



INDEPTH Training and Research Centres of Excellence (INTREC)

Policy brief

Addressing SDH in Ghana

Many complex factors come together to determine the ultimate health of any population. In many countries the interactions of varied political, social and economic forces result in health inequalities. The consequences of these interactions manifest depending on existing norms and institutions, how societies are structured as well as the policies, programs and actions of governments. Within countries some marginalized and vulnerable groups bear the brunt of these inequalities more, depending on circumstances such as unequal supply of power, incomes, and goods and services, health services inclusive. These conditions determine a people's quality of life and their health status. [1, 2] To ensure that health is fairly distributed across societies and to promote social justice there is the need to ensure that the issues that cause these inequalities are addressed.

INTREC's role

INTREC (INDEPTH Training and Research Centers of Excellence) is a consortium whose collaborative action is envisioned to address health inequities in a total of seven Low and Middle Income Countries of Africa (Ghana inclusive) and Asia by developing sustainable capacity for research for health and its social determinants. INTREC also aims to facilitate the translation of research findings into policy and action in both regions.

Ghana SDH concerns

During initial INTREC work in Ghana, the following core SDH issues were identified through review of literature and interviews with professional stakeholders both within and outside the health sector: *Education, economic conditions and the anthropological and social dimensions that determine health seeking behavior and the lifestyle choices people make that have health implications.* (3)

The following factors that were identified as needing more focused and targeted interventions: *Environmental sanitation and hygiene; mental healthcare services and road traffic accidents*

and the rising incidence of non communicable conditions like cancers, obesity, diabetes and hypertension within the population. These require actions such as enforcement of existing laws and regulations and intensive health education. (3)

There is the need to build capacity to enable further research into these SDH factors. This will demand training people on monitoring and evaluation methods to ascertain the extent of work already done concerning these issues, how to involve stakeholders in further research, how to collect relevant data and how to package and communicate the results to policy makers in actionable ways to promote health equity in Ghana (2, 3). Such evidence can then inform the review and formulation of policies which can be translated into effective actions to address inequalities to benefit the entire population.

Actions for Ghana

In Ghana there are comprehensive SDH related policies; programs and regulations both within and outside the health sector. Implementation of some these policies have not achieved the desired impact due to inadequate funding and coverage of programs, weak institutional capacity, weak targeting mechanisms, ineffective law enforcement, turf protection within sectors and inadequate inter-sectoral linkages. Addressing these SDH issues effectively would require strong political leadership and commitment and sustainable collaboration across sectors whose work impact the health of the population to ensure focused and targeted interventions that will reduce health inequalities. Further data collection to facilitate this process is needed and this will require involving relevant stakeholders in the appropriate sectors through sharing information and seeking their input. These stakeholders can then be in the position to play the advocacy role that will facilitate the incorporation of recommendations into policy. (3)

Initial Actions for Ghana

1. Create awareness about SDH

Spear headed by MOH at inter sectoral level

- ✓ Institute programs to educate and create awareness about SDH in Ministries, Departments and Agencies and organizations whose work relate to SDH as well as in the general populace.
- ✓ The link between addressing SDH issues and its impact on development must be highlighted and made clear.
- ✓ Initiate a drive to bring to light, institutionalize and promote the use the phrase “Social Determinants of Health” to create the awareness that the health status of the country’s population is not only within the purview of the health sector.
- ✓ Highlight the intersectoral approach to addressing SDH issues.

2. Build capacity for research

Ministry of Education/MOH/INTREC

- ✓ Seek support and funding to develop sustainable capacity into research for health and its determinants.
- ✓ Institutions that offer SDH related courses must make explicit, the relevance of the courses to SDH.
- ✓ Improve access to training and education in SDH. More SDH related courses must be offered in institutions outside public health institutions. Institutions must offer online as well as short courses to increase access in SDH training. Institutions of higher learning must permit cross faculty training in SDH.
- ✓ SDH training must include developing expertise in data collection, packaging findings to impact policy, disseminating findings and recommendations to stakeholders and policy makers.

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References

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2. Hoffman K. et al. (2012) **Addressing human and research capacity for health equity and the social determinants of health in three African countries: the INTREC programme**. Global Health Action
3. Addei S, et al. INDEPTH Training and Research Centres of Excellence: Ghana Country Report. www.intrec.info

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