

Learning the Lessons from HIV

How to preserve and use hard-won service delivery knowledge



HIV is exceptional among epidemics not just in its reach and persistence, but also in the amount of money and international attention it has garnered. The volumes of work made possible by HIV-related investments have delivered huge opportunities to learn about how to address health challenges in contexts all over the world, how to reach high risk groups, how to change risky behaviours, how to extend the reach and reliability of health services, and how to monitor and evaluate interventions' impact. In many ways, the money that has been channelled into health through HIV has created the discipline of global health as it is today.

But the movement got off to a slow start. A lot of time and effort was spent during the initial response to the epidemic rediscovering many of the conclusions that had already been reached through efforts to address sexually transmitted infections and reproductive health. Why? Because there was no systematic effort to review what had been learnt by specialists in other disciplines, in other contexts, and apply those lessons to the new science of HIV. If those lessons had been learned, many more lives might have been saved. South Africa is one country determined that the same mistakes will not happen again.

How South Africa is learning from its HIV success

South Africa's HIV/AIDS epidemic is among the largest in the world. But owing to political resistance, an effective antiretroviral programme was only started in the mid-2000s. Since then, the programme has grown exponentially, and free, life-long antiretroviral treatment is now being delivered to over 2 million people – meaning universal access has been achieved.

This landmark number is even more impressive when considered in the context of the health system in crisis onto which HIV emerged. Years of Apartheid had created a system where adequate care was available to only a tiny proportion of the population, and the high-technology, hospital-focused system proved difficult to extend to all the new citizens. Interestingly, however, the health system modifications necessary to support the huge ART programme have helped improve service-access among historically underserved populations; have strengthened key health systems functions including laboratory services, medicine supplies, human resources, and governance; and have led to the launch of a primary health care-centered reform process under the banner of National Health Insurance – in part a response to the financial considerations of sustaining life-long treatment for South Africa's HIV positive population. South Africa is now a leading example of how to leverage investments in disease specific programmes to ensure that overall population health is improved in the long term, and how to learn from the past to deliver better health outcomes.

What is the best way to learn from the past?

South Africa's achievements highlight a challenge: how to effectively capture the knowledge gained through trial and error? The risks of not doing so mean losing much of the returns on substantial investments when institutional memory is lost. And, importantly, without a mechanism for cataloguing knowledge that is independent of its authors, learning is restricted to what can be passed on through mentorship or direct discussion. In health, these risks equate to lives lost and unnecessary suffering.

Whether at departmental, institutional, or country levels, the same challenges must be tackled: definition of a systematic way to identify useful knowledge; capture of the information in a way that others will be able to use for the present and future; and developing a mechanism for dissemination of the final products as widely as possible. There is also a need for routine knowledge exchange among professionals. But the challenge in making knowledge exchange effective is how to help professionals seek out relevant, useful lessons from others' experience, at the crucial time, in a way that promotes interdisciplinary, international learning.

Session details

Learning the Lessons from HIV for Improved TB Control and Beyond: a South Africa Knowledge Hub Event

Satellite session of the 20th International AIDS Conference
24th July, 2014; 18:30-20:30

Room 101-102, Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre,
Melbourne, Australia

Strengthening Health Systems launch event and networking drinks
from 19:30



Delivering a better informed future

Even if knowledge is captured effectively, there is no guarantee that it will be sought out and used to support better-informed choices. Health reforms, policies, programmes and activities can only be improved by drawing on past experience if the decision-makers in charge make a conscious effort to review available information and use it to refine their plans before moving forward. This is not just a question of changing mindsets among leaders or publicising relevant evidence in the right place. It also requires a culture change in education, in professional approaches, and in the way decision-makers are held to account to create a future where evidence-informed decisions are the norm.

Learning the Lessons from HIV: the Debate

To underline the importance of capturing the knowledge that has emerged through responses to HIV, the South Africa Knowledge Hub – a joint initiative of the World Bank and the Government of South Africa – is collaborating with *Strengthening Health Systems* to co-host a panel discussion at the 20th International AIDS Conference, Melbourne, Australia. The aim of the event is to directly facilitate knowledge exchange by sharing some of the most important lessons resulting from the HIV response in South Africa. A keynote speech from Deputy Director General Yogan Pillay will present how innovations from the country's hugely successful ARV programme have improved key health system functions, namely: human resources, pharmaceutical supplies, monitoring and evaluation, laboratory capacity, leadership and management, and accountability.

A panel of high profile participants will subsequently discuss what other countries can learn from South Africa's experience and debate the best ways to build on this knowledge to leverage HIV investments to deliver sustainable health system gains in other contexts. The session will be introduced by Patrick Osewe, Program Leader, World Bank, who will describe a framework known as the Science of Service Delivery and present how it is being applied to the control of HIV and TB in the mining sector in Southern Africa, ensuring that potential solutions are designed with full knowledge of the past, with careful diagnosis of the challenge to be addressed, the roles of all relevant stakeholders, and a clear rationale for intervention. As part of the knowledge exchange process, audience members will be invited to actively participate in the discussion and share their own perspectives of lessons learnt through the response to HIV.

About the South Africa Knowledge Hub

The South Africa Knowledge Hub is a joint initiative of the Government of South Africa and the World Bank. It

Session Format

Time	Session Details
18:30-18:40	Learning from the Past: Use of the Science of Service Delivery to Tackle TB and HIV in the Mining Sector in Southern Africa <i>Patrick Osewe, World Bank</i>
18:40-18:50	How HIV Successes Have Improved South Africa's Health Care <i>Yogan Pillay, Deputy Director General, Department of Health, South Africa</i>
18:50-19:35	Translating HIV Success into Improved TB control and Beyond <i>Moderator: Hannah Kikaya, Editor, Strengthening Health Systems</i> Panellists: Learning from the Past at Policy Level <i>Yogan Pillay, Deputy Director General, Department of Health South Africa</i> Strengthening the Evidence Base for Intervention <i>Emanuel Njeuhmeli, Senior Biomedical Prevention Advisor, USAID</i> The Role of Implementing Partners <i>Bada Pharasi, South Africa Country Representative, MSH</i> Advocacy for Implementation of Lessons Learnt <i>Maree Nutt, RESULTS International Australia</i>
19:35-19:55	Question and Answer Session <i>Moderator: Patrick Osewe, World Bank</i>
19:55-20:00	Strengthening Health Systems Launch <i>Introduced by Hannah Kikaya</i>
20:00-20:30	Networking and Drinks Reception

was established to provide a mechanism for global and inter-disciplinary learning through the generation and sharing of evidence-based knowledge to solve complex development problems. Knowledge Hub events provide a forum for high-value knowledge exchange by facilitating presentation sessions and panel discussions on issues of direct relevance to policy making and providing opportunities for international and inter-disciplinary networking.

About Strengthening Health Systems

Strengthening Health Systems is a new international peer-reviewed, open-access journal that is committed to supporting the publication of the totality of health systems knowledge, and by doing so, to bridge the divides between research, policy and implementation. A priority for the journal is to support non-academics in the health systems community to publish their work; to forge closer links between academic groups, policy makers and implementing organisations; and to help develop new, robust techniques for knowledge exchange that strengthen the scientific record for health systems interventions. Through these endeavours, the journal intends to support a robust evidence base for health system decision making by governments, development partners and implementing organisations.