

Capacity Building for Robust Policy Evidence in Public Health and Roles of Academic Institutions

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Ethiopia, with a population of over 110 million people, is characterized by a diverse range of public health problems. In recent years, the country has witnessed an increase in the incidence of emerging and re-emerging public health problems, such as malaria, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, and Non-communicable diseases, as well as natural and man-made calamities. These problems pose a significant threat to the health and well-being of the Ethiopian population, and they also have a detrimental negative impact on the country's economic development. In order to tackle these issues effectively, it is crucial to implement robust policies and programs that are supported by substantial evidence. Therefore, policies and programs should be based on the best available evidence, and regularly evaluated for their effective.

However, there are several challenges to generating and utilizing the best available and robust public health evidence in Ethiopia. These challenges include, but are not limited to, a lack of robust data sources and systems, inadequate capacity, and the data culture. While certain diseases have well-established data systems, we still lack reliable data on the incidence and prevalence of many public health issues, especially in non-communicable diseases, including malignancies and emerging /re-emerging problems. The existing situation poses challenges in the advancement of evidence-based policies and programs in critical public health domains. Furthermore, these challenges are exacerbated by inadequate resources to produce and utilize evidence, particularly within the healthcare system. These deficiencies encompass a shortage of skilled researchers, limited availability of data, and insufficient funding for research.

Despite these challenges, there are also lots of opportunities to leap-frog the current status and strengthen the generation of robust data for use in public health action. The Ethiopian government is investing in the development of new data collection systems, which will help improve the availability of data on public health problems. This investment is being led by the Ethiopian Public Health Institute (EPHI) and its partner entities, making a significant step forward.

Similarly, the Ethiopian government and international organizations are working to train researchers in Ethiopia, enhancing their capacity to generate and synthesize relevant evidence within the health care system. Furthermore, efforts are being made to promote evidence-based decision-making by providing training for policymakers and ensuring that evidence is easily accessible.

By addressing the challenges and capitalizing on the opportunities, it is possible to generate and use evidence to address the emerging and re-emerging public health problems in Ethiopia. This initiative aims to enhance the physical and mental well-being of Ethiopians, leading to a healthier population and contributing to economic growth.

In this regard, higher education and training institutions such as universities play a key and vital role. By conducting research, training researchers, and disseminating research findings, academic institutions are helping to improve the health and well-being of the Ethiopian population. Academic institutions conduct a wide range of research on public health problems, such as the epidemiology of public health problems, the effectiveness of public health interventions, and the development of new public health policies and programs.

Another role of higher academic institutions is training and capacity building, as they are responsible for the training of researchers and other professionals in public health. This training is crucial as it leads to evidence generation and utilization, processes. Furthermore, these institutions play a pivotal role in disseminating synthesized evidence through publications and public health advocacy targeted towards policymakers, practitioners, and the general public. This aspect helps ensure that the evidence is utilized to inform decision-making and improve public health outcomes.

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