeholders so as to bridge the gap between research findings and policy-making. The WG is helping the INDEPTH Network to determine how the centres can translate their findings to maximize impact on policy and practice, and on how the Secretariat can support member centres that run HDSS to achieve this goal. To conclude, this meeting will begin dialogue on bridging the gap between research and policy and identify ways by which the work of our HDSS centres could easily be made visible to policy makers for informed decision making.

INTRODUCTION TO AND POTENTIAL OF HDSS TO SUPPORT HEALTH POLICY IN INDIA

HDSS could lead the transition from descriptive, situational research to implementation/action research. Institutionalizing dialogue and feedback processes building on established mechanism should be initiated between HDSS and policy-making teams, at district and state-level. This could generate demands from the policy circles which could be used for mainstreaming the health systems approach. Moreover, emphasis should be given to research communication and dissemination for improved policy advocacy.

HDSS is the most robust public health platform and an operational research laboratory for population studies which can also act as think tank for the policy decisions. HDSS can pioneer to develop population based disease registries in the country.

DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM AND POLICY REFORMS

Traditionally policy research has focused more on content and less on execution barriers which could be addressed if HDSS are used to monitor programs, interventions and policies. HDSSs have the capacity to help fill the data void and act as supplement in developing nations. The programs and policies sometimes fail because of inequity in the various aspects. HDSS has answers to all these issues on how to implement or make strategies. The policymakers are looking for such answers where they could test or monitor programs, and HDSS can act as population laboratories in real life situation. Additionally, dialogue with policymakers would make the process easy which would lead to articulation of need based research questions and attract relationships and partnerships.

HDSS are useful with the policy makers perspective thus providing a platform to translate the research based interventions, observations and innovations into policies.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS:

The discussions throughout the meeting delivered many recommendations and suggestions few of which are listed below-

1. To develop online courses for HDSS data collection and data management which could be a step towards self sustainability: Dr. T.P. Ahluwalia, Head, Health systems Research, ICMR

2. Government could demand for categorization of medicine and outlay expenditure on the basis of disease burden which is one of the outcomes of HDSS. There should be linkages between available annual data on disease burden and the percentage of medicine and grants to be utilized annually: Dr. Nagaonkar, Asst. Director, Rajiv Gandhi Jeevandayi Yojna, representing Sec. Public Health and Family Welfare

3. Government officers should inform the researchers about their needs so that relevant research data is generated: Dr. Abhijit Chowdhury, Centre Leader, Society for Health and Demographic Surveillance, Birbhum.

4. Government should come forward and form common platform with HDSS centres and government functionaries, where both sides can interact on common interests: Dr. Dipankar Maji, Deputy Director, Public Health West Bengal state.

5. Conduct SWOT analysis of every HDSS site at regular intervals in India: Dr. T.P. Ahluwalia, Head, Health systems Research, ICMR
6. A network of Indian HDSS sites in the line of INDEPTH Network should be developed to have a country wide impact: All participants and chairperson.

A network of Indian HDSS sites on lines of INDEPTH Network should be developed to have a country wide impact of HDSS on policy reforms

7. Another focused meeting is required to discuss on "How to establish Indian HDSS Network?" which would also discuss the global priorities which the network would take up as key concerns: Dr. N.K. Ganguly, Ex. Director General, ICMR.

Health and demographic surveillance systems are today's need where health research, implementation programs, impact assessments and policy decisions collectively affect the public health status in India. Although such systems have worked in a discrete nature to-date, it is time to come forward and interact with government systems, non government organizations and between institutes working on similar platforms. The key components for this interaction should be identified and frequent crosstalk should occur between those.

Such dialogue would lead to recognition of need based research questions which in turn results in supporting the existing policy programs or policy reforms. The need for interaction could be fulfilled by formation of network of Indian HDSS sites in line with the INDEPTH Network, with support from government which could collectively conduct focused research activities keeping the uniqueness of each site intact.

OUTCOME

This meeting was an important kick-start for interaction between HDSS member sites, scientists, academicians, policy makers and government officials. This interaction was important to inform the community about the existence of HDSS sites in India and the immense potential these sites have to support the health policy reforms in the nation.

This meeting has not merely informed, about the existence of HDSS, but has also identified the area in which HDSS can support national health policies. It has led to a thought process which would ultimately result in formation of Indian network of HDSS sites which would create an immense impact in the health system. Overall, this interaction fulfilled the objectives as described and lead to a futuristic approach where the utilization of HDSS could be done to its full extent for strengthening policies and programs ultimately leading to improved public health.

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