



REGIONAL CONSULTATION OF THINK TANKS ON IMPLEMENTATION OF SDGs FOR BETTER HEALTH OUTCOMES IN EASTERN AND SOUTHERN AFRICA

IMPERIAL ROYALE HOTEL KAMPALA 13th to 14th OCTOBER 2016

Prepared by the ACHEST Secretariat



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SUMMARY: CONSULTATION COMMUNIQUE

Communique from the 1st Africa Region Health Think Tank Consultation on implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) (Kampala 14th October 2016)

The first consultation meeting of Health Think Tanks on the implementation of SDGs brought together over 30 health policy research experts from health policy institutions, academia and policy makers from seven countries and belonging to about 20 institutions, including Universities and Government departments

Participants observed and appreciated that a lot of work is being conducted in support of SDG implementation by health Think Tanks (*health policy research institutions*) in the Africa region. This health policy work to support SDG implementation has not only involved the health Think Tanks present at this consultation meeting but in addition, involves many other health Think Tanks in the region with which there is need to link up and establish networking for synergy and effectiveness. Policy makers also appreciated and welcomed the contribution of health Think Tanks to SDG implementation in the region. The timing of this consultation was therefore perceived as being right.

The consultation identified the need for strengthening cross sectoral work to accelerate SDG achievement in the African region, as the over-riding strategic priority. The way forward was therefore articulated against this background for action at three levels.

- At the National level, cross sectoral work is the priority for achieving the SDGs. This approach provides health think tanks with many entry points for contributing to SDG implementation. In each country, the health Think Tanks should get together with their governments and assign themselves niches for work to take forward in synergy.
- At the Regional level the health Think Tanks would like to continue to work together and bring others for collaboration through a regional network. This will initiate the establishment of an Africa Regional Network of Health Think Tanks supporting implementation of SDG in the region. This Network of African Health Think Tanks will therefore have a common interest of taking “*health outcomes as a centre-stage objective*”, for supporting SDG implementation.
- At the Global level, the African Region Health Think Tanks and their network, will aim to link with other institutions from the world, engaged on similar streams of work for learning from each other, building capacity through mutual support, and collaboration.

Consensus was gained on the key next steps to follow from the consultation as set out below:

1. The draft Report of the Consultation meeting shall be prepared by the host institution, the African Centre for Global Health and Social Transformation (ACHEST) and, shared with participants in four weeks’ time after close of the meeting;
2. A mailing list of participants will be created by ACHEST;
3. The meeting designated a technical working group (TWG) to take this work forward, constituted by one member from each of the seven participating countries, the IDRC and the East Central and Southern Health Community (ECSA-HC) for ACHEST to coordinate; and,
4. ACHEST will convene the TWG to review progress with next steps, the draft report and the identified arrangements to take forward the work at the three levels as set out above with special focus upon championing the national initiation of country level “*health think tank network initiatives*” to support implementation of SDGs for better health in Africa, in a sustainable environment.

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Introduction and Background

The first consultation meeting of African Health Think Tanks on the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was convened on the 13th and 14th of October 2016 in Kampala, Uganda by the African Centre for Global Health and Social Transformation (ACHEST) with support from the Canadian International Development Research Centre (IDRC). It was attended by over 30 health policy research experts from health policy institutions, academia together with some policy makers from seven countries and belonging to about 20 institutions, including Universities and Government Departments. The overall goal of the consultation was to contribute to building momentum for accelerating the implementation of health SDGs in Africa as a part of a series of ongoing regional dialogues. Participants were identified through a consultative process with stakeholders from policy-research and academic institutions as well as from a wider range of stakeholder institutions. The specific objectives of the regional consultation were:

- a) To share perceptions for understanding the current context of national health systems and policy processes, and how SDG implementation is playing out at the national level in the Eastern and Southern African countries represented at the consultation;
- b) To share experiences on the roles played and the spaces occupied this far, by policy- research institutions in the country where participants are to work on health-related policy issues
- c) To explore ways in which policy-research institutions wish to position themselves for future ongoing health-related SDG implementation efforts;
- d) To explore ways in which the SDG-implementation efforts of policy-research institutions can be facilitated moving forward towards 2030

The opening events of this consultation provided an overall background to the consultation as well as reflections on SDG implementation by high-level policy makers from Government and from Health Sector leadership in Uganda. The consultation was a follow up by ACHEST and IDRC on actions agreed at a global meeting of health policy experts and health policy research institutions late 2015 in Geneva to give leadership to a Health Think Tank Initiative (HTTI) in support of SDG implementation. The relevance of think tanks was highlighted for generating and using evidence especially in the health sector where evidence is key. IDRC and ACHEST emphasized the need for health system strengthening with attention upon delivering maternal and child health, improving governance and specifically focusing upon implementation actions rather than the theories. In this respect, it was stressed that think tanks are knowledge brokers essential for knowledge translation for SDG implementation. The meeting therefore also provided an opportunity to help identify partners to further help strengthening of health systems.

Health Think Tanks and SDG implementation in various contexts and spaces

In the official opening statement delivered to the consultation by his ambassador, the President Emeritus of the UN General Assembly 2015 and Minister of Foreign Affairs in Uganda, commended the aims of the consultation. It stated that the task will be for countries to ensure that the SDGs are implemented in an effective, timely manner for socio-economic transformation and improvement of people's livelihoods. The statement proposed that countries consider the need to focus on four important actions or measures including:

- Integrating the SDGs into the national and regional development plans. In this regard, Uganda has already incorporated over 76% of the SDGs into the second National Development Plan for the period 2015-2020, as part of Uganda Vision 2040. This was achieved through early multi-stakeholder engagement and sensitization when the SDGs were being formulated
- Mobilizing the necessary resources, both domestic and external, for implementation of the SDGs. In Uganda, key sectors such as infrastructure, education, health, tourism, trade and industry as well as agriculture have been allocated increased resources in the budget for financial year 2016/17. The challenge is to ensure that resources are optimally utilized to achieve better service delivery and health outcomes. In this regard, the regional consultation provides a valuable opportunity for sharing of views and practical experiences on priority actions that can be taken
- Changing of mind-set to view SDGs as a holistic agenda, with inter-linkages across the various goals and between domestic and international action
- Ensuring multi-stakeholder engagement and participation in implementation of the SDGs on the ground as well as in the follow-up and review mechanisms, which will foster greater ownership.

The statement by the Minister of Health in Uganda, expressed the hope that the consultation would be a catalyst and trigger for government and the public to engage in an open debate by all stake holders such as parliament, professional associations, academia, civil society, development partners and the media, and would lead to a national consensus on the most practical approaches for responding to the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Uganda and the region. While committing the Government and Ministry of Health readiness to act upon the consultation resolutions the statement further reorganized that nationally and regionally based think tanks can strengthen country ownership of the SDGs agenda. By generating locally relevant data, think tanks have potential to support their respective governments and populations to contextualize information and generate local solutions that are workable and are owned and driven by the people themselves. Think Tanks and academic institutions can also serve to support mutual accountability by governments, civil society and the international community through the generation and analysis of information and its strategic dissemination. This would in turn improve performance of health systems.

It was in addition pointed out that, 193 countries signed up to take responsibility to achieve the SDGs. What needs consideration now, is how best to implement and achieve the progress towards achieving the SDGs. Institutions such as think tanks and academia have the capacity for opinions and objectivity to support progress towards the SDGs by mitigating the challenges that arise from the three Ps (power, policy and plans) which usually constrain implementation. The policies must integrate the SDGs, and the processes must be for transformative purposes. Think tanks are needed as organizations that can provide evidence and find collective ways to work together. In practice, however, think tanks and academia have been untouched

resources for opportunities in catalyzing the implementation of the SDGs. This initiative is now tapping into that resource.

A very broad and rich set of experiences from various contexts was shared through plenary presentations and group discussions.¹ These presentations and the discussions that ensued all unanimously emphasized the importance of cross sector work as being critical for success in implementing SDGs and noted that:

- Health is a universal agenda for all sectors and needs an “all-government” approach though Health in All Policies (HiAP) effort. This however, was recognised as being very difficult to achieve because of the different government sector priorities
- Multi-sectoral collaborations are key in the implementation for achieving SDGs.
 - The health sector is for the community; therefore, community engagement is the most important element to engage in SDG implementation and yet the community is often left at the peripheral.
 - Other players need to be reorganised such as the private sector and these are willing to come on board to work with the health sector to achieve the SDGs.
 - MOH, Uganda has monitoring and coordination mechanisms for the SDGs implementation. These include monthly meetings of the senior management committee, the SDG technical working groups (14 TWGs), the national partnership forum, and the inter-ministerial committee.
 - The Uganda health sector is also working more and more with the private sector. The development of a private-public strategy for the health sector is currently underway. It is however quite challenging to work with the private sector because of their diverse nature which makes it difficult to map them correctly.
 - Areas of geographical disparities especially those that are under served are being prioritized to improve the equality of the SDGs implementation in Uganda.
 - Think tanks should consider development of incentives for collaboration that are not donor funded. National governments can be lobbied to fund collaborative efforts and programs of the think tanks
 - It is critically important that think tanks and universities transform the successful research into development of the communities on ground
 - It is a priority that think tanks identify those bottles necks that hinder the implementation of the SDGs in their different countries.

At the regional level, the think tank consultation meeting was perceived to be an illustration of the value of regional cooperation, the value of bringing a multitude of voices and opinions together to debate and discuss how, and what, to prioritize for policy, for budgetary allocation, for action to achieve a more equitable, a safer, a more economically diverse and robust future for all. The consultation also received regional networking experience of policy research institutions across selected African countries supported by IDRC and which aims to use innovative research in MNCH to inform and hopefully transform policy to reverse unacceptably high rates of maternal and infant mortality. This work led by APHRC brings together partners at the Eastern, Central and Southern Africa Health Community (ECSA), and the Uganda-based Africa office of Partners for Population and Development as well as in West Africa through the West African Health Organization at ECOWAS, fostering a change in the way that technical experts and technocrats are talking to one another. The effort embeds policymakers and evidence generators from selected thirteen countries, into a

¹ All presentations at the consultation that were received in digital format are accessible on a common web portal at the ACHEST Website www.achest.org as well as picture gallery.

network of regional champions for a new approach to impart skills in how to engage, how to communicate and how to develop the confidence in their ability to use evidence as a tool of persuasion, to support reform and transformation of both individual policies and the policy environment as a whole, so as to be responsive, dynamic and reflective of the evolving context in which health services are delivered. A second model of a regional network experience received and noted in this consultation is the East Central and Southern Africa Health Community (ECSA-HC) which is a *regional inter-governmental health organization* that fosters and promotes regional cooperation in health among member states including Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Swaziland, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe

The consultation also received and took note of the Think Tank initiative (TTI), (2009-2019). This is a multi-donor programme of 43 grantees in 20 countries. It provides institutional support to think tanks in developing countries. Rationale of the TTI include; Important role of national think tanks, opportunities for developing country think tanks, challenges facing think tanks in developing countries such as funding levels, capacity development, organizational system weaknesses. The project achievements include organizational stability, deepened and widened research programs, reduced funding constraint to critical staffing, operating in better-facilitated work environment, promoted peer learning and exchange, attracting higher visibility – media, policy arena, higher profile & quality engagement, research-to-policy linkage. Participants had in addition already been informed that the Global Health Program at the Graduate Institute in Geneva hosted on the 12th – 13th November 2015, for the first time ever, leaders from Health Policy Think Tanks (HP-TT) and academic institutions from around the world to discuss how the transformational approach to global development and the SDGs agenda can be put into practice for global health and greater health equity. This consultation resulted in the establishment of a leadership group that includes ACHEST is now working with the IDRC of Canada to popularize the role of HP-TTs in accelerating the achievement of SDGs with special emphasis on LMICs. It was noted on several occasions that HP-TTs are important actors because they do not all work solely on health issues. Some are certainly specialising on health directly, but others use different disciplinary lenses to address health-related problems (e.g. economic, social, etc.). This combination of perspectives, disciplines and methodologies can help HP-TTs when working collaboratively to address complex, intersectoral problems.

Niche Positioning of Health Think Tanks in the future implementation for SDGs.

Creating an environment for future roles and capabilities to support SDG implementation

The consultation received and took note of expert opinion on the transition and trend analysis of social organization, culture and the economy over many hundreds of generations characterized by progressively shrinking time-frames for social transformation. The recent modern planetary era (2000-2100) is expected to be characterized by globalized capitalism, explosion of population, new trends of culture, a lot of travel around the world, technology revolution, production and economic complexity among others. In the next few years, 2015-2030, there are aspirational sustainable development goals with an increasing advocacy for inclusive growth involving behaviors of individuals in the way they consume materials and energy, all based

upon human rights, equity and an information technology based economy. Industrialization may not be a key driver of development, and the critical feature is an increasing emphasis on investing in people; a possible move away from investing in infrastructure to investing in people and the need to build Resilient Responsive Health Systems. A cross sector approach will be required to respond to sustainable development needs that focus upon affordable and clean energy, decent work, with strong systems for peace and justice and giving attention to actions for mitigating climate change. These provide an indication of the things upon which policy research institutions need to focus their support in the medium long term future for agenda 2030.

To address this agenda the role of health policy think tanks is to give advice on policy issues, conduct research, advocacy, consultancy, lobby, and monitor and project future trends. Cross-sector work for this agenda will require Health Think Tanks to operate in networks for effectiveness. These networks as a whole should have strong coordination and unity of purpose, multidisciplinary, multinational, with reliable level of funding, good public relations and visibility. Institutional capacity development will be critical for the health think tanks to ensure adequate technical expertise, experience and exposure.

Experience of Institutional Capacity development from Centre for Health Systems and Policy Research (CHESPOR) was received and noted. – CHESPOR in Ghana is a part of GIMPA and offers both formal and informal capacity development. Formal capacity development includes; Graduate & post graduate programs, Short courses and Fellowships. Graduate and Postgraduate Programs are conducted through regular full-time training, part-time training, modular programs/trainings, registrar programs, blended learning approach and through online / distant learning approaches. Program aims range from skills building for Networking, Collaborations and partnerships-production and exchange of ideas, shared learning and experience sharing, field building & research opportunities, mutual support and relationship building, succession planning, building community of practice and harnessing resources among institutions.

Opportunities include

- supported training of younger generation and mentoring opportunities
- Deliberate effort to sustain and build competencies
- Build associations and networks
- Develop planned goals and agendas,
- Create community of practice (Cape Town Hub)
- Create platforms for engagements
- Free and consolidated resources (CHEPSAA)
- Field building and theory generation

Think Tanks need to work on raising the profile and visibility of implementation for accelerating achievement of SDGs. Discussions in break-out groups during the consultation recommended that in order to raise the profile of the SDGs, the following should be accomplished

- Mapping of key stakeholders; from national to community level (politicians, local governments, training institutions, CSOs, community members and any other stakeholders)
- Popularize the understanding of the SDGs and people must see the end point and the part they can play in achieving that end point.
- Putting our money where our mouths are, that is we must justify why we finance the actions for achieving SDGs
- Linkage in policy between international and national level action as well as linking national to district to local and community levels where action takes place (think globally act locally)
- When drawing strategic plans at all levels, SDGs should be integrated into the planning process so that all development programs contain the spirit and letter of SDGs.

- Capacity building for the coordination organizations (e.g. NPA, Forum of Academic and Research Institutions, CSOs, etc.) to support popularization of SDGs
- Forming networks for implementation of SDGs at country level so that there are comparisons from the local, national, regional and international levels. These networks should meet regularly to compare notes. These networks should be able to explain to all stakeholders the commonality of purpose and action among district development plans, national development plans, vision 2040, African 2050 agenda and SDGs.

The networks should raise awareness at all levels based on problem analysis and possible solutions suggested;

- Link up with popular artists to popularize SDGs among the population using local jargon
- Creating dialogue by using media to raise awareness
- Social marketing of SDGs
- Identify, profile and facilitate champions
- Develop a catchy SDG slogan to capture minds of all stakeholders
- Have M&E on SGDS and disseminate findings as feedback to popularize SDGs.
- Profiling successes so that people can see the impact of SDGs
- Strengthen the think tanks so that they can generate and disseminate evidence as catalysis for implementation of SDGs.

The core niche of think tanks should be research, data collection, contributing knowledge and evidence that can be used for advocacy for policy implementation. Special niches/contributions of think tanks that were considered were:

- To generate evidence through research and availing information for policy. Think tanks should also make sure that the evidence they generate is timely and relevant
- The think tanks should basically try to bridge the gap between research (knowledge generation) and policy formulation
- They should also bridge the gap between research and policy implementation
- The think tanks should align themselves to government programmes in order to remain relevant
- Think tanks should engage the communities in data research and also engage with the media and publications
- Some think tanks should do monitoring and evaluation of impact and provide feedback to the public

For health think tanks to remain relevant it was proposed that:

- Think tanks should empower the community thereafter the communities will hold the government accountable
- Think tanks should have good branding and visibility-this is determined by how the think tank works closely with people and their responsiveness-how ready think tanks are when they are called upon to help the government. Once the think tank has established a brand with government and the communities, it is not easy for it to disappear from the scene since people will always want to work with that said think tank
- Think tanks should take the approach of “Name and Inspire’ as the best way to gain good branding as opposed to “Name and shaming”
- Think tanks should be competent and fit for purpose.

Facilitating Policy-Research Institutions to support SDG-implementation efforts moving forward towards 2030

The financing of policy research institutions for roles in SDG implementation and priorities for skills development for their workforce

Through group work sessions discussions during consultation recognized that there is no one model of a think tank. The definition of a think tank depends on the purpose of the think tank. Focus should be on capturing the multi-disciplinary aspects of the think tanks

Specific Elements for skills development of the workforce in the think tanks include;

- a think tank should be able to move past evidence generation
- leadership and governance skills
- advocacy , health communication marketing negotiation skills-they must get out there(outreach strategies)
- they must be out of the box visionary, future orientated –capability to assess the current situation and predict the future
- writing skills, making sure tools such as the policy briefs are informative to the policy makers- personal engagements is the best way for disseminating the research findings
- knowledge generating and sharing approaches should incorporate the community participation
- skills for dealing with the media

Local and regional as well as global networks and financing approaches to explore for supporting future roles and capacity development: Financing specified processes

- Thematic, target support such as research to policy translation
- Networking of existing with the new
- Capacity building focus-define capacity gaps
- Spreading opportunities through networking
- Clarification on the purpose and roles of the think tanks networks before the funding and also the interest of the government. Therefore, the government should be interested in what is going on. There should also be a balance between inward and community outlook
- Shared space that is inclusive to all stakeholders
- Leverage on each of the organisational strengthens and resources
- Government locally could fund these think tanks probably through a local network of think tanks eventually feeding into the regional and global networks. Enhancing efficiency in existing networks
- Tap into academia with existing resources
- Define the value of the think tanks and align them with the government priorities and either local opportunities
- Pay attention to the way we package the dissemination of the evidence generated

The overall conclusion of discussions regarding future roles (niches) and facilitation of Think Tanks to support implementation for accelerated achievement of SDGs recognized that it is important and pertinent to create effective think tanks networks and that these think tank networks are needed at local, regional and

global levels. The discussion session ended with a consensus that there is room for the institutions (think tanks) that gathered for two days consultation to maintain a network for future collaboration on the work to support acceleration of achieving SDGs for countries in the Africa region. Key points noted in closing were that:

- It is very important to identify competence in the different think tanks and identify convergences and divergences
- Pioneers from academia such as Makerere University have already been working hard to generate evidence in research. Think tanks should have some multi-sectoral approaches and a different strategy on how to engage other research projects and influencing policy. There is need to bring the funders to the table
- The private sector has not been engaged here in the meeting yet they are a good partner in the SDGs implementation specifically highlighted in the SDGs goal. We need to bring them on board even those not yet directly involved
- Communities should be made partners in the things we are trying to help them achieve. We ought to recognise that communities already have think tank-like structures in the form of community leaders and there is therefore a need to work more closely with them.
- Policies need to be explicitly documented but in practice many policies remain undocumented and merely implicit thereby creating a gap between practice and explicit policies in place. .This has to be addressed in order to narrow gap between explicit policy and implementation practice.. The wider the gap the wider the conflicts and non-implementation.
- The issue of funding should be a priority especially around this early period of SDG implementation. Lack of funding and resources is a real concern for the think tanks that needs to be given spotlight
- Business people should be used to help harness the implementation of the SDG
- We should find a way of popularising what we do to get our government to fund the think tanks from the government budgets. We should coordinate donors to get donor money as a collective group
- The funders' interest could be more streamlined by the focus and objectives of the think tanks. Think tanks need to step into the gap and identify what it is they will be doing

Outcome of the Consultation and Building an Agenda for the next steps:

The consultation identified the need for strengthening cross sectoral work to accelerate SDG achievement in the African region, as the over-riding strategic priority. The way forward was therefore articulated against this background for action at three levels.

- At the National level, cross sectoral work is the priority for achieving the SDGs. This approach provides health think tanks with many entry points for contributing to SDG implementation. In each country, the health Think Tanks should get together with their governments and assign themselves niches for work to take forward in synergy.
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ACHEST will convene the TWG to review progress with next steps, the draft report and the identified arrangements to take forward the work at the three levels as set out above with special focus upon championing the national initiation of country level “*health think tank network initiatives*” to support implementation of SDGs for better health in Africa, in a sustainable environment.

Closing remarks

Closing remarks were delivered by the executive Director of the hosting institution ACHEST and by the representative of the funding agency IDRC. Gratitude was extended to all participants and organizers of the consultation to all the institutions and a special vote of thanks was extended to IDRC for financing the consultation. Appreciation was expressed to participants for contributing their knowledge and expertise in the discussions. The ideas, messages and experiences from the group were impressive, coherent and productive. The way the different regional governments have internalized the SDGs in their country agendas was noted as being impressive too. It was expressed that people from all over the world were eager to hear the outcomes of the consultation meeting and participants were encouraged to keep up the energy to continue working together. ACHEST volunteered to continue to link together the think tanks in the region and the IDRC representative further committed that IDRC is willingly to act collectively with the think tanks at both national and regional levels to achieve the SDGs agenda and that IDRC is in for the long haul to support collaborative research, which is Africa’s most powerful research approach to achieve the SDGs.

[pk/AHTTI/Dec2016](#)

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Regional Consultation of Think Tanks on Implementation of SDGs for better Health Outcomes in Eastern and Southern Africa

Imperial Royale Hotel, Kampala, 13th to 14th October 2016

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Group Photograph of Participants

