From the Director’s desk

Welcome to the last edition for 2014 of IDRC’s newsletter for sub-Saharan Africa. We feature IDRC’s work supporting health systems research, an interdisciplinary and applied field that takes a holistic approach to health. IDRC recognizes that health systems are foundational for the health of women, children, and communities. Consistent with Canada’s focus on strengthening maternal, newborn, and child health, the research that IDRC and its donor partners support is contributing to changing policy and practice to improve women’s and children’s health.

This edition includes a wealth of resources on the science and practice of people-centred health systems, including highlights from the recent 3rd Global Symposium on Health Systems research, in Cape Town, South Africa, which I was fortunate to attend. I am proud of the contributions of so many of IDRC’s grantees to making this event such a vibrant success. Additionally, read how the recently completed Nigeria Evidence-based Health System Initiative’s (NEHSI) support to primary healthcare reforms in two Nigerian states has strengthened health information systems, improving the health of mothers and children, and building a culture of evidence-based health planning. Read also about research that has revealed important new findings for preventing HIV among those who are unable to make choices to protect themselves in southern Africa. We also feature latest news on IDRC projects, including audio slideshows about our work in the Ugandan cattle corridor.

Happy Holidays!
Simon Carter

Focus on health systems research
Third global symposium on health systems research puts people at the centre

The Ebola epidemic in West Africa has turned a powerful spotlight on health systems around the world and the importance of ensuring the rights and dignity of users of those systems and the professionals who work within them. In October, some 2,000 health-care experts from 125 countries gathered in Cape Town, South Africa to focus on cutting-edge research into people-centred health systems to address the question: How to make the patient the foremost consideration of health systems? The Symposium championed the role of citizens and local and national governments rather than external actors in leading the drive toward universal health care. A key focus was on how to promote local mechanisms that support inclusive and representative health systems.

Read the event highlight

Research findings are catalyst to nationwide rollout of HIV prevention program in Botswana

Much of the work done on HIV/AIDS to date has focused on it as a medical problem requiring a clinical fix. Evidence of the links to structural issues and how to address them are important to ensure long-term solutions to addressing the AIDS epidemic. Remarkable new research into HIV prevention among vulnerable groups less able to make the right choices to protect themselves, found that gender violence, regressive views of gender hierarchy, economic dependence, and substance or alcohol abuse all lead to choice disability when it comes to HIV/AIDS prevention.

Read more about the research conducted by CIET Trust

Using evidence to reduce maternal deaths in Nigeria

The recently concluded Nigeria Evidence-based Health System Initiative (NEHSI) has helped improve the health of mothers and children by strengthening the health information systems that underpin primary health care. Beyond its impact on maternal health, NEHSI has changed the way the health system works by laying the groundwork for scaling up an evidence-based model for decision-making in Nigeria. The research has shown that informing and involving communities can directly improve health outcomes and that working with local and state government partners ensures the tools and training leave a legacy of institutional capacity.

Read more about the project
The science and practice of people-centred health systems
Health systems are complex and face a host of challenges. At their core, health systems exist to serve people, whether they are patients, families, communities, or health workers. But the term "people-centred" is relatively new and encompasses many factors affecting health beyond biomedical solutions, including health service delivery, social justice, and human rights. A collection of 11 articles, drawing together research from Ethiopia, Uganda, Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa, India, Argentina, and Brazil, depicts a range of methodologies to investigate aspects of people-centred health systems, including the experiences of patients, health workers, and the community, perceptions around policy-making, and the social determinants of health.
Read the full text articles

Participatory action research in health systems: empowering people to lead change
A new publication launched at the 3rd Global Symposium on Health Systems Research highlights the key features of participatory action research and its history. It outlines the processes and methods used in implementing this research approach, and the reality of applying it in health systems. It was published by the Regional Network for Equity in Health in East and Southern Africa (EQUINET), in association with Training and Research Support Centre (TARSC), Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research (AHPSR), the World Health Organization (WHO), and IDRC.
Read more and download a free copy
Canada announces funding for two African health and research organizations under the maternal and child health program

The Innovating for Maternal and Child Health in Africa research program announced the selection of the two African organizations that will help put research into practice and bring the program’s results to the attention of decision-makers. They are the West African Health Organization, based in Burkina Faso and a consortium made up of the African Population and Health Research Center based in Kenya; the East, Central and Southern Africa Health Community based in Tanzania; and the Partners in Population and Development based in Uganda. Read the announcement

Unleashing women’s potential to achieve Africa’s Green Revolution

A recent session jointly organized by the African Union, UN Women, and IDRC brought together stakeholders to discuss how to reduce gender inequalities and support women smallholder farmers in Africa’s agricultural sector. The session, aptly themed "Unleashing Women’s Potential," occurred during the Africa Green Revolution Forum held in Addis Ababa between September 1-4. Read more about the symposium

IDRC partners with the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council to build safer, more prosperous societies

IDRC and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) announced $10 million in new projects to four Canadian and developing-country research teams. Together the teams will work to build safer, more sustainable, and prosperous societies in Canada and around the world. Their projects are supported through the International Partnerships for Sustainable Societies (IPaSS). Read more about the initiative
Side event to La Francophonie focuses on taxation, informal economy in developing countries
The International Foundation of Francophone Accountants organized a side event as a prelude to the 15th Summit of the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie held November 29-30, 2014 in Dakar, Senegal. The event discussed appropriate innovations to improve the tax system within informal businesses that are predominant in many Francophone developing countries. Insights from the meeting were presented at the Dakar summit. Read more about the side event.

Youth summit in Senegal on unemployment and insecurity
Unemployment is the number one concern of French-speaking youths around the world, according to young opinion leaders drawn from 23 countries. An international forum for Francophone youth was held in Dakar, Senegal in mid-October, ahead of the 15th Summit of the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie. Some 250 youth debated their own futures during the two-day event organized by Senegal’s Ministry of Youth, Employment, and Promotion of Civic Values, and the National Youth Council of Senegal, in partnership with the Initiative Prospective Agricole et Rurale. Read more about the side event.

Innovations that work for youth employment in Africa
The Institute of Policy Analysis and Research (IPAR-Rwanda), in collaboration with IDRC, hosted a high-level regional conference on “Innovations that work for youth employment: voices from the youth” on November 24-25, 2014 in Kigali, Rwanda. Research findings from an IDRC-funded regional project on youth employment were presented during the conference, as were presentations by prominent entrepreneurs and youth representatives from the region. Read more about the conference.

Calls and Awards
African Population and Health Research Centre: African Doctoral Dissertation Research Fellowship (ADDRF) Program
Deadline: January 15, 2015
Doctoral research awards and post-doctoral fellowships in health policy or health systems issues.
Contact: Dr Caroline Kabiru, Associate Research Scientist
Read more about the project

GrOW Call for proposals: Effects of patterns of growth on women’s economic empowerment
Deadline: February 23, 2015
Call for research proposals concerning the Growth and Economic Opportunities for Women (GrOW) program on the effect of specific patterns of growth on women’s economic empowerment.
Contact: grow@idrc.ca

Latest Results and Reports

- Addressing the human resources for health crisis through task-shifting and retention: results from the Africa Health Systems Initiative’s research component: Published on Human Resources for Health, edited by Esmé Lanktree, Marc Cohen, Renée Larocque and Francis Omaswa (Guest Editor)
- Uptake and impact of research for evidence-based practice: lessons from the Africa Health Systems Initiative’s research component: Published on BMC Health Services Research, edited by Esmé Lanktree, Marc Cohen and Renée Larocque
- Advancing the application of systems thinking in health: Published on Health Research Policy and Systems, edited by Taghreed Adam

Multimedia

Empowering rural communities to minimize wildlife related diseases
With support from IDRC, researchers from Makerere University studied the impact of social and environmental changes on the health of pastoralist communities around Lake Mburo National Park in Uganda. They assessed the impact of zoonotic diseases (those of animal origin) on animal and human health, and their effects on livestock value chains with a view to developing strategies to reduce risks and
Building resilience to climate variability in Uganda’s “cattle corridor”
With IDRC support, researchers from the Africa Innovations Institute set out to find ways to enhance the resilience of poor rural communities to climate variability by addressing linkages between climate variability, food security, and human health in agriculture-based livelihood systems within Uganda’s "cattle corridor."
Watch an audio slideshow about this project

Information and technology: Improving food security in Uganda
Uganda's "cattle corridor" struggles with extreme weather events, social conflict over land, and increasing water shortages. The Climate Change Adaptation and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) project, also called CHAI, chose four districts in the cattle corridor and piloted an information system that is already changing lives.
Watch an audio slideshow and learn more about the project

Removing cost barriers – lessons from West Africa
Watch a video of an IDRC funded project where researchers led by Niger’s Laboratoire d’études et de recherches sur les dynamiques sociales et le développement local (LASDEL) are working to remove health cost barriers in West Africa.

As a prelude to the International summit on the francophonie held in Dakar in November 2014, IDRC supported a forum under the theme « Femmes en Francophonie: Vecteurs de paix et actrices de développement » watch highlights from the forum (in French)