

### **1. Workshop objective and programme**

- Reflect on strategies and tools to promote evidence based policy making
- Inform a EHP SA regional policy influence plan (PIP)
- Agree on a framework for individual Regional Research Innovation Fund (RRIF) PIPs
- Strengthen networking within and between research portfolios

### **2. Theoretical underpinning**

Evidence into policy and practice is a dynamic academic research field and theoretical work has been in development since the 1970s. The field is deemed important because the availability and utilisation of research enhances the quality of policy discussions and potentially also policy outcomes. Furthermore, there needs to be accountability for the resources directed to research, which is combined with demands for greater rigour in the prioritisation of research efforts. Research clearly matters, however there remains no systematic understanding of what, when, why and how research feeds into development policies

Evidence uptake is the process that allows / disallows research to influence policy makers' horizons, policy development, declared public policy regimes, funding patterns and policy implementation or practice (Lindquist, 2003). Lessons learned in evidence uptake programmes, include the following:

- Research uptake is not always 'up'
- Uptake is unlikely to be about research findings alone
- Dismissal is 'uptake' too
- A little bit of 'uptake' is probably all you'll ever get
- Uptake of bad research is not good
- Uptake happens both ways
- The real contribution of a body of research can only be judged in hindsight.
- One power of a single study is limited

### **3. RRIF projects within the different policy influence approaches**

EHP SA projects are spread across the spectrum of policy influence approaches. Despite the fact that most are research-based projects, most projects do find themselves operating in different spheres. These are: advice (evidence based, cooperative approach); advocacy (evidence based, confrontational approach); activism (values based, confrontation approach) and lobbying (value based, cooperative approach)

### **4. Regional context & objective setting**

During the workshop EHP SA research projects worked in their respective portfolios and discussed the current status in the region regarding evidence uptake; the main challenges and bottlenecks; what an ideal situation would look like. They concluded with a discussion of first steps towards addressing the challenges, which can be developed into objectives. For example:

- Adolescents portfolio: strengthening development synergies; more rigorous evidence; working with unusual partners/ champions (e.g. police / magistrates); formal and aligned results-sharing; expanded and cross-cutting partnerships
- Men who have sex with men (MSM) portfolio: increased financial and resource allocation for MSM specific programmes; generation of evidence; building momentum using advocacy and lobbying in community and by researchers; availability of programs targeting MSM; building networks and coalitions to do MSM work; availability of more resources for MSM work; acceptance of MSM as a key population to be targeted for HIV interventions; public health

approach as an entry point to HIV service provision for MSM; use of social media; civil society organisations (CSOs) providing and distributing protective barrier methods.

- Prisoners: forum that meets regularly to give feedback on research; capacity building of relevant authorities in correctional-related research; more engagement with other countries / sharing of practices; building on nascent prisoner rights movement in some countries; meaningfully including prisoners in national strategic plans and M&E frameworks; assimilation of current information.

## 5. EHPSA value add

EHPSA is, in essence, a programme that deals with evidence uptake. It has been designed to achieve this goal by generating new evidence and building the capacity of policy makers and practitioners to utilise evidence in policy and decision making processes. Furthermore, EHPSA covers countries in the eastern and southern Africa region. This places the EHPSA programme, the research portfolios and the individual studies in a unique position that can be leveraged for greater research impact. EHPSA's value add potential:

- Regionality: focus local, think regional and link into the global level for impact
- Utilise conferences as platforms for dissemination
- Ensure stakeholders in the studies are linked into a regional EHPSA network (face-to-face and online) as a cohort of stakeholders throughout the EHPSA lifespan
- Social mobilisation to ensure that evidence informs not only policy, but also practice for HIV and vulnerable populations.
- Engaging donors, multilaterals and the private sector with the evidence created through the research projects
- Linking with relevant other regional organisations and ensure these stakeholders remain engaged. These include:
  - STRIVE
  - Microbicides Trail Network (MTN)
  - HIV prevention trials network (HPTN)
  - Southern Africa Development Community (SADC)
  - Southern Africa HIV and AIDS Information Dissemination Service (SAfAIDS)
  - AIDS and Rights Alliance for Southern Africa (ARASA)
  - Regional United Nations Aids Team for eastern and southern Africa (RATESA)
  - African networks for research and training in sexual and reproductive health and HIV (Repronet)
  - Regional Inter-Agency Task Team on Children and AIDS (RIATT)
  - Collaborative Initiatives for Paediatric HIV Education and Research (CIPHER) and
  - AVAC - global advocacy for HIV prevention
- Leading on the monitoring and learning of the evidence uptake potential and approaches developed under the programme.

## 6. Conclusion and next steps

EHPSA's approach is unique in that it supports early responsible and continuous stakeholder engagement that is linked to the research milestones of each project. This approach aims to ensure that by the time the research findings are finalised, stakeholders have been engaged throughout the process and uptake of the findings becomes more likely.

Instead of submitting a comprehensive policy influence plan, participants agreed to submit a refined objective statement and a stakeholder engagement plan that is derived from the ground work; contextual analysis; problem analysis and stakeholder analysis. The following issues have been highlighted by the EHPSA project in preparation to submit the stakeholder engagement plans:

- Updating of partners

- Ensure alignment with current work plans
- Review project milestones and set objectives
- Ensure all project sites and countries are included in the plan

Monitoring of the stakeholder engagement plans will take place through the normal EHPSA quarterly reporting process and through a monthly call of 20 minutes with the EHPSA team to share lessons learned, promising practices and other unique and innovative events related to evidence uptake.