



INDEPTH Network

Better Health Information for Better Health Policy

1st Quarter Newsletter from the Secretariat

January - March 2013

INTREC Holds its First International Stakeholders Meeting in Ghana

In 2008, the World Health Organization's Commission on Social Determinants of Health (SDH) argued that existing differences in health status between and within countries were linked to degrees of social disadvantage, were unjust and avoidable, and that it was the responsibility of governments, researchers and civil society to work to reduce them. In 2012, with this concern in mind, the INDEPTH Training and Research Centres of Excellence (INTREC) project was launched with the dual aims of:

- Providing SDH-related training for INDEPTH researchers from Africa and Asia, thereby allowing the production of evidence on the associations between SDH and health outcomes;
- Enabling the sharing of this information by facilitating links between researchers and decision makers, and by ensuring that research findings are presented to decision makers in an actionable, policy-relevant manner.

In setting the agenda for this year's activities, INTREC organised a three day international stakeholders meeting in Accra, Ghana, from the 19th-21st March at the Royal Richester Hotel. The theme of the meeting was "Strengthening research and policy on social determinants of health in low and middle-income countries in Asia and Africa". More than fifty scientists from INDEPTH member centres attended, as well as academics and other collaborators from institutions in USA and Europe.

On the opening day, the Executive Director of INDEPTH, Prof. Osman Sankoh, welcomed all participants to Accra and gave a brief introductory presentation on the INDEPTH Network, informing the scientists gathered that the scientific vision of the Network was to generate robust scientific knowledge to guide evidence-based health and social policies and interventions at local, national and international levels.

During his own welcome presentation, Prof. Peter Byass, Chairman of the INDEPTH Scientific Advisory Committee and Principal Investigator (PI) of the INTREC project, explained to participants that as an EU-funded project, INTREC needs to meet certain EU requirements. One of these is that the PI must be based at a European institution, which in this case is the Umeå Centre for Global Health Research, at Umeå University in Sweden. In addition to the INDEPTH Network, he added that the Institute of Public Health, Heidelberg University in Germany; the Centre for Health Service Management, Gadjah Mada Medical School in Indonesia; the Centre for Global Health and Inequality, Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences in the Netherlands; and the Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies, Harvard University in the USA were also involved in the project.



In a maiden presentation, Dr. Margaret Gyapong, leader of the Working Group on Social Science Research within the INDEPTH Network and also centre leader of the Dodowa Health and Demographic Surveillance System (HDSS) in Ghana, informed participants that during its 65th Assembly held in Rio de Janeiro in October 2011, the World Conference on Social Determinants of Health enjoined member states to develop and support policies, strategies, programmes and action plans that addressed social determinants of health, with clearly defined goals, activities and accountability mechanisms, and with resources for their implementation. She also said that the call by WHO was important, adding that the INTREC project was an opportunity for INDEPTH members to "look at the wealth of data we collect within the various HDSS sites to examine the extent to which we can contribute to the call to the member states."

Prof. Lisa Berkman of Harvard University presented via video on the social determinants of health and approaches and implications for global health research and policy. Other lively presentations on linking social determinants to health, health policy and health research came from Prof. Pascale Allotey (Malaysia), Dr Yahyalpuge (Tanzania), and Prof Charles Surjadi (Indonesia).

There were country reports on situational analyses of SDH training, needs, and policy from the INTREC participant countries: Ghana, Tanzania, South Africa, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia and Vietnam. Dr. John Kinsman from Umea University gave a session on the project's methodology, and also identified some of the over-arching findings from the situation analyses.

An important session was also held on the proposed SDH research training programme for INDEPTH scientists. Dr Anna Mirny presented the plans, and a wide-ranging discussion followed, with valuable suggestions given regarding, for example, sustainability of the project.

As part of the planned activities, participants undertook a field trip to Dodowa in the Greater Accra District of Ghana, in order to acquaint themselves with operations at the Health and Demographic Surveillance System site.

Vaccine and Child Survival Working Group Makes Steady Advancement



In 2008-2009 the INDEPTH Network Working Group on Vaccination and Child Survival secured funding to conduct multi-site studies for a project entitled, "Optimising the impact and cost-effectiveness of child health intervention programmes of vaccines and micronutrients in low-income countries" or 'Optimise' for short. It involved three INDEPTH Health and Demographic Surveillance System (HDSS) centres in Nouna (Burkina Faso), Navrongo (Ghana) and Bandim (Guinea Bissau).

Since securing the funding, the Group has been working assiduously and has made significant progress. To set the scene for this year's activities and programmes, the Group held its third consortium meeting from January 9-13 in Bandim, Guinea Bissau with sixteen participants attending

from the three participating centres: Nouna, Bandim and Navrongo. The first two meetings were held in Navrongo (2011) and Nouna (2012). The objectives of this year's meeting were to review activities undertaken since the project's inception; change the project's three-site to a two-site protocol and review field visits, reports and deliverables. During the meeting, the project's Principal Investigator (PI), Prof. Peter Aaby, informed participants about an important discovery reported in a paper published by Biering-Sørensen, PIDJ 2012 from a BCG trial to kick-start the project. The finding demonstrates that a single dose of BCG vaccine has a significant protective effect on neonates whereas that of a Dutch group showed non-specific immunological effects of BCG (Kleinnijenhuis, PNAS 2012). Another discovery from the optimise research shows that an early measles vaccine protects neonates against hospitalisations, especially for respiratory infections.

The participating centres outlined progress chalked up, with Navrongo in its sixth round of collecting vaccination information which started in January, 2011. More than 70% of vaccination cards are seen during visits.

Nouna also indicated they were making progress in data collection and would be speeding up the process. Bandim also reported on its progress, visiting 182 clusters of 100 women of fertile age and all children aged less than 5 years in the same households.

The Group also discussed measuring gene expression and the effect of providing hepatitis B vaccine with a BCG vaccine. Among challenges being faced are low hospital attendance and the lack of proper hospitalisation records at health facilities.

Gates Foundation Official Visits Secretariat

The INDEPTH Secretariat continues to be a port of call by very important visitors. Prof. Cyril Engmann of the Gates Foundation (In a white shirt at the back, middle) paid a courtesy visit to the Secretariat on 16th January, 2013. He held lively discussions with the Executive Director, Prof. Osman Sankoh and some Secretariat staff in the area of Newborn Health Research.

Prof. Engmann was particularly hopeful that the INDEPTH Network could play a key role in championing not only Newborn Health Research but also Maternal Health Research. He urged the leadership of INDEPTH to identify champions at the member HDSSs who could promote the scientific agenda of the Network. He stressed the need to strengthen data collection systems especially in standardizing and harmonizing definitions across member centres. He also encouraged INDEPTH scientists to document ways of progressing from the publication of scientific papers to translating their findings into programmes and policies beneficial to various populations.



In a brief presentation to welcome the Gates Foundation official, Osman gave an overview of the activities of the Network and talked about work done in the area of Newborn Health Research. He elaborated on the support the Gates Foundation had provided to the Network. He expressed INDEPTH gratitude to the Foundation for providing funding for the self-explanatory project: INDEPTH Effectiveness and Safety Studies for Antimalarials in Africa.

IDAMS Consortium Strategises on Threat of Dengue Fever



INDEPTH Network to the participants. Dr. Thomas Jaenisch of the University of Heidelberg Medical Centre in Germany, the coordinator of the IDAMS consortium and co-organiser of the meeting introduced the participants to the IDAMS consortium and laid out a framework for the question of dengue in Africa. Dr. Raman Velayudhan of WHO Headquarters in Geneva presented the new global strategy on dengue prevention and control by WHO. Dr. Ousmane Faye and Dr. Amadou Sall from the Pasteur Institute in Senegal presented an African perspective on dengue in Senegal. Dr. Harald Margolis from the Dengue Branch of the US Centers of Disease Control in Puerto Rico, USA, and Dr. Herve Zeller from the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control in Stockholm

Dengue fever (caused by four distinct dengue viruses) is the most rapidly spreading mosquito-borne disease worldwide and has been identified as a global public health concern especially in the tropical and sub-tropical regions of the world. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 50-100 million dengue infections occur each year and that almost half of the world's populations live in countries where dengue is endemic. In view of the magnitude of the problem, the International Research Consortium on Dengue Risk Assessment, Management Surveillance (IDAMS) in which INDEPTH is a member, funded by the European Union 7th Framework, collaborated with the INDEPTH Secretariat to organise a meeting of experts in Accra from 7 to 9 February 2013.

The objectives of the meeting were to assess the available evidence on the presence of dengue in Africa, to identify knowledge gaps, and to discuss the need for future research and eventually control strategies. In a welcome address, the Executive Director of INDEPTH, Prof. Osman Sankoh, one of the facilitators of the meeting, presented an introductory overview of the

completed the picture by their analysis of the global threat of dengue with emphasis on the situation on the African continent.

Lively presentations followed in plenary sessions after which participants were divided into four groups: 1) to map out strategies for evaluating the presence and burden of dengue in Africa; 2) to discuss clinical presentations and diagnostic capacities, 3) to analyse knowledge gaps regarding the mosquito vector; and to discuss the potential threat of dengue in the light of the current health policy landscape in the region.

The meeting drew research scientists from Oxford University, Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, Pasteur Institute, Kenya Medical Research Institute, CDC Kenya, Bonn University Medical Centre, and from INDEPTH member Health and Demographic Surveillance Systems centres in Ghana, Ethiopia, Guinea Bissau, Tanzania, Mozambique and Burkina Faso. It is expected that research results and discussions from this collaborative venture of the IDAMS consortium will result in a publication.

New HDSS in Nigeria lauds INDEPTH

One of INDEPTH's outstanding commitments is to strengthen the technical and research capacities and skills of established member centres that run HDSSs as well as support the establishment of new HDSSs in low- and middle-income countries, thereby preparing them for effective scientific contribution to INDEPTH when they become fully integrated members of the Network.

In keeping with this commitment, INDEPTH has been providing technical support to three HDSSs in Nigeria (Nahuche HDSS in Bungudu Local Government Area, Cross-River HDSS in Akpabuyo local Government Area and Oriade HDSS in Oyo State). Recently Nahuche HDSS was approved full membership by the INDEPTH Board. We expect two other HDSSs to become members of the Network in the near future.

Prof. Martin Meremikwu, leader of the Cross River HDSS which is operated by the University of Calabar in Nigeria, and which has benefited immensely from the technical expertise of INDEPTH scientists, particularly from the Navrongo HDSS, was at the INDEPTH Secretariat to present an update on CRHDSS work.

Martin informed the Secretariat that the primary objective of the CRHDSS is to generate reliable data on vital events, especially child health, reproductive health and the control of endemic infectious diseases, notably malaria, HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis. He expressed optimism that CRHDSS would join the INDEPTH Network in the near future. The Executive Director, Prof. Sankoh, was delighted at the work accomplished by this young and upcoming HDSS in



Nigeria and told Martin not to hesitate to knock on the doors of INDEPTH whenever he needed more assistance.

Prof. Martin Meremikwu thanked INDEPTH for all the support provided them since their establishment and said, "working with established HDSS centres in INDEPTH ensured the good starting point of CRHDSS". Present at the meeting were a cross section of staff from the INDEPTH Secretariat.

INDEPTH Cause of Death Determination (CODD) with interVA-4 Data Analysis and Scientific Writing Workshop in Accra



After having successfully held a Cause of Death Determination (CODD) workshop in Belgium in December 2012 in which 18 INDEPTH member centres participated, a second workshop has been held in Accra, Ghana from the 22nd to the 24th March, 2013. The three-day workshop was to facilitate data analysis and completion of draft manuscripts based on the application of interVA-4 to Verbal Autopsy data for inclusion in a supplement of the journal Tropical Medicine and International Health (TMIH).

The Executive Director of INDEPTH Network, Prof. Osman Sankoh, who gave the opening remarks, encouraged the participants to take the workshop seriously in order to produce lots of papers, particularly cross-site papers for the journal, since one of the most important activities of INDEPTH is determining causes of death.

For his part, the Chair of the Scientific Advisory Committee, and the key facilitator of the workshop, Prof.

Peter Byass, said the meeting was a follow up to a CODD workshop held in Belgium in December 2012. He said the Belgium workshop had been extremely successful and that participants had been able to process more than 100,000 Verbal Autopsies (VAs). Peter said the Accra workshop would lay emphasis on practical work, analysis and interpretation of findings after which participants would write a series of causes of death papers for publication. He said that knowing the cause of death was important because it helped policymakers to base interventions on a better understanding of critical diseases.

In all, about 20 participants from the various INDEPTH centres across Africa took part in the workshop. The outcomes of the workshop were advanced manuscripts for the proposed supplement in the TMIH journal and an agreement on submission of centre-specific data to the Secretariat to facilitate pooled-data analyses.

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