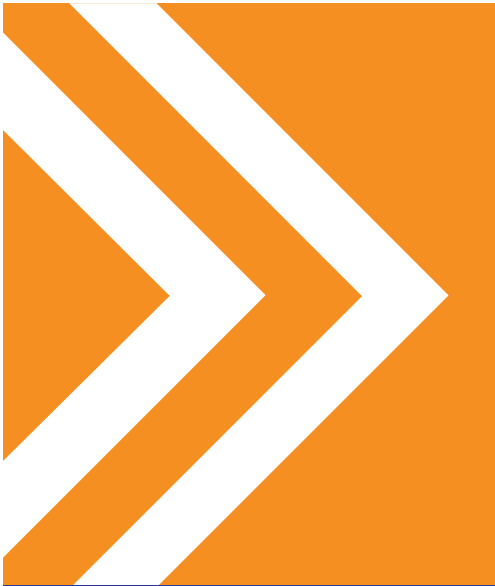




GLOBAL

Organizational Capacity of Health Systems Global



Building the Organizational Capacity of Health Systems Global: From Start-Up to Performance

Introduction

Health policy and systems research (HPSR), and health systems in general, have become the subject of intense global interest in recent years. The evidence from increased use of HPSR enhances health program design and implementation, and improves understanding of how to remove bottlenecks and better target domestic or donor investments—especially those focused on Universal Health Coverage (UHC). In response to this increased interest in HPSR, the First Global Symposium on Health Policy and Systems Research was held in Montreux, Switzerland in 2010, and a second symposium was held in Beijing, China, in 2012.

The success of the first two symposiums generated interest in establishing a global organization to run subsequent symposiums and become an overall convener for those in the field of HPSR. As a result, the Executive Committee of the Beijing Symposium established a working group purposed with creating a society fully dedicated to health policy and systems research. Thus, Health Systems Global (HSG) was born.

Formally created in 2012 at the Beijing Symposium, HSG was intended to consolidate the field of HPSR and bring it to maturity.

Health Systems Global - Vision and Mission

Vision: Support health systems to attain better health, equity and well-being by strengthening health policy and systems research, policy and practice communities.

Mission: Connect and engage researchers, policy-makers, health care managers, educators, civil society, media and donors from around the world to advance the field of health policy and systems research and create opportunities for unleashing their collective capacity for generating, sharing and applying knowledge, necessary for health systems strengthening.

HSG is a professional society of health policy and systems researchers, advocates, implementers, and policymakers, whose aim is to consolidate research methods, build capacity in HPSR through networks and communities of practice, promote uptake of research findings in policy and decision-making, and advocate for the field of HPSR and health systems strengthening in general.

At its inception, HSG found itself with a large mandate, limited resources, and nascent organizational structures. HSG had two imperatives during its start-up period:

1. Make a visible contribution to the field of HPSR to show its value. One clear way to do that was to successfully take on the organization and management of the 2014 Global Symposium in Cape Town, South Africa.
2. Establish itself organizationally, an existential challenge for any new organization.

HSG's mandate was aligned with the goals of the Office of Health Systems (OHS) within USAID's Bureau for Global Health. The OHS was therefore keen to provide assistance to help HSG become established. OHS, through the Health Finance and Governance (HFG) project, provided three years of funding to help establish a firm organizational foundation for HSG to carry out its mandate to develop the field of HPSR. HFG's overall objective was to provide organizational development support aimed at firmly establishing the governance and organizational structures needed for HSG to function and carry out its mandate.

Structure of Health Systems Global

HSG is composed of two main bodies:

- ▶ An 11 member all-volunteer Board of Directors, composed of health policy and systems researchers and policymakers, that provides direction and oversight to the organization; and
- ▶ A paid Secretariat that runs the operational aspects of the organization.

In addition to these formal entities, an essential engine of HSG is its ten thematic working groups (TWGs). The TWGs are volunteer-led networks of practitioners that come together around a topic of interest within the field of HPSR. They engage diverse groups of HSG members in different activities such as hosting webinars, and collaborating on policy briefs, and contribute to the overall mission and vision of the organization. With defined, democratic leadership structures, clear scopes of work, and annual work plans that include delivering tangible outputs for HSG members and the HPSR field in general, the TWGs have become a cornerstone of the organization.

Thematic Working Groups

- Emerging Voices for Global Health
- Ethics of Health Policy and Systems Research
- Health Systems in Fragile and Conflict Affected States
- Medicines in Health Systems
- Social Science Approaches for Research and Engagement in Health Policy and Systems
- Supporting and Strengthening the Role of Community Health Workers in Health System Development
- Teaching and Learning Health Policy and Systems Research
- The Private Sector in Health
- Translating Evidence into Action
- Quality in Universal Health and Health Care

From 2012 – 2014, the Center of Health and Infectious Disease Research (CHIP) in the University of Copenhagen housed HSG's interim part-time Secretariat. The Secretariat had very limited funding and two part-time staff members supported by short-term consultancy arrangements. In 2015, HSG underwent a major organizational transition that included contracting out the permanent secretariat and communications functions, moving the legal home (organization registration) from Denmark to Switzerland to assure a legal environment more conducive for a global organization, and establishing a more durable financial foundation.

Through a competitive process, the Curatio International Foundation (Curatio)—located in Tbilisi, Georgia—was selected to house the new, more formal Secretariat. During the transitional year, Curatio was supported by Inis Communications, a firm located in Bangkok, Thailand. In 2016 a team from the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) in Brighton, UK, took up the communications support. The new Secretariat is better resourced with four part-time staff based in Tbilisi: an Executive Director, a Coordinator, an Administrative Assistant, and a Finance Director. The team in Tbilisi is augmented by communications expertise from IDS who manages the HSG website, social media, and various other communications needs for the organization and hosted biennial symposiums.

Summary of HFG Assistance

HFG provided organizational development assistance to HSG over a three-year timeframe from 2013-2016. Assistance was tailored to the stage of HSG's development and its evolving needs. For example, in the first year of assistance, HFG focused on clarifying the fundamental roles and responsibilities of the Board and Secretariat—a classic organizational governance issue. In year one, HFG also initiated the development of a three-year strategic plan using a highly participatory process including: a web-based consultation with the Board, six regional meetings to solicit member input, and a membership-based survey that elicited 450 responses. The strategic plan was a key initiative to both define HSG's priorities and serve as a basis for fundraising. In year two, during HSG's transition and selection of a new Secretariat, HFG provided targeted inputs, such as reviewing the terms of reference for the new Secretariat. In year three, with a new Secretariat in place, HFG provided assistance on second generation organizational issues. These issues included looking for ways to improve board performance, assessing the functioning of the TWGs, and developing tools to assess Board and Secretariat performance.

The table below summarizes HFG assistance to Health Systems Global. Assistance was provided through organization of three board retreats and ongoing remote technical assistance.

Areas of Assistance

Year One	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarification of Board and Secretariat roles and responsibilities • Development of three-year strategic plan (2013-2015)
Year Two	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of Board member roles and responsibilities • Development of terms of reference for new Secretariat • Assistance in transition to newly elected Board • Development of guidelines for operation of TWGs including relationship to Secretariat • Development of draft communication plan to expand membership
Year Three	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment of functioning of new Board and development of recommendations • Assessment of functioning of TWGs and development of recommendations • Development of tool to appraise board performance • Development of 360-tool to assess Secretariat (Executive Director) performance • Revision of TWG operating guidelines • Update of Board election process

Results

Health Systems Global has made remarkable progress in just three years. It has not only entered the international landscape of institutions interested in health systems strengthening, but has found a place of distinction among them. It is a significant accomplishment to create a viable organization from scratch in such a short amount of time.

Specifically, HSG accomplished the following:

- ▶ Grew from a 1,000 paid-member organization in 2013 to a 1,600 paid-member organization in 2016¹, although non-paid member engagement is significantly greater;
- ▶ Successfully managed the 2014 Cape Town Symposium (attended by about 2,000 individuals from 90 countries);
- ▶ Established ten functioning TWGs, took stock of lessons learned, and developed tools and procedures for improving TWG operations;
- ▶ Developed an array of membership services including a website (www.healthsystemsglobal.org), newsletter, and social media to engage and involve members in discussions and online training to advance member capacity;
- ▶ Successfully transitioned to a new, fully functional Secretariat;
- ▶ Better defined the respective roles and responsibilities of the Board and Secretariat;
- ▶ Increased the Board's stability by revising its composition from 11 to 15 members with six regional slots and nine at-large members; and
- ▶ Began creating a solid financial foundation for the organization through effective fundraising and 2014 symposium management efforts.

The table on the next page shows quantitatively what HSG has been able to accomplish over the past three years.

HFG support has been treasured by all in the HSG Board and the Secretariat as we moved from inception to the consolidation phase of our institutional development. The expertise, experience, and dedication afforded by the HFG project staff helped us greatly as we dealt with various aspects of HSG governance, TWG operations, and Secretariat performance improvements.

I am glad to report, and also HSG's Board shares these views, that the technical assistance rendered by the HFG project made HSG better prepared to deliver on its mission. We are now better placed to deal with operational matters related to the work of our TWGs and to attend to the needs of the next Global Symposium of Health Systems Research, soon to take place this November in Vancouver. We are better enabled to track our performance and report on the progress we make, or challenges we face.

George Gotsadze, Executive Director,
Health Systems Global
May 2016

¹ The data for 2016 is based on Q1 figures from HSG.

Indicators	Baseline	By March 31st, 2016
Number of paying individual members	1,002 (2013)	1,579
Number of engaged individuals through social media and web-based channels		
Number of HSG LinkedIn Group Members	1,257 (Feb. 2015)	2,080
Number of LinkedIn posts per week	12 (2015)	49 ²
Number of Twitter followers	3,826 (Feb. 2015)	5,155
Number of Facebook posts	113 (2015)	932 (Q1, 2016) ²
Number of blogs published on website	13 (2015)	31 ²
Number of HPSR symposia attendees	1,775 (HPSR 2012)	2,000 (HPSR 2014)
Number of TWGs	0 (2013)	10
Number of TWG webinars	5 (2015)	8 ²
Number of TWG webinar participants	436 (2015)	920 ²
HSG Newsletter subscribers	Under 1,200 (March 2015)	1,850
HSG annual expenditures	\$US 406,854 (2012/2013) ¹	\$527,972 (2015)
HSG's financial assets (end of the fiscal year i.e. December 31st)	\$US 279,224 (2013)	\$US 716,788 (2015)

¹ HSG's legal establishment occurred during the Beijing symposium in 2012, therefore marginal amounts of 2012 expenditures were merged with 2013.

² Only during Q1, 2016

Lessons Learned

The list below provides lessons learned for establishing a new organization, especially a virtual network such as Health Systems Global.

- ▶ Organizational development support over a multi-year period is essential for getting a new organization up and running.
- ▶ The value of organizational development support is greatly enhanced when the organization's leadership is strong and understands how to use such support, as was the case with HSG.
- ▶ A professional society needs committed Board members with a range of expertise and the dedication to fulfill stated responsibilities.
- ▶ A professional society that operates virtually, along with an engaged Board, needs a full-time, adequately resourced secretariat to manage the day-to-day operations.
- ▶ Perhaps the most difficult aspect of establishing a new organizational entity is securing a sustainable source of financing. Clarity on the business model of the organization and continuously balancing costs against available revenues is necessary to reach financial sustainability. In HSG's case, effective fundraising—largely driven by the Board—and management of symposium and secretariat costs helped generate sufficient revenues to lay a solid foundation.

- ▶ Global organizations often have to choose whether to organize themselves geographically or topically. HSG originally envisioned establishing regional hubs but with the success of the global TWGs, HSG has accepted a topical approach cutting across regional boundaries for now. Regional expansion still remains a priority for a membership-based organization to be truly global.

Conclusion

HSG is still a young organization that needs targeted support. Nevertheless, its start-up has been promising, showing all the signs of an effective, sustainable organization. It benefits from excellent Secretariat leadership and an extremely dedicated Board committed to the value of HPSR and the importance of evidence in policy and decision-making. One of the primary reasons for HSG's success to date has been an appreciation of the need to pay significant attention to developing the organization itself and not just work towards the mission of the organization. USAID's investment in organizational capacity-building has been critical in getting HSG started and established, and has led to an effective organization focused on improving the evidence to inform health system strengthening decision-making.

The Health Finance and Governance (HFG) project works with partner countries to increase their domestic resources for health, manage those precious resources more effectively, and make wise purchasing decisions. Designed to fundamentally strengthen health systems, the HFG project improves health outcomes in partner countries by expanding people's access to health care, especially priority health services. The HFG project is a five-year (2012-2017), \$209 million global project funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development under Cooperative Agreement No: AID-OAA-A-12-00080. The HFG project is led by Abt Associates in collaboration with Avenir Health, Broad Branch Associates, Development Alternatives Inc., Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Results for Development Institute, RTI International, and Training Resources Group, Inc.

For more information visit www.hfgproject.org/.

Agreement Officer Representative Team: Scott Stewart (sstewart@usaid.gov) and Jodi Charles (jcharles@usaid.gov).

DISCLAIMER: The author's views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) or the United States Government.



Abt Associates
4550 Montgomery Avenue
Suite 800 North
Bethesda, MD 20814
www.abtassociates.com

June 2016