

Policy Analysis work currently underway in EQUINET

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One of the areas of Equinet's current work programme is policy analysis. The core of such work is a concern for how decisions are made and how to strengthen future decision-making. Policy analysis work can inform our analyses of the political economy of inequity, of the strategies required to promote and support equity-oriented policies and of the practical approaches to enable implementation of such policies. Yet despite its important role in analyses of, and advocacy, for equity, only few people in the SADC region are actively involved in conducting such analyses.

Equinet's current programme of work seeks to begin to address this gap through a dual focus on capacity building in policy analysis and the implementation of relevant small-scale projects. Its objectives are to:

- * To promote investigation of health equity-related topics using policy analysis frameworks;
- * To better understand the forces constraining decision-making on equity issues and shaping the achievement of equity goals in the health sector;
- * To identify levers for equity-oriented advocacy and policy change within the health sector at national/regional/international levels;
- * To build capacity in conducting health policy analyses;
- * To strengthen the networks between those involved in this area of work.

An invitation for initial applications to this programme drew a global response and much interest! Our email communications clearly reach far and wide!

Eventually we were able to invite six colleagues (from four of the Equinet countries: Zimbabwe, Zambia, Tanzania and South Africa) to an initial training workshop, held in February 2003 in Johannesburg. The workshop had two components.

First, five days were spent introducing the overall approach and frameworks used in policy analysis. These sessions were conducted as part of a broader teaching module on policy analysis that forms part of the University of Witwatersrand Master's in Public Health Programme. The five days cover a series of key topics in policy analysis, introduce relevant concepts and frameworks, provide opportunities for discussion and practical engagement with the issues of focus, and include a running set of group work activities which provide participants with the opportunity to conduct a policy analysis of a specific, real-life scenario. Participants also go away with a pack of reading to enable them to continue reflecting on the nature and applications of policy analysis.

The second component of the February workshop allowed the Equinet participants to begin to develop protocols for small-scale studies on topics they had previously identified. We asked, of course, that these topics be specifically linked to an equity issue and be of policy relevance to their own country settings. Coincidentally all also focus on implementation issues – what factors constrain or facilitate implementation of specific policies, and what lessons can be drawn about how to strengthen future policy change.

Participants were asked to finalise protocol development in the month after the workshop, and by early April all six had submitted final protocols for review by Equinet.

The process of review is currently being undertaken. Once completed, the selected studies will begin in earnest. We envisage that this will continue into early 2004. And in 2004 we plan two further workshops. The first, to present analyses and draft reports, get feedback and allow finalisation of the report – as well as discuss the process of dissemination within countries to relevant stakeholders. The second, to present and allow finalisation of journal papers developed from the study reports, to be submitted to internationally peer-reviewed journals.

Through this set of activities, it is intended that this programme of work will support the:

- completion of several small-scale policy analysis studies that can be used in informing country-level policy implementation and development;
- consolidation and extension of skills in policy analysis within the SADC region;
- strengthening of existing networks within Equinet.

For further information on the policy analysis work please contact Lucy Gilson, Centre for Health Policy, University of Witwatersrand Email: lucyq@mail.saimr.wits.ac.za. Further information on EQUINET and its work is available from the EQUINET secretariat at TARSC, 47 Van Praagh Ave, Harare, from our website at www.equinetafrica.org or by emailing the secretariat at admin@equinetafrica.org