ST-DHS Newsletter Q3 2020

Dear Systems Thinkers,

We hope this email finds you well and in good health.

In the last months, many things have happened within the Systems Thinking Initiative for District Health Systems. Big thanks go to the research institutions in Botswana, Pakistan and Timor-Leste for adapting to the changing situation and managing to move this forward with the districts.

In this newsletter, you will find an overview of what has been going on in each of the countries, as well as within the community of practice. In the end, you will find some reading recommendations.

If you have any questions or thoughts, please do not hesitate to contact us (Daniel.cobos@swisstph.ch, c.santfruchtman@swisstph.ch)

Enjoy the read!

ST-DHS Technical Support Center

Botswana

In the Greater Gaborone DHMT, capacity building has progressed from introduction of the initiative to a stage where the team is working on finalising the identified challenge. The process has been a bit slow due to challenges presented by the COVID-19 situation as the GGDHMT is within the hardest-hit zone. The team is composed of managers who are also responsible for frontline COVID-19 response teams, therefore attendance and frequency of meetings is affected.

Capacity building has begun in the North East DHMT. The research Institution team is currently running a three days' workshop aimed at introducing the DHMT team to the ST-DHS initiative, adaptation of tools and Identification of that health system challenges.

Pakistan

1. **Achievements**: The team in Pakistan has managed to fully on-board the DHMT of the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) to the initiative. Through the community of practice, the team has been introduced to System Thinking tools such as Process Papping, Theory of Change and Reflection, all of which are being employed in their practice. The first reflective session on the challenges within the surveillance during the COVID-19 and its peak was conducted last month with the DHMT.

2. **Challenges**: The pandemic has been the most evident challenge as the ICT DHMT has been busy with their daily activities. The shift in priorities has slowed the overall pace of the official response from MOH.

3. **Next Steps**: We intend to conduct an exercise to highlight the challenges, as identified by the DHMT, within the process map of the ICT COVID surveillance system.

A research study is also being developed with the data being gathered at the ICT District Health Office.

We are currently in correspondence with Punjab Healthcare Department (Pakistan) for taking Rajanpur DHMT team on board for ST project, as the second district in Pakistan.

Timor-Leste

The Journey of Systems Thinking for District Health Systems Strengthening initiative in Timor-Leste began in November 2019 with two objectives; 1) strengthening systems thinking perspective in the health system, and 2) addressing the gaps in the capacity of districts management teams to apply systems thinking approaches. Despite the limitations posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the initiative has been going on, even with a slight delay.

The active engagement has been maintained with the Technical Support Center and the two pilot districts (Dili and Viqueque) through virtual meetings and a technical workshop in each of these districts in which the team provided systems thinking orientation. The workshop also included an exercise to identify the health system challenges. Planning and budgeting, distribution of human resources and quality of the health information system were identified and prioritized.

Orientation and awareness-raising activities were also conducted at the national level. Recognizing that leadership is the key, the Hon'ble Minister of Health was apprised on the concept and the project implementation framework. There is a low level of awareness on the systems thinking approaches and tools among managers both at the central Ministry of Health as well as at the districts health management levels.

Next steps will entail the further investigation of the problems identified and measures to resolve them. The project will continue to mobilize a broad level of engagement and participation, including that from local Universities, as we take this project forward.

Community of Practice

The community of practice was a positive side-effect of the COVID-19 pandemic. Having had to adapt to the changing situation and travel restrictions across the world, we created an online community. What started as an internal training opportunity, quickly converted into a peer-to-peer experience sharing venue.

During the last 5 months, we have had more than 15 sessions in which members from each institution have presented their knowledge, trained us on different skills or shared a challenge that they experienced.
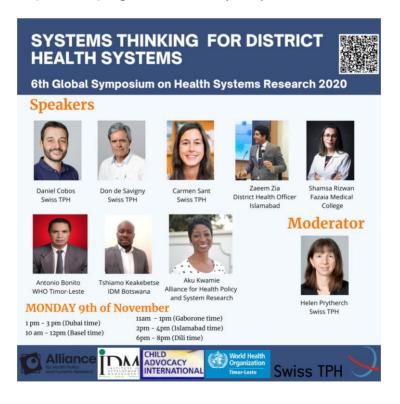
We also managed to organize a public webinar to discuss the unintended effects of COVID-19 on the health system. Did you miss it? You can still watch the recording here.

Health Systems Research 2020

We will be hosting a skills-building session the coming **Monday 9th of November** at the 6th Global Symposium for Health Systems Research. Eight representatives from the Systems Thinking for District Health Systems Initiative will be presenting approaches and tools to apply systems thinking in districts.

Finally, Aku Kwamie from the Alliance will be launching the co-design phase of the Systems Thinking Accelerator (SYSTAC) a global community of systems thinkers.

Suggested Readings

Peer-reviewed articles

Systems thinking for health emergencies: use of process mapping during outbreak response: https://gh.bmj.com/content/5/10/e003901

Understanding key drivers of performance in the provision of maternal health services in eastern cape, South Africa: a systems analysis using group model building: https://bmchealthservres.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12913-018-3726-1

Advancing the application of systems thinking in health: South African examples of a leadership of sensemaking for primary health care: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4066696/

Qualitative process evaluation from a complex systems perspective: A systematic review and framework for public health evaluators: https://journals.plos.org/plosmedicine/article?id=10.1371/journal.pmed.1003368

Blogs

Tools of a Systems Thinker: https://medium.com/disruptive-design/tools-for-systems-thinkers-the-6-fundamental-concepts-of-systems-thinking-379cdac3dc6a

Do you have any reading recommendation or do you need access to any of the papers? Please let us know!