Capacity development, training and research uptake

OC - (8713) - MAXIMISING RESEARCH IMPACT TO STRENGTHEN PUBLIC HEALTHCARE

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Background: Billions of dollars are spent on research globally per year yet little is translated to public use through policy and/or commercialization. For the few research findings that make it to policy, evidence in most LMICs shows they hardly see the light of implementation. Our EDCTP-funded TWENDE consortium used implementation of tuberculosis (TB) molecular diagnostics as a model to investigate the barriers, and opportunities to unlock them in order to maximize uptake of health research innovations into policy and practice.

Methods: Mixed methods approach including surveys, audits, In-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs), policymaker dialogues to unravel the bottlenecks and how to overcome them.

Results: 1119 respondents representing from Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania participated in the study. 19% were district/county health officers, 12% healthcare audits, 58% one-on-one interviews and FGDs with healthcare practitioners, community leaders, TB patients and survivors, and caregivers, and 11% policymaker workshops. Barriers: government poverty, family/individual poverty, incompatibility of technologies to existing infrastructure, low awareness and socio-cultural beliefs in the community were found. Stigma at community and healthcare levels were rife. Consequently, TB diagnostics were under implemented and underutilized. Xpert MTB/RIF test was fully utilised in ~10% of healthcare facilities (conducted 8 tests per day) whilst Line probe assay was implemented in less than 1% of the facilities.

Conclusion: Based on our findings, we believe overcoming the barriers presents the opportunity to maximize research impact of public healthcare. This could be achieved through sustained public and practitioners’ sensitization to remove stigma and increase demand & utilization of services, early interaction of researchers and policymakers to increase sense of ownership and acceptability of research innovations, early developer – end user communication to align the tools with the needs and existing infrastructural capacity, and increasing users’ affordability on innovations through socioeconomic empowerment programmes.