



Health Systems Global

*Improving performance
through research and policy*

Strategic Plan 2013–2015

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Foreword

Health systems are the essential base on which individual and population health goal attainment rests. Their weakness or strength has broad reaching repercussions and is of fundamental importance to improved and sustained achievements in health within and across high, middle and low income countries. Health systems research is concerned with knowledge generation related to health systems. However, as an applied science, it is also concerned with promoting the demand and use of this knowledge for decision (policy) making and implementation as an integral part of health systems development and strengthening. Despite its usefulness and the upsurge of interest in recent years, health systems research remains a relatively marginalized field. Much work remains to be done if it is to make its full contribution to global and national health development.

An observation of the First Global Symposium on Health Systems Research in Montreux, Switzerland, in November 2010 was that there was no organization or network of health systems researchers, decision (policy) makers and implementers to take forward the essential agenda of strengthening and promoting the field of health systems research. The creation in October 2012 of Health Systems Global, a membership society, has been an important step in addressing this gap. Following its launch at the Second Global Symposium on Health Systems Research in Beijing in 2012, with the election of an 11-person all volunteer Board, the Board and Secretariat of Health Systems Global have prioritized the development of a strategic plan.

On behalf of the Board and Secretariat of Health Systems Global, it is my pleasure to introduce this strategic plan that outlines the vision, mission and medium term strategic objectives for Health Systems Global. This strategic plan has grown out of wide consultations with decision makers, practitioners and researchers within and outside the membership of Health Systems Global. It represents yet another important step to take forward the agenda of strengthening and promoting the field of health systems research and its contribution to health goal attainment.

Irene Akua Agyepong
Health Systems Global Board Chair

1. Introduction

Overview of Health Systems Global

The First Global Symposium on Health Systems Research was held in Montreux, Switzerland, in November 2010. The Symposium was attended by over 1,200 participants from more than 100 countries. It produced a clear message about how and why health systems research should be strengthened to contribute to universal health coverage around the world. Recommendations from the Symposium focused on the overarching goal of strengthening and promoting the field of health systems research by defining a health systems research agenda, developing capacity for health systems research, and developing new and more robust methodologies for health systems research.

In addition, it was recognized that there was no organization or network of health systems researchers, decision makers and implementers to take forward the above agenda. As a result, consensus was reached, captured in the Montreux Statement (2010) (<http://www.healthsystemsglobal.org/AboutUs.aspx>) on the need to create an international society for health systems research, knowledge, innovation and action. This society would focus on building a larger constituency and enhancing credibility and capacity for health systems research globally and in low- and middle-income countries specifically. It would be member-driven and would constitute the first global body fully dedicated to promoting health systems research.

A working group was established to create this society under the guidance of the Executive Committee of the Second Global Symposium on Health Systems Research. Membership in the working group was drawn from Symposium Steering Committee members with the addition of several others involved in health systems research. As a result of this effort, Health Systems Global was founded in October 2012 and was launched the next month in Beijing at the Second Global Symposium on Health Systems Research, where some 1,800 people participated and an 11-person all-volunteer Board was elected. Health Systems Global now has more than 1,400 members.

Purpose of the strategic plan

The purpose of this strategic plan is to guide Health Systems Global in its initial stage of development. The plan is intended to guide the organization's decision-making in the following respects:

- Identify priorities to guide decision-making
- Provide the basis for determining resource requirements
- Provide the basis for detailed implementation planning

The plan has an approximately 2.5-year time horizon from mid-2013 to 2015.

How the strategic plan was developed

The strategic plan was developed in a highly participatory process that was structured to meet the needs of a global organization. The process was designed to gain commitment and ownership of Health Systems Global by involving members in the development of the plan. The plan was developed over an approximately five-month period from February to July 2013 using the following steps:

- At a Health Systems Global Board meeting in London in February 2013, the Board developed a draft mission statement, vision, and strategic goals and illustrative activities to serve as a starting point for the development of the plan.
- At the same Board meeting a sub-committee of the Board was created to guide the strategic planning process.

- Health Systems Global then conducted an online consultation with Board members to further discuss the mission, vision, and strategic objectives drafted in London. The virtual consultation took place over a two-week period in April 2013.
- Health Systems Global then conducted an online survey in May 2013 seeking feedback from members and non-members on the draft strategic objectives and activities. The survey questions were largely open-ended. Four hundred and fifty-three people (453) responded to the survey. The quotations in boxes throughout this document are drawn from the online survey and give a flavor of member responses.
- Six regional meetings were conducted from March to May by Board members in Washington DC, Kampala, Delhi, two in London, and one for WHO EURO, covering parts of central Asia (via Skype). These meetings were approximately two hours in duration and offered an opportunity for approximately 80 members and non-members interested in health systems research to provide feedback on the mission, vision and strategic goals.
- All inputs were analysed and findings were used to guide the drafting of the strategic plan. The plan was reviewed by the Board sub-committee and was revised. It was then submitted to the full Board for review. The full Board approved the strategic plan in September 2013.

2 Situation Analysis

Current status

Health Systems Global currently consists of an 11-person elected Board and a small Secretariat with several part-time staff: the Secretariat director, a coordinator, two consultants (one for communications and one for membership) and university staff as needed to support accounting, the website and certain administrative matters. The Secretariat, located at CHIP, a WHO Collaborating Centre at the University of Copenhagen, manages the resources and membership functions. The Secretariat has a small budget to fund basic operating costs. As presently constituted, the Secretariat does not have adequate capacity to support the implementation of the activities in this strategic plan.

Having tapped into growing interest in the field of health systems research, Health Systems Global has rapidly gained over 1,400 members and 500 followers on Twitter. The high level of participation in the development of this plan is evidence that there is a very engaged community that is supportive of Health Systems Global. With support from the Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research, the International Development Research Centre and the Rockefeller Foundation, Health Systems Global is actively planning the Third Global Symposium on Health Systems Research in Cape Town, South Africa in September 2014.

Key issues affecting Health Systems Global

Health Systems Global is a new and evolving organization, having been in existence for less than a year. As with any new organization seeking to establish itself, Health Systems Global has a range of issues that it will need to address to be successful. The below summary of these issues also frames the strategic goals and activities discussed in Section 3.

- Health Systems Global is moving into an existing institutional landscape of organizations relevant to the field of health systems research and must therefore be clear about how it relates to existing organizations in the field such as the Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research, the International Health Economics Association (iHEA) and other international and national associations with a similar or related focus. Health Systems Global must be perceived as complementary to these existing organizations rather than as a competitor. This implies a need to clearly articulate how Health Systems Global is different, as well as a need to actively engage related groups, seeking synergies wherever possible.
- Health Systems Global must demonstrate its usefulness by raising the profile of the field of health systems research and demonstrating how it can contribute to strengthening health systems and attaining global and national health goals through the exchange of ideas and experiences across regions. Health Systems Global is a global organization with relevance to all regions, not just low- and middle-income countries. One of the benefits of being a global organization is that there are a range of opportunities for cross-regional learning. To capitalize on this potential, Health Systems Global must evolve communication mechanisms that will be effective for reaching audiences in diverse settings.
- Health Systems Global must not only focus on researchers but also on policy-makers, civil society actors, and practitioners who use the results of health systems research. Health Systems Global must remain grounded in field realities and not become an organization dominated by academic researchers. This implies a need to strongly emphasize working with policy-makers and funders on identifying research priorities in the first place, on ensuring that research is part of policy design and implementation, and on knowledge translation and sharing.
- To establish credibility, Health Systems Global must not be seen as advocating for specific health system policies. It must instead focus on promoting the value of the field of health systems research

and the use of research evidence to inform policy decision-making in health systems. This organizational neutrality will allow it to avoid the politics inherent in taking positions on specific issues.

- As a dues-paying membership organization, Health Systems Global must provide services that its members value in order to attract and retain members. Listening to its members will be a pillar of Health Systems Global's operations and requires effective communication mechanisms and attentive staff.
- Health Systems Global must create robust organizational and management structures that are at the same time light, responsive and appropriate to an all-volunteer board.
- Without a firm financial foundation, Health Systems Global will not have long-term success in achieving its goals. This strategic plan is a key first step in developing a business plan to secure a sound financial future.

3. Strategic Plan

Vision

“Globally connected health systems research and policy communities contribute to the attainment of better health, equity and well-being.”

Mission

“Convene researchers, policy-makers and implementers from around the world to develop the field of health systems research and unleash their collective capacity to create, share and apply knowledge to strengthen health systems.”

Strategic goals and activities

This section includes the strategic objectives, rationales for why these objectives are important and activities to implement the strategic objectives. Illustrative quotes from the member survey are provided to amplify specific activities.

Strategic Objective 1: Build health systems research communities that encompass policy-makers, researchers, NGOs and funders

Rationale: The development of the field of health systems research has been undermined by fragmentation within the community, both among researchers who often come from different disciplinary perspectives, and between researchers and users of research. As a society that embraces all of these groups, Health Systems Global will seek to build stronger linkages across them.

Activities

- A. Explore fully the establishment of regional hubs that act as networking centres for members and stakeholders in the region to facilitate learning, information-sharing and the promotion of health systems research. This will include a process to map and identify organizations that could serve as regional hubs, define the geographic scope of the hubs, develop criteria for selection, propose a selection process and understand the management and financial implications. The Board will then make a decision regarding whether and how to proceed with the establishment of the hubs that serve as networks for stakeholders in that region.

“Hubs in different regions would connect people with interest in health systems research, share experiences, facilitate networking, and learn from one another.”
- B. Establish thematic working groups in different health systems research areas. Thematic working groups are an important part of Health Systems Global's operations. They are intended to provide a platform for membership interaction and the exchange of experiences around particular issues in health systems research. The thematic working groups are communities which are expected to encompass diverse members and potential members of Health Systems Global including members from different geographical areas (countries or regions), or different constituencies (researchers, policy-makers, implementers). Planning is already well underway for launching these groups.

“Provide online materials for researchers to reference and use. Sometimes people know what problems they are facing but perhaps don't know how to show the evidence and make this known to policy-makers. An online database with easy navigation to articles on current methods and their uses would be useful.”
- C. Develop and maintain an up-to-date website as a platform for information sharing, research and member interaction. Some suggestions for the website include interactive blogs, online discussions (such as a LinkedIn group) and links to sites that offer open access research, research repositories and webinars.

- D. Develop an open access register of Health Systems Global members including such items as contact information, member interests, and recent publications.
- E. Communicate regularly with members through webinars, occasional newsletters, emails, and social media such as tweeting of health systems research and related news.

Strategic Objective 2: Advance the field of health systems research through further development of health systems research methods, and of the skills and competencies of Health Systems Global members

Rationale: Health systems research is a relatively young field and, drawing as it does upon multiple disciplines and methods, there is a need to develop the field through improved conceptual frameworks, taxonomies, methods, measures, and criteria for evaluating the strength of evidence. Health Systems Global will also help to build skills across those active in the field through a variety of strategies to support capacity development for individuals.

Activities

- A. Conduct a biennial symposium on health systems research.
The symposium is Health System Global's flagship event. The next symposium will take place in Cape Town, in September 2014. Health Systems Global has the lead responsibility for the planning and conduct of the symposium.

"Pursue both the biennial global symposium as a platform for people to share their work and online webinars to teach methods."
- B. Promote and support the development of health systems research methods including methods for knowledge translation. Disseminate these methods through online platforms such as the Health Systems Global website, the biennial symposium, scientific journals, webinars, and other platforms.
- C. Promote and support health systems research capacity-building for the conduct, translation and utilization of research findings for researchers, policy-makers, donors and practitioners. Health Systems Global does not expect to have the organizational capacity to provide training directly during the duration of this strategic plan although that is possible in the long term. In the near term, Health Systems Global will promote and support courses developed by others through its website, biennial symposium and other communication channels. Capacity-building includes short-term training, online courses and mentorship schemes, such as for abstract writing.

"The target should be to develop local capacity and support this local developed community to plan and conduct research and its translation into action."

Strategic Objective 3: Mobilize and support relevant communities to engage in and advocate for health systems research

Rationale: The very nature of the issues that are the focus of health systems research demands a broad participation in the inception, development and dissemination of research. Health Systems Global acknowledges that there is not a linear process from research to policy, and embraces the need for pluralistic, people-centred approaches to promoting the use of evidence in programs and policies. This engagement is critical not only in enhancing the use of evidence but also in increasing public recognition of the value of investing in health systems research. As the only global membership society for health systems research, Health Systems Global is in an unparalleled position to mobilize and support such advocacy.

Activities

- A. Issue advocacy briefs and other documentation that promotes the field of health systems research and

"The Society should seek to raise the profile of health systems research and attract funding."

the importance of providing funding for it. Briefs can take a range of forms including but not limited to commentaries, fact sheets and editorials. These briefs could be about successful examples of health systems research that produced findings that guided decision-making. In general, Health Systems Global will not take positions on specific policies or best practices related to health systems, but rather focus on advancing the field of health systems research.

- B. Serve as a connector between policy-makers, alliances, practitioners, NGOs, researchers and donors through the biennial symposium, webinars, web-based platforms and regional hubs as they are established.

Strategic Objective 4: Ensure that Health Systems Global is strong and sustainable

Rationale: As a new society there is much that Health Systems Global needs to do to build its own organizational and governance structures and capacities so that it can continue its work in a sustainable fashion.

Activities

- A. Increase the membership base of Health Systems Global, ensuring that it is inclusive and representative. The membership base should be built through presence at major health conferences, social media and other forms of outreach. Health Systems Global will strengthen engagement with the current member base to maintain their interest.

“Strengthening engagement with members will lead to a stronger society.”
- B. Evolve Health Systems Global’s governance and organizational structures so they can effectively support the mission of the society. This includes the continued development of the Board and Secretariat.

“Health Systems Global should definitely focus on building its capacities as well as of its members.”
- C. Establish a stable financial foundation through a series of activities including costing this strategic plan, developing a prospective operating budget, and developing and implementing a business plan.
- D. Develop an explicit partnership strategy to engage with relevant organizations and groups that can contribute to the effectiveness and success of Health Systems Global. These include related public health societies, issue-specific organizations in such areas as health information systems and human resources for health, existing regional structures including national societies (referred to as nodal institutes in some countries), and journals.

“Strengthen our partnerships with other organizations especially academic institutions and relevant global organizations such as WHO and other UN entities.”

4. Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

The monitoring and evaluation framework consists of two parts. The first is focused on indicators of impact and outcomes of Health Systems Global that can only be assessed in the medium and long term and the second on process indicators focused on inputs and outputs that can be measured in the short and medium term.

A. Outcome indicators

Health Systems Global will measure the achievement of its mission and vision to determine the impact of the organization. To measure impact, Health Systems Global will seek funding for an evaluation. This will consist of a baseline and follow-up after several years of operation. The evaluation will include quantitative and qualitative measures using mixed methods including surveys of member views. Possible evaluation questions might include:

- To what extent do Health Systems Global’s activities demonstrate an awareness of other health system research communities?
- How effectively does Health Systems Global interact with other health systems research communities?
- What role does Health Systems Global play in the field of health systems research?
- How has Health Systems Global contributed to the evolution of the field of health systems research?
- How did this come about?

B. Input and output indicators

Strategic Objective and Activities	Indicator	Milestone
SO 1: Build health system research communities that encompass policy-makers, researchers, NGOs and funders		
A. Explore establishment of regional hubs or networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreement on whether to establish regional hubs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feasibility study conducted • Board decision on whether to proceed
B. Establish thematic working groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of thematic working groups with at least 15 members established and functioning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thematic working groups in place and functioning
C. Develop and maintain website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of website users per month 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of the website • Links to other health systems research-related sites
D. Develop and maintain an up-to-date register of members on the website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of users of member register per month 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Register of members developed
E. Communicate regularly with members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of communications per year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 webinars • 4 newsletters • 4 emails • 300 tweets
SO 2: Advance the field of health systems research through the further development of health systems research methods and of the skills and competencies of Health Systems Global members and their institutions		
A. Conduct biennial symposium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of participants who attend the symposium • Number of abstracts submitted • Amount of surplus funds generated for Health Systems Global/future symposia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agenda developed • Logistics arranged • Participants registered • Participant evaluations
B. Conduct webinars	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of webinars conducted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 webinars per year • Participant evaluations of webinars
C. Promote and support the development of health system research methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of sessions at symposium focused on health systems research methods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of thematic groups working on health systems research methods
D. Promote and advocate for health systems research capacity-building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of health systems research capacity-building opportunities promoted through Health Systems Global 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity-building opportunities posted on website
SO 3: Mobilize relevant communities to engage and advocate for health systems research		
A. Issue advocacy briefs and other documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of advocacy items developed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy briefs developed • Factsheets produced • Editorials/commentaries/roundtables • User evaluations of briefs

Strategic Objective and Activities	Indicator	Milestone
B. Serve as a connector between policy-makers , practitioners, researchers and donors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of webinars • Number of users of the website 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Webinars • Regional hubs • Web-based platforms
SO 4: Ensure a strong and sustainable Health Systems Global		
A. Increase the membership base of Health Systems Global	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of members in Health Systems Global 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in the number of individual members by 10% annually globally and by region • 10 new institutional members per year.
B. Evolve Health Systems Global governance and organizational structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governance and organizational structures strengthened to guide organization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic plan developed and made public • Regular Board (virtual) meetings • Board retreat held if funding available • Manual to define operating procedures developed
C. Establish a stable financial foundation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amount of resources raised per annum from membership fees • Amount of resources raised per annum from donors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operating budget developed • Strategic plan costed • Business plan developed
D. Develop an explicit partnership strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic partnerships identified 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership strategy developed • Partnerships established