

GAPS, PRIORITIES AND CHALLENGES IN KNOWLEDGE TRANSLATION: MONITORING AND EVALUATING EVIDENCE-TO-POLICY INITIATIVES

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Background Information

- Recent drive for creation use of Evidence to policy initiatives
- Rapid development of platforms eg EVIPNETs, REACH-Policy, ZAMFOHR (26 Localities)
- Many important questions remain: how to better use evidence to policy networks (KT platforms)
- M & E is necessary; we need to learn as we are doing through research and sharing info across countries, regions, networks (collaboration)
- Research is needed in M & E of evidence-to-policy networks or platforms since very little information is available in this field.

Issues Raised by Task Force Report

- a) The importance of promoting and facilitating greater uptake of existing and emerging research findings so as to enhance productivity, efficiency and equity of health systems.
- b) Need to bridge the gap between researchers and the users of research (particularly policy makers) through partnerships and networks.
- c) The design, implementation and evaluation of units to support policy makers in their efforts to use research was considered a priority area.
- d) It recommended that WHO should facilitate the development of effective mechanisms to promote the uptake of research findings by National and International policy makers.

Issues raised by Task Force report

- e) Recommended that WHO should monitor all progress towards the achievement of the task force recommendations through the WHO Advisory Committee on Health Research.
- f) Argued the importance of evaluation of major programs that are being rolled out or scaled up to deliver interventions for priority diseases.
- g) Despite the foregoing in the Task Force did not highlight specifically the need to monitor and evaluate evidence to policy platforms as an integral part of their establishment and development process

What has changed in M & E since Mexico?

- Slow but steady progress has been made.
- Focus on three examples:
 - Lavis and colleagues developed an evaluation framework for assessing country level efforts to link research to action.
 - SURE project
 - PREP proposal (producing Research Evidence for Policy in Asian Health Systems): not yet funded

The Four Elements of the Framework

- The general climate for research use
 - The production of research that is both highly relevant and appropriately synthesised for research users (esp policy makers)
 - The mix of clusters of activities used to link research to action
 - The evaluation of efforts to link research to action.
- The efforts of activities to link research to action are considered in four clusters of activities: Push efforts (e.g researchers tailoring their message according to user needs), efforts to facilitate pull (e.g efforts to train users to access research evidence), user-pull efforts and exchange efforts.

The Lavis et al. Approach to M & E of the Platforms

Has four components described below which will produce evidence to facilitate countries to learn from platform experience:

- Describe annually what each KT is doing in terms of processes and outputs (documentation of infrastructural and contextual factors that may affect the relationships among initiatives, outputs, eventual outcomes & impacts).
- Conduct formative evaluations of the KT platforms so as to identify which of their efforts can be improved right from priority setting process, through packaging evidence summaries to deliberative dialogues organized by a KT.

The Group's Approach to M & E of the Platforms Cont'd

- Identify through outcome evaluations which of the KT efforts are having the desired or unexpected outcomes in the health system.
- Assess through impact evaluations whether the desired impacts are being achieved i.e. that health systems policy making processes take into account health research evidence and that research agendas are influenced by priority policy questions.

SURE (Supporting Users of Research Evidence in African Health Systems)

SURE will use Lavis and colleagues framework for assessing country-level efforts to link research to action and conduct both qualitative and quantitative studies for a comparative evaluation of African initiatives, assessing advantages and disadvantages of different approaches in different contexts. In addition there will be impact evaluation using case studies and interviews.

PREP (Producing Research Evidence for Policy in Asian Health Systems)

PREP focuses specifically on the countries of China (including Sichuan and Shandong provinces and Beijing municipality) Lao PDR, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam. Here again evaluation is a key objective targeted to methods for producing research syntheses that meet the needs of policy makers.

Lessons Learnt Since Mexico: Current Priorities

- In an effort to move the field forward the following priorities are identified:
- Developing capacity for M and E and related research. There is a great need to develop interest by various stake holders and researchers to gain knowledge and skills for meaningful participation in activities research related to various aspects of M and E. There is need to develop champions and leadership for this field so that different regions of the world can become self sufficient and ensure sustainability of efforts/programmes.
- Academic institutions need to take a grater interest in this field and promote academic excellence while offering competitive rewards for those individual committed to this. Policy makers should include M and E activities in their national plans and provide matching resources.

Lessons Learnt Since Mexico: Current Priorities Cont'd

- Securing adequate funding to support identified M and E activities in Individual countries and to commit resources to these initiatives.
- Developing theoretical framework that will facilitate conduct of rigorous evaluation of KT platforms in a systematic manner so that results from different jurisdictions can be comparable.
- Use the Lavis and colleagues evaluation framework in different countries and begin to share experiences so as to facilitate learning and improvement of performance of KT platforms. Researchers who are in the core business of knowledge translation should spearhead this effort as it requires a deep theoretical understanding of this field.

Challenges and Way Forward

- Nurturing emerging experimentation: REACH and EVIPNets provide good examples from which to examine some of the challenges that have proven to be obstacles in our efforts to advance this field through M and E. Many challenges remain. There is a definite need to nurture, whether through established units and organizations or new and emerging ones, the nascent KT platforms as they grapple with untested processes and experiences. Lack of flexibility and strict adherence to bureaucratic processes may hinder harnessing full advantages of available resources both financial and human in a timely fashion. There is need for being open to new ideas and finding creative solutions to impediments. Some local, country or regional civil service technocrats are yet to fully appreciate the potential value of these emerging exploratory efforts and the importance of also supporting them to the fullest extent possible.

Challenges and Way Forward Cont'd

- Management of the change process in the health system is a challenge that is envisioned if monitoring and evaluation of evidence-to-policy initiatives is to be rigorously implemented to achieve the maximum desired impact for health care delivery. Learning as we proceed by all stakeholders especially researchers and policy makers is critical to success.
- Need to identify leaders and champions who have to be groomed to take on this very important roles and be ready to experiment all the time while acting as catalysts for change.
- Raising funding support whether locally or internationally has continued to be a major challenge especially when some funders may not fully appreciate the local situation and support structures.