

# SECURE HEALTH NEWS

Working with government officials & staff to optimise individual & institutional capacity for increased research use

## SECURE Health Conducts Evidence-Informed Policymaking Training for Technocrats in the Ministries of Health and Parliaments in Kenya and Malawi

The SECURE Health Programme conducted training on evidence-informed policymaking (EIPM) for technical staff from the Ministry of Health (MoH) and Parliament in Kenya and Malawi in March-April 2015. The training sought to address inadequate individual skills in accessing, appraising, synthesising and applying data and research evidence in policy formulation, planning and programming. The inadequate skills at individual level were identified by a comprehensive study conducted in both countries on the status of evidence use in health policy decision-making in the Ministry of Health and Parliament.

The training targeted the MoH and Parliament staff who provide advise to senior policymakers and political leaders and those responsible for drafting of technical and legal policy frameworks, preparation of memos for deliberation by Cabinet, and preparation of evidence briefs for informing the deliberations of sectoral parliamentary committees and MPs. In Kenya, 34 staff were trained, whereas in Malawi 37 staff were trained.

Based on the results of the pre and post-test training surveys conducted, the training participants acquired knowledge, skills and tips in:

- Defining a clear policy question or issue
- Searching for evidence for answering the policy question/ issue – where and how to search effectively
- Assessing the quality of research evidence before deciding to use it in decision-making
- Reviewing and synthesising multiple evidences into summaries for informing policy decisions – participants initiated the development of policy briefs for tackling urgent policy issues that the MoH or Parliament are grappling with
- Creating opportunities and/or taking advantage of opportunities to enable application of evidence in decision-making

Training participants greatly appreciated the training approach, structure and the concepts covered. Mr. Edward Kawiri Zombe, Principal Youth Officer, Ministry of Youth Malawi, pointed out



A session of the evidence-informed policymaking training workshop for the first cohort in Malawi on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2015.

that, “these trainings are difficult to come by, we have learnt a lot and I will be sharing the newly gained knowledge with my colleagues.” It is hoped that the improved knowledge, skills and attitudes of the participants will translate to behavior change in their workplaces so that more policymakers demand and use evidence in decision-making.

In their remarks, senior policymakers in both countries applauded the SECURE Health programme for conducting the EIPM training, terming it as timely and likely to change the way the MoH and Parliament work for more effectiveness. “Our staff expressed their appreciation for the intense training they were taken through, the skills acquired will greatly enhance their delivery of research services to members of parliament,” said the Deputy Director, Information and Research Services in the Kenyan Parliament, Bonnie Mathooko. In Malawi, the MoH Chief of Health Services, Dr Charles Mwansambo pointed out, “Training programmes that apply adult learning techniques and has a follow-up mentoring scheme would ensure that the learning does not start and end at the workshop, but is extended to the work place as well.”

A unique aspect of the SECURE Health EIPM training programme is that the workshops are followed by a one-year on-the-job technical assistance to participants to support their application of the knowledge and skills learned into their day-to-day work. Trainees are individually developing of policy briefs that will later on be presented to top-level policymakers to inform policy decisions.

## Science-Policy Cafés in Kenya and Malawi focus Health Policy Issues on Evidence, provide Accountability Platforms



Dr Kepha Ombacho (Director, Public Health - Ministry of Health, Kenya) speaks during a science-policy café on cholera held in Nairobi on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2015.

Every six months, the SECURE Health programme hosts science-policy cafés in Kenya and Malawi to deliberate on urgent health policy issue that health sector policymakers and other actors are grappling with. The cafés provide a platform for critical deliberation of existing evidence on the policy issue and the potential policy options for tackling the issue. The cafés convene technical staff and senior officials from the Ministry of Health, researchers, programme implementers and civil society, and funding agencies, among other key stakeholders.

So far, three cafés have been organised in each country. In Malawi, the first café focused on the “Pros and cons of free health services versus paying services in public hospitals” in July 2014, the second was on “Usage of contraceptives among young people: issues of access, abortions, maternal and child mortality” in February 2015, and the latest was on “Capacity of the Malawi Health System to prepare and respond to outbreaks: the case of Ebola and other related diseases” in July 2015. In Kenya, two cafés have been held on the “Implementation of the free maternity services policy” in February 2015, and “Tackling the frequent cholera outbreaks” in June 2015.

In both countries, the science-policy café forums are continuing to inform decision-making deliberations. In Kenya, a senior Ministry of Health official requested for a summary of the key issues and recommendations from the café on free maternity services to inform on-going government efforts to improve the implementation of the policy.

### Upcoming Events

- Follow-up EIPM training workshops in Kenya and Malawi
- Launch of the Evidence-Informed Policymaking Guidelines in Kenya and Malawi
- Hosting the next science-policy cafés in Kenya on ‘Implementing community health strategy’, and in Malawi (topic to be agreed upon soon)

***“It is pleasing to have officials from both Parliament and Ministry doing this training together. This will free staff from excessive bureaucracy when accessing information from both institutions. There will be a culture of open information sharing among Parliamentary researchers and specialists from Ministry of Health thereby cutting bureaucracy and improve efficiency in assisting members of Parliament make evidence based decisions.”***

Assistant Clerk of Parliament - Malawi, Mr. J.J. Manzi

## Helping Malawi MPs focus on Evidence in the 2015/2016 Budget Deliberations

On 1<sup>st</sup> June 2015, the SECURE Health programme in Malawi partnered with the Parliamentary Committee on Health, Option Health and the Clinton Health Access Initiative (CHAI) to host a sensitisation workshop for committee members on evidence with a focus on the 2015/2016 budgetary process. The workshop emphasised the important role of evidence in decision-making in parliamentary processes in general and in the budgetary process in particular. The workshop further presented and deliberated an analysis of Malawi’s 2015/2016 budget. The budget analysis provided the Parliamentary Committee on Health with evidence to support their advocacy and decision making on the allocation of resources to specific policies and programs in the health sector. The purpose was to focus and inform MPs deliberations of the 2015/2016 budget in Parliament.

## SECURE Health draws Attention to Research Non-Use at a Health Scientific Conference in Kenya



Dr Rose Oronje (Communications and Policy Engagement Manager, AFIDEP) speaks during a panel session at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Scientific Conference of the University of Nairobi and Kenyatta National Hospital on 11<sup>th</sup> June 2015.

As part of stimulating increased research use in decision-making, the SECURE Health programme partnered with the Ministry of Health in Kenya to organise a session on Research-to-Policy at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Scientific Conference of the University of Nairobi and Kenyatta National Hospital held 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> June 2015 in Nairobi. The session drew attention to the need for the health research deliberated at the conference to inform decision-making within the health ministry. The session deliberated the well-documented barriers to research use in Kenya’s health sector and the potential solutions to tackling these barriers. Some of the barriers deliberated were: poor packaging and dissemination of research evidence, lack of a health research repository in Kenya, lack of meaningful relationships between policymakers and researchers, lack of skills among policymakers on accessing, appraising and applying research evidence, and lack of institutional support systems for enabling increased research use in decision-making. The session attracted the participation of policymakers from the Ministry of Health, researchers and healthcare practitioners in Kenya.