Closing the Research-to-Practice Gap with an Innovative Research Partnership Model

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Overview

- What is the “research-to-practice gap”?
- The partnership model
- Achievements
- Challenges
- Key points
What is the Research-to-Practice Gap?

- Analysts suggest that for health research the average span between ‘discovery’ and ‘change’ is 17 years.*

- Most findings require deliberate, planned, and managed efforts to help decision-makers and key stakeholders establish and sustain new practices.

- To speed up process, research should be conducted with research utilization (RU) in mind.

The Partnership Model

- Historically, attention to RU given after study results were known

- Under new model, “RU partners” join study teams from the beginning

- Goal: To maximize the use of research results and increase the likelihood for replication/scale up
The Partnership Model

• 23 studies under two USAID-funded research cooperative agreements
• Areas study teams are addressing from the beginning:
  – Local relevancy of research idea
  – Stakeholder involvement throughout study
  – Political, social and cultural environment
  – Sustainability, compatibility and scalability of a pilot project
  – High quality, evidenced-based FP materials
  – Documentation of the intervention process + costs
Methods

- **Survey of research and RU partners**
  - 18 FP-focused studies
  - 11 research partners, 6 RU partners surveyed

- **RU partner documentation of experience**
  - 23 studies, 8 RU partners
  - 2009 to present

- **Study team questionnaires**
  - Completed October 2011, 3 studies with data collection complete and dissemination meeting conducted
Achievements

- Stakeholder engagement in study
  - Early involvement
  - Wide range of stakeholders
  - Engaged throughout

“[My RU partner’s] expertise and attention to stakeholder issues has been essential to the success of the project.”

— FHI 360 Researcher
Achievements

- Protocols/Study Design
  - Expanded plans on use of results
  - Sustainability
  - Scalability
  - Cost objective

“Having an active RU partner involved at the beginning of the study is incredibly useful for keeping the study aimed at the ‘consumers’ [of study findings].”

– FHI 360 Researcher
Achievements

• Pilot projects/intervention design
  – Evidence-based materials and tools
  – Technical accuracy of new materials and tools
  – Sustainability and scale up
  – Aimed for simple and low cost interventions
  – Documentation of intervention to inform replication and scale up
Achievements

- Dissemination meetings
  - Include not just study data but intervention lessons learned
  - Stakeholder involvement in developing recommendations based on study results

FP/IZ integration study dissemination meeting in Jharkhand, India
Achievements

• Policy/program change
  – All 3 completed studies currently actively using data to change FP policy or improve FP program activities

• Scale up
  – One completed pilot project already in scale up phase, which key stakeholders recommended based on preliminary study results
Challenges

1. Need to improve how study team functions
2. Stakeholder engagement can slow down studies, raise expectations
3. Pilot projects: challenge to keep simple and low cost and be effective
4. Tight/insufficient budgets
5. Benefits of model if pilot project results are negative

“There is often confusion and reluctance to involve stakeholders in the study process. [The study team] is concerned that their input can’t be addressed, or will slow down the research process.”

– FHI 360 RU Partner
Key points for researchers/research managers/research donors

• Make sure someone on study team keeps the “end in mind”

• Provide strong management support

• Build more time/money into research budgets
Key points for program managers, practitioners, policymakers

• Get involved in research
  – To influence research agendas
  – To make studies more relevant
  – To translate results into practice

• Be realistic about research can and cannot do

• Boost the demand for research
  – Insist on evidence-based policies, programs, and materials
THANK YOU!

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