Report

Meeting to Review the Design of
India Health Policy & Systems Research Fellowship Program
21st August 2020

Contact

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Objective

Health Systems Transformation Platform (HSTP) & Institute of Public Health Bengaluru (IPH) envisage India Health Policy & Systems Research Fellowship Program to enhance capabilities of researchers in applying systems thinking lens, policy analysis, & acknowledging complexity in bringing about people-centric change. Researchers from HSTP & IPH put together initial draft fellowship program, structure, and curriculum in consultation with Indian and global health policy & systems research (HPSR) practitioners. This draft was revised based on inputs received from an expert consultation held on 24 June 2020. *(access the report here)*

This meeting on 21ˢᵗ August 2020 was organized to review the revised fellowship program structure and curriculum. Six HPSR practitioners, HSTP & IPH team and observers participated in this meeting (*see list of participants*). The final fellowship program structure and curriculum will be prepared based on the inputs received in this meeting.

The three-hour meeting was structured as below (*details in agenda*)

1. After opening remarks and a round of introductions, context and overview of the proposed fellowship program was presented by N Devadasan, Technical Advisor, HSTP.
2. The redesign action plan and revised curriculum documents were presented by Prashanth N S, Assistant Director Research & Dorothy Lall, Assistant Director Education from IPH Bengaluru.
3. A discussion with HPSR practitioners to receive inputs on program structure & curriculum in general and 'tensions to be resolved' was steered by Prashanth N S, Assistant Director, Research, IPH Bengaluru.
4. In conclusion, summary of meeting discussions was presented by Rahul S Reddy, National Coordinator, HSTP. The way forward was presented by N Devadasan, Technical Advisor & Rajeev Sadanandan, Chief Executive Officer, HSTP.

India Health Policy & Systems Research Fellowship Program is initiative of Health Systems Transformation Platform (HSTP). HSTP is incubated and financially supported by Sir Ratan Tata Trusts. Spirit of collaboration & knowledge exchange is at the core of HSTP's values and it is exploring arrangements with governments, Indian and global institutions/ public health schools with HPSR expertise to collaborate on this initiative.

At present, this initiative draws expertise from Institute of Public Health Bengaluru (IPH) which received a grant from HSTP to co-develop the fellowship program's structure and curriculum. Faculty from Institute of Tropical Medicine Antwerp (ITM) and Nossal Institute of Global Health, University of Melbourne (Nossal) are involved in guiding the fellowship program development with financial support from ACCESS Health International. HSTP has strategic partnership arrangements (with no financial obligations) with ACCESS, ITM, and Nossal for supporting HSTP's health systems research and capacity building initiatives.

Prof Maharaj Kishan Bhan, HSTP's pillar of strength, continues to inspire our work. We are grateful to the HSTP Board for their support & HPSR practitioners for their contribution. Special thanks to the efforts of HSTP (Rajeev Sadanandan, N Devadasan, Rahul Reddy, Vivek Panwar) & IPH Bengaluru (Upendra Bhojani, Prashanth N S, Dorothy Lall, Kranthi V, Sumegha Asthana, Kanika Chaudhary, Pramod Kumar).

Summary of Discussion

- **The fellowship's aims, goals and provenance** should be stated clearly, especially for the applicants to set right expectations and be aware of where they are headed. Diversity of fellows in a cohort to aid peer to peer learning, reflexivity and positionality should be considered. Candidates demonstrating basic writing skills, critical thinking & analytical skills, with experience of publishing in peer reviewed journals or policy briefs or issue-based reports or analytical pieces and motivated to engage with HPSR conventions in their career progression should be prioritized.

- **HPSR Core Competencies** and values are to be clearly addressed in the curriculum considering room for candidates with diverse health research disciplines and practice. A key competency is understanding structure and evolution of Indian & LMICs health systems. A historic perspective and current scenario of the country's health system is required to provide a context on which research questions and proposals are developed. Historical perspective avoids the problems of assuming that Indian health system ought to be a certain way and this puts forth very clearly that there were specific socio-political decision points in time because of which the system is currently the way it is. And this is not inevitable. The sense of context & history, the lack of inevitability is important to bring change through research & focused work.

- **Exposure to and appreciation** of various research approaches and methods is necessary for the fellow to understand that there are multiple ways to conduct their 'inquiry'. This can be introduced through reading material and select seminars/ webinars that show them how to approach a health system problem rather than sessions on 'this is how you do' Focus Group Discussions or Key Informant Interviews etc. It is observed, early/ mid-career researchers face difficulties in thinking through issues, being clear about research design, understanding and critically appraising available information and analysis. These need attention through specific exercises early in the course and during mentorship for implementing the research grant.

- **Mentorship model** needs detailing to ensure role and time engagement of mentors is specified, as this impacts the relationship with mentee and their expectations. It was suggested from a pool of mentors, each fellow depending on the research question, could choose one mentor as primary mentor to guide research grant implementation and contact sessions. This mentor will take responsibility for the process (if not the inputs and outputs). There could be a second mentor who would bring in heft and careful thinking on fellow's overall growth through the fellowship journey.

- **Developing the research question and proposal** is an iterative process appreciating the position and perspectives of all stakeholders in the health system. Fellows should be encouraged to reformulate research question (RQ) by applying a negative analysis lens or a power analysis lens or any other critical perspective on the RQ. They can revisit their original 'problem' or 'question' and re-shape with exposure to other ideas, discussions with colleagues/ mentors. Mentors could leave questions on the table for mentees on how else they would look at a question from another angle or a perspective. It helps to reassure that it is a process and nudging/pushing them along at each step to get it better. Defining milestones in this process could move things forward and keep them focused and motivated.

- **Practicalities** of mentorship and implementing the research grant need to be re-examined. While each fellow working a research, grant is preferred to ensure a personalized experience, 2-3 fellows working on one research question may be explored to solve problems as a team with multiple perspectives and skillset. Logistics of this exercise should not make the learning experience distracting and exhausting.

Next Steps

N Devadasan, Technical Advisor, HSTP, informed that HSTP and IPH expect to engage with a select group of HPSR practitioners to finalise the fellowship program structure and curriculum, co-develop course content, play a role of mentors & teaching faculty or advise on improving overall design & reach of the course. He invited the participating HPSR practitioners to join this initiative in any of the capacities mentioned above. A well-defined Terms of Reference for specific involvement and partnership structure will be circulated.

Rajeev Sadanandan, Chief Executive Officer, HSTP mentioned facilitating institutional commitment for the initiative will help build comprehensive course content yet lean program structure and ensure sustainability. Contractual arrangements with the individual or institution they represent, will be facilitated to compensate & enable the practitioner to devote time to this initiative.

Rahul S Reddy, National Co-ordinator, HSTP, in closing remarks, summarized the discussions and expressed gratitude to HPSR practitioners & all the participants for their contribution.

The final fellowship program structure and curriculum will be prepared based on the suggestions of this group, which will undergo another round of independent review for content and pedagogy. The plan is to launch the course this year. Health policy and systems research training program requires rigour in content development, careful planning, and passionate implementation. HSTP and IPH are exploring arrangements with governments, Indian and global public health schools to collaborate on this initiative. The spirit of collaboration and knowledge exchange is at core of HSTP's values. Prof (Late) Maharaj Kishan Bhan who has been a pillar of strength for HSTP and continues to be an inspiration. He believed that enhancing stakeholder's capabilities is key to transforming Indian health systems. Only then would home grown solutions to local challenges yield sustainable results. HSTP is developing capacity building initiatives to suit each of the stakeholder groups. This fellowship is for researchers, one of the key stakeholders who are to be nurtured, trained in recognizing windows of opportunity, and provide a platform to advocate for change.

Agenda

Video Conferencing Platform
21 August 2020, 1:00 PM - 4:00 PM (IST)

1:00 - 1:30	**Welcome & Introductions** Kranthi Vysyaraju, Program Coordinator IPH Bengaluru
1:30 - 1:50	**Overview** **India HPSR Fellowship Program:** N Devadasan, Technical Advisor, HSTP **Action Plan for Fellowship Program Redesign:** Prashanth NS, Asst Director, Research, IPH Bengaluru **Revised Fellowship Structure & Curriculum:** Dorothy Lal, Asst Director, Education, IPH Bengaluru
1:50 - 3:45	**Discussion on Revised Structure & Curriculum** • Sara van Belle, Professor, ITM Antwerp • Sumit Kane, Associate Professor, University of Melbourne • Sundari Ravindran, Independent Health Policy & Systems Research Expert, • Bruno Marchal, Associate Professor & Head, Health Systems, ITM Antwerp • Rakhal Gaitonde, Professor, Shree Chitra Tirunal Institute of Medical Science & Technology • Devaki Nambiar, Head - Health Systems & Equity, The George Institute for Global Health • Prashanth NS, Assistant Director, Research, IPH Bengaluru (Moderator)
3:45 - 4:00	**Way Forward:** N Devadasan, Technical Advisor & Rajeev Sadanandan, Chief Executive Officer HSTP **Summary of Meeting Discussions & Vote of Thanks:** Rahul Reddy, National Coordinator, HSTP

Participants

Name	Designation	Organization/ Affiliation
Bruno Marchal	Associate Professor	Institute of Tropical Medicine, Antwerp
Devaki Nambiar	Program Head	George Institute for Global Health
Dorothy Lall	Assistant Director Education	Institute of Public Health, Bengaluru
Kranthi Vysyaraju	Program Coordinator	Institute of Public Health, Bengaluru
Sara van Belle	Professor	Institute of Tropical Medicine, Antwerp
Sumit Kane	Associate Professor	University of Melbourne
N Devadasan	Technical Adviser	Health System Transformation Platform
Pramod Kumar	Education Coordinator	Institute of Public Health, Bengaluru
Prashanth N S	Assistant Director Research	Institute of Public Health, Bengaluru
Rahul Reddy	National Coordinator	Health System Transformation Platform
Rajeev Sadanandan	Chief Executive Officer	Health Systems Transformation Platform
Rakhal Gaitonde	Professor	Shree Chitra Tirunal Institute of Medical Science & Technology
Sanjeev Kumar	Research Specialist	Health System Transformation Platform
Sumegha Asthana	Chapter Lead	Women in Global Health (Observer)
Sundari Ravindran	Principal Visiting Fellow	UN University - International Institute for Global Health
Upendra Bhojani	Director	Institute of Public Health, Bengaluru
Vivek Panwar	Fellow	Health Systems Transformation Platform
Kanika Chaudhary	Teaching Assistant	Institute of Public Health, Bengaluru
Alexo Esperato	Senior Program Officer	Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (Observer)
Stefan Nachuk	Deputy Director	Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (Observer)