

ANSER WORKSHOP REPORT

November 29th 2017, 9am -12.30 pm

KANTL, Koningstraat 18, 9000 Gent

Introduction

This workshop focused on providing an opportunity for ANSER network members to learn about and reflect on effective strategies for ensuring translation of research outcomes to evidence based SRHR policies. The first part of the workshop provided an overview of the most burning issues and current challenges for SRHR research and policy in Europe and globally, with presentations of concrete case studies and examples. This was followed by an interactive group discussion to explore gaps, lessons learnt and ways forward. There was a special focus given to the role of ANSER as a global resource for linking SRHR research with policy.

Objectives of the workshop

- To present strategies for linking research outcomes to policy development in the field of Sexual and reproductive health
- To provide a forum for knowledge sharing of best practices among SRHR experts, researchers and programme implementers
- To develop concrete action plans for the ANSER network to promote translation of research into SRHR policies

Workshop format and methodology

The workshop was designed to be interactive and incorporated an experiential learning cycle developed by Kolb (1984) to ensure that discussions were reflective and based on key learning points from the experiences of the researchers present. The experiential learning cycle has been used successfully in a myriad of adult learning processes gives the base for bringing together the three dimensions of social learning and change (individual, organizational and societal/institutional) in a full spiral of action and reflection. Learning according to this theory involves a four-stage cyclical process. These four stages involve:

- Discussion of concrete experiences
- Opportunities for reflexive observations
- Abstract conceptualisation
- Concrete application

The workshop began with a keynote presentation by Gunta Lazdane, (former Programme Manager, Sexual and Reproductive Health, WHO Regional Office for Europe) who discussed her experiences of developing regional policies on SRHR. There were also presentations of case studies from three SRHR experts involved in International SRHR implementation research in Ghana, Belgium and Kenya. They were Wilson De los Reyes (Senior Legal Advisor & Main Representative to the UN in Geneva) from

RFSU a NGO in Stockholm, Sweden, Ines Keygnaert, Ghent University, Belgium, Research Professor ICRH ad Marleen Temmerman, former senator, currently professor at Aga Khan University, Nairobi, Kenya and Ghent University, Belgium. This was followed by facilitated group discussions, with key discussions guided by the following questions:

1. What happened? What succeeded or failed?

- What significant things happened? Describe the events. Who was involved, what did they do?
- How did stakeholders help/hinder this? What stakeholders? In what way?

2. Why did it happen? Why was it successful or not?

- Why did it happen, what caused it? What helped, what hindered? What was expected? What assumptions were made? Are there other experiences or thinking that could help to view these experiences differently?

3. “So what”? What are the implications for the process?

- What could have been done differently? What was learnt (new insights)? What new questions have emerged?

4. Now what? What action will we now take to make improvements?

- What does this mean for practice? What is the goal, how should things change? What can be done differently? What is important to do in order not to repeat the same mistakes? What steps can be used to build these new insights into practice?

5. What can be the role of the ANSER in facilitating action (translating research into policy)?

Presentation of key learning points were provided and presented by each group. Conclusions and action steps for the ANSER network were developed and agreed on, to promote the translation of SRHR research outcomes into policy, and the key role of ANSER in bridging this gap

Summary of presentations and key points

Action plan for sexual and reproductive health – towards achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Europe – leaving no one behind by Gunta Lazdane

Gunta Lazdane, former Programme Manager, Sexual and Reproductive Health, WHO Regional Office for Europe began by providing an overview of her experiences working on and developing Health 2020. A European policy framework for promoting health and well-being across the continent; as well as the Strategy on Women's health and well-being in the WHO European Region and the Action plan for sexual and reproductive health. She discussed the efforts required in lobbying member states and policy makers to see the policy framework as a priority and work on translating them into local policies. Gunta mentioned that Health 2020 was one of the first policies to include 'rights-based language into the framework, and key lessons can be learned from the steps taken in developing the policy, engaging stakeholders and creating an enabling environment to translate the policy into practice/

Key learning points

- First identify priority issues and link them with SRHR; for example in Europe, Tobacco or alcohol consumption is a key issue for many member states and can be linked to SRHR research
- Identify knowledge gaps for these key issues and situate the research to answer relevant questions that will be easily utilized by policy makers. Key things to consider in the research process include relevance of research questions, credibility of research team, translation into recommendations and potential public health impact of findings. It is also important not to duplicate existing research.
- Frame research within global priorities like the Sustainable Development Goals, as this is a priority for most policy makers. For example, development of key indicators for SDG goals related to sexual and reproductive health
- Understand the political climate regarding SRHR and frame research to strategically address these issues, for example, there is yet to be a recognized definition of sexual rights globally. This is a key gap that can be addressed by SRHR researchers by engaging in multidisciplinary research including lawyers and SRHR advocates, and exploring the discourses around these issues
- There are opportunities to focus research on accountability mechanisms, as development of policies does not necessarily always translate into implementation. There is also an opportunity to focus research on the development of evidence based guidelines on SRHR. An example of this is the CIRE (Continuous Identification of research evidence) group that is responsible for updating the Medical eligibility criteria for contraceptive use

Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), a tale between Northern Ghana, Maastricht and Geneva by Wilson De los Reyes Aragón

Wilson De los Reyes Aragón, Senior Legal Advisor at RFSU presented a case study from his experience of implementing a project focused on improving access to comprehensive sexuality education in Ghana. The project was done in collaboration with different actors including World Bank, Maastricht University and local organizations in Ghana and was multidisciplinary. The project was focused on broadening support for CSE in Ghana. He identified some of the enabling factors for the project which included regional co-sponsorship, an existing policy framework that supported CSE. However, the inherent geopolitics regarding the translation of international policies on CSE proved to be an obstacle, as well as lack of interest and capacity to implement CSE policies was a challenge. Developing the right strategic approach to address this issue was of paramount importance to the success of the programme. Some of the key outcomes of the programme were integration of CSE into the school curriculum, replication of the programme strategy and the facilitation of relationships with policy makers that could serve as an entry point to continue dialogue on CSE in the country

Key learning points

- SRHR researchers and programme implementers should take advantages of opportunities to broaden support for SRHR, by engaging with stakeholders including policy makers strategically. This could be through informal meetings, where there is freedom to address myths and misconceptions about SRHR and what it involves. This is important as during formal meetings,

policy makers might take a defensive stance which might hinder the opportunity to openly discuss myths and misconceptions

- Understand the regional context and adapt key programmes and projects to acceptable language, that deliver the same quality but discourages backlash or conflicts with religious and traditional mores
- Work with multidisciplinary teams, to address gaps in lack of capacity among project implementers and researchers. Especially when addressing issues related to SRHR policy.

Linking Research to policy: The case of the sexual assault care centres in Belgium by Ines Keygnaert

Ines Keygnaert, a Senior Researcher at the International Centre for Reproductive Health presented a case of developing a framework for providing care for survivors of violence in Belgium. She discussed the multi stage approach used to engage with policy makers and establish the sexual assault referral centres in Belgium. The process started with visits to already established SARCs in other countries (London and Utrecht) to identify best practices. Literature studies were done on existing models for providing care to SV survivors and the key issues around accessibility, input of these reviews were used to develop key study questions for a feasibility study. Interviews were conducted with survivors of violence, Police officers and health service providers across 17 hospitals and AIDS referral centres in Belgium. A framework for service provision was developed that was refined and validated in consultation with stakeholders (ministers, directors of hospitals, police, justice departments, etc.). Funding was provided by the Belgian government to establish the centres and run a feasibility study. Three centres have now been established and are being piloted in different parts of the country.

Key learning points

- Engage with all stakeholders that are involved with the SRHR issue and engage them in discussions and agenda setting. Ensure they are involved from the beginning of the research process to the end. This also involves engaging with media and publicly disseminating the research findings.
- Identify enablers for ensuring translation of research outcomes to practice or policy, and engage with them to promote the research agenda
- Researchers should ensure that they have enough subject matter knowledge of the SRHR issue and are able to provide evidence based recommendations to policy makers, confidently
- SRHR researchers should create strong communication channels between themselves, policy makers and other relevant actors, to ensure that they are accessible and can be easily reached. This approach fosters dialogue and is strategic for promoting translation of research findings and outcomes into policies

The Gender-Based Violence & Recovery Centre Coast Province General Hospital by Marleen Temmerman

Marleen Temmerman, former senator, currently professor at Aga Khan University, Nairobi, Kenya and Ghent University, Belgium presented a case study outlining her experience of establishing a Gender based violence recovery centre in Kenya with other stakeholders. She discussed the fact that though there were existing guidelines and policies to address sexual violence, there were initial challenges to providing comprehensive 24 hours care to survivors of violence in Kenya. Existing centres prior to the

opening of the GBVRC at CPGH closed during the weekends and survivors experienced difficulties in accessing care. To address this gap, the International centre for Reproductive health in Kenya developed a comprehensive framework for addressing GBV that incorporated community, justice and medical interventions. Funding was found to start up a demonstration intervention project at the casualty department at Coast Province General Hospital in Mombasa. The goal was to provide evidence to encourage national authorities to replicate the model in other parts of the country. The centre was opened in 2007. A collaboration was set up with the Kenyan Ministry of Health and a steering committee was set up with local Kenyan NGOs working on GBV and the Kenyan police. Some of the outcomes of the project since its opening in 2007 include providing services to over 7300 survivors, enhanced hospital and communitywide awareness via regular training and Increased Hospital engagement; with the Casualty Department taking the lead role in providing urgent care to GBV survivors. There is also an active plan to encourage the Ministry of health to take over the running of the centre. In 2016, the centre got the UNESCO award.

Key lessons learned

- Sustained multi-stakeholder engagement was necessary over a long period of time for the development of trust, this enhanced the implementation of the project.
- ICRH Kenya situated itself as an expert in the field. Hence, was able to garner political support for the project, and was involved in meetings at the Ministry of health level. This is important for SRHR researchers, as they need to be recognised by policy makers in their field, so that they can be engaged with in setting the agenda for policy makers and developing policy.
- Agenda setting should be a role researchers should take on. Researchers have the opportunity to steer policy to address key SRHR issues encountered in their work. Even though these issues might not be seen as priorities by policy makers, engaging with stakeholders strategically and also with the media provides an opportunity to set the agenda and make the issue a priority

Recommendations from the interactive sessions

- Media engagement is very important for publicly disseminating research findings. Specifically, strategic engagement with the media, policy makers and advocates provides an opportunity to lobby for translation of key research findings on SRHR issues into policy and practice. Opportunities for using social media to publicly disseminate research findings exist, like twitter. Other forms of media that should be engaged with include newspapers and radio stations.
- Fostering trust and developing equal partnerships: It is important to build trust with different stakeholders over time and not only at the point when there is a need to translate research findings. Building of trust takes effort, multiple engagements and also time investment. Developing ways for researchers to situate themselves in policy dialogue as experts that can provide technical input to policy formulation is important. It is also important to develop respectful and equal partnerships between policy makers and researchers. As they often speak different languages, it is vital that researchers take advantage of informal meetings to provide opportunities for dialogue that is interactive and can be used for agenda and priority setting in the field of SRHR,
- It is important to avoid polarization of debates while engaging with policy makers, use evidence from prior research of best practices globally and adopt the appropriate language for the context

and setting. Also use spokespersons that are respected and credible to lobby the policy makers.

- It is important to strategically align research to political priorities, interests and gaps. In planning advocacy activities, develop materials that provide opportunities to align research to stakeholder interests and priorities.
- Multidisciplinary teams are important, researchers should identify ways to work with different experts on the SRHR issue they are dealing with. for example for sexual violence this will involve working with lawyers, human rights activists, police officers, health service providers and policy makers. This multi-stakeholder engagement process allows for a more holistic approach to translating research findings into policy and practice.

The role of the ANSER network in translating research into policy/practice

- ANSER can engage with the media more, by working with media houses, journalists and publicizing the work it does, and the work of its members through social media and other media outlets, it can set the agenda for priority SRHR topics.
- ANSER can pool publications of its network members on specific pertinent SRHR issues, providing an opportunity to draw attention to the network and also to its members. This can be a strategic tool for public dissemination of ANSER's technical outputs and activities. It can also be used to gather evidence from research that can be used for lobbying policy makers.
- ANSER could develop a training resource focused on teaching researchers how to engage with policy makers and communicate with them.
- ANSER can serve as a resource for knowledge synthesis by promoting joint publications within its members that combines research findings across different sites, institutions and countries on the same issue.

Conclusion: Key messages

Translating sexual and reproductive health research findings into policy and practice is possible but needs to be done with effective stakeholder engagement.

- Trust building is important in translating research into policy/practice. However, building trust takes time and resource investment.
- Informal meetings provide an important opportunity for researchers to network with other stakeholders like policy makers and these should be taken advantage of, for building trust and fostering partnerships between researchers and with policy makers.
- ANSER should focus on engaging the media and policy makers in all its activities, as well as other stakeholders, for example involving human rights' activists in more ANSER network meetings
- There are opportunities for ANSER to develop an accountability framework for policy makers, for example, by providing a checklist for key issues policy makers have to take into account when developing SRHR policy. However, it is also important to avoid duplicating research and synthesize evidence that already exists.
- ANSER needs to increase awareness about its activities and programmes. Ways to do this can involve publicizing its activities on its website and member institutions to do the same.