

Health Partnerships Symposium Report:

THET hosted a Health Partnerships Symposium on Tuesday 28th February and Wednesday 1st March 2017 in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The event was attended by 90 global health actors including health partnership representatives from 14 countries in Africa, Asia and the UK as well as the Government of Tanzania, INGOs and the multilateral and donor community. This was an end of programme event for the Health Partnership Scheme (HPS). THET is the managing agent for the HPS, a six-year programme implemented from 2011 with support from the UK Department for International Development (DFID).

The focus of the HPS is on improving the quality of health services and building the capacity of health workers and the faculty needed to train them. Over the course of six years, more than 130 health institutions have been strengthened through strong partnerships between UK and overseas institutions in 32 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia with over 50,000 health workers trained and 60,000 UK health worker days spent volunteering. The event provided a platform to celebrate what the health partnerships have accomplished. As the programme is coming to an end in June 2017, it also served as an opportunity to reflect on partnerships' successes and challenges, to learn from other actors what is working to ensure and to identify what could be improved in the future and learn from other actors working to ensure health services for all.

A range of sessions were held over the two days, looking at different areas of health systems strengthening including human resources for health partnership approaches, sustainability in diverse country contexts and circumstances. Practical, skills-building sessions on resource mobilisation, financial management, monitoring and evaluation were held. There was also time to discuss THET's principles of partnership and the recommendations of the HPS evaluation for the future.

For THET, the Symposium is part of a shift towards increasing our emphasis on supporting and empowering partners overseas to take a lead in future health partnerships. THET used the Symposium as a platform to gather feedback from health partnership representatives and actors working to strengthen the health workforce in Africa and Asia to inform future work in this area. THET has identified a number of themes of importance or interest to health partnerships and a series of recommendations. These were either identified as having a critical role in health partnership success of supporting health systems strengthening efforts, such as leadership and management and quality improvement, or as being particularly salient to partnerships within the current global health landscape, like sustainability or establishing south – south partnerships. The themes identified, and THET's recommendations, do not represent the views of any single institution or individual attending the event. These recommendations are simply meant to act as a guide for THET and other actors who are either supporting or working in partnership to strengthen the health workforce.

Leadership and management: Leadership and management importance and qualities were mentioned in many sessions over the two days. Continued investments in leadership and management are important for ensure sustainability in the long-term. This would also encourage leadership from managers of hospitals and other health facilities or units to lead change or to support changes partnerships are working to implement.

Quality improvements: To ensure strong health systems, more investments are needed in quality improvements. Health service quality was distinguished from health service access, and its relevance to all partnerships and health themes was stressed. Only when quality health service delivery has been achieved can health systems strengthening happen. It requires a change in behaviour resulting from investments in training and quality checks over time.

South to South exchanges: More support is needed for South to South learning and knowledge exchanges both in terms of health professional volunteering, as well as networking platforms to share experiences and forge new partnerships.

Integration of sustainability: A plan to ensure that results can be maintained in the long-term should be included at the onset of a project or programme. It is also important to engage with communities, including community leaders, when planning for sustainability. THET could play more of a role in supporting partners to sufficiently plan for maintaining project impact even after a project has come to an end. Responding to emergency strengthens a projects adaptability to different environments. But a resilience approach could be included already in the design of a project/programme to manage change better in implementation stages.

Gender and populations: How can we ensure that partnerships benefit the most marginalised? This was a question in the discussion around the recommendations for the HPS evaluation.

Partnership approach: THET has based on its own experiences and existing evidence developed eight principles of partnership which are crucial to ensuring impact and strong partnership working. The importance of a partnership approach was also a red thread throughout the two days. THET has developed a self-assessment tool which is meant as a guide to actors working in partnership to strengthen the health workforce.

Should you have any questions, comments or wish to receive further information, please do get in touch with THET directly at hps@thet.org. We encourage further dialogue on this topic to share our thinking in the future.