

ECTMIH 2021 Bergen – Proposal for Organised session

“Evaluation challenges and innovative evaluation methods to improve the governance of health systems in Western Africa”

Track:

Track 5. Building strong health systems to achieve UHC: the role of rights, governance, technology and priority setting

Names, affiliations and email-addresses of all participants

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Purpose and content of the organised session

The need to evaluate public health policies, both to be accountable to taxpayers and donors and to support the adaptation of policies, the functioning of health systems, is well established. Evaluation is a critical element in improving the governance of health systems and guiding the design, implementation and scaling-up of appropriate health interventions to progress towards universal health coverage. However, in many Western African countries, evaluation capacity is still limited, stakeholders have poor knowledge of different concepts related to monitoring and evaluation, evaluations are often commissioned by donors without national ownership, and therefore evaluation reports are rarely utilised to support decision-making. Moreover, evaluations face important financial, operational and methodological challenges, notably due to the complexity of health interventions, absence of “true” control areas exempt of programmes, and lack (or poor quality) of data. Health programmes are usually multifaceted and spread over a long period of time, and many outcomes change gradually – whereas even if change does occur in the short-term, it may not persist into the long-term – hence evaluation beyond the time line of the program is necessary.

Faced with these challenges, this session intends to present a number of innovative methods that are adapted to support the development of an evaluation culture in Western Africa.

The introduction will set the scene of the evaluation practice in Western Africa and point out that most of the time, health programmes in these contexts are evaluated as part of donors' requirement, because development aid effectiveness has been questioned by donors and beneficiaries alike. The many actors involved in development aid – including international organisations, civil society, public officials, associations, labor unions, donors, and foundations – have divergent and sometimes contradictory interests. Moreover, the countries in greatest need of aid are most often politically unstable, lacking in infrastructure and experiencing high demographic growth. In this context, it is challenging to build evaluation capacity and to render evaluations useful. Innovative solutions are needed to meet these specific issues. The real challenge for evaluation in these countries is not only financial but also methodological. This communication addresses two issues linked to evaluation: making ethics a dimension of evaluative approaches (especially in developing countries) and the need for a global, integrated framework for evaluating development policies.

Then, the methodological challenges of causal impact evaluation will be discussed. In absence of randomised experiment, difference-in-differences are used to mimic an experimental research design using observational data to evaluate causal effects of health policies. In this context it is key to identify comparable control areas or individuals however this can be a challenge because of (1) limited availability of individual data before and after programs are implemented, (2) programmes being implemented nationally, and (3) complicated and broad range of health outcomes being targeted. This presentation will present how geo-referenced data available in the Demographic Health Survey could be used to identify control individuals and match them with programme participants to evaluate a family planning programme in Nigeria.

The third presentation will deal with the principles of the meta-evaluation methodology. In a country like Burkina Faso, the health sector is a priority sector, absorbing nearly 11% of domestic public spending. The country has chosen to develop this sector within a logic of planning and evaluation of the actions carried out, in order, on the one hand, to ensure accountability and, on the other hand, to strengthen the quality of the statistical and steering system (Ridde & Dagenais 2012). More and more actors are involved in this process but capacities remain uneven. The objective of the meta-evaluation is to highlight, for a given political-administrative regime, the basic criteria for a quality evaluation: having its own conceptual and terminological framework, coordination of practices and approaches to monitoring and evaluation (M&E) at the national and local levels

Then, two PhD students will present their complementary meta-evaluation research protocol in Burkina Faso – one targeted on the methodological quality of evaluations, the other one on the process quality, including utility, of evaluations.

Finally, a wrap-up of the key messages will be presented, and the debate with participants will be launched.

Timetable

The session will comprise six short presentations. The research team will propose participants to ask questions and propose short interventions through a forum of discussion. The most relevant ones will be synthesized by a moderator at the end of the session, and a selection of participants will be invited to intervene.

1'-6': Olivier Sossa: **The challenges of evaluation practice in Western Africa**

7'-12': Sandy Tubeuf: **Methodological challenges in causal impact evaluation**

13'-18': Catherine Fallon: **Meta-evaluation as learning processes**

19'-24': Zawora Rita Zizien: **A meta-evaluation research protocol on the methodological quality of evaluations in Burkina Faso**

25'-30': Mohamadi Zeba: **A meta-evaluation research protocol on the process quality and utility of evaluations in Burkina Faso**

31'-35': Elisabeth Paul: **Wrap-up** and introduction to the debate

35'-50': **Debate with participants**: The participants will be encouraged to ask questions and propose short communications through the chat. E. Paul will synthesize them and invite the most relevant ones to participate in the debate.