

Strengthening Capacity for conducting systematic reviews in Low & Middle Income Countries: Mistra-EviEM and the Global Evidence Synthesis Initiative (GESI)

Policies of international agencies emphasized on investing in developing capacity to do and use research in research institutes based in Low and Middle-Income countries (LMICs) (DFID, 2008; WHO, 2008). Building capacity locally facilitates the connections between researchers and policymakers, creates the feeling of ownership and enhances uptake in decision making of the research evidence (Innvær, Vist, Trommald, & Oxman, 2002).

Oliver et. Al, (Oliver, 2015), found in their rapid appraisal on capacity building for systematic reviews in LMICs, that the imbalance between high in come countries and LMICs in this capacity was mostly due to the lack of resources in LMICs. Moreover, challenges to strengthening this capacity in LMICs were on the different levels (individual, team, institutional, and system), and included the language barrier, the absence of knowledge management and knowledge communication, and only few efforts to enhance the demand for systematic reviews and to link systematic reviewers with stakeholders.

Mistra EviEM and the Global Evidence Synthesis Initiative (GESI) are collaborating to hold joint capacity building activities when possible in these countries.

Mistra EviEM is a core-funded project with the main aim of synthesising environmental evidence on specific topics relating to the Swedish environment. Along with conducting systematic reviews and maps, EviEM has become a world leader in evidence synthesis training, giving recent workshops in low and middle income countries. The EviEM training team recognises that this capacity building is vital for appropriate evidence-informed decision making in these contexts.

GESI aims to increase the capacity to undertake cross-disciplinary research syntheses by supporting evidence synthesis centers in LMICs. GESI is interested in building capacity in trans-sectoral evidence synthesis, i.e., covering different sectors of public practice and policy and public service delivery, including but not limited to agriculture, crime and justice, economic development, education, food security, health and healthcare, hygiene, social protection and water sanitation. The secretariat has built a Network of established Evidence Synthesis Centers in LMICs to enhance collaboration and encourage sharing knowledge and experience. The Network currently consists of 37 Centers from 24 LMICs: Argentina, Bangladesh (2), Brazil, Cameroon (2), China, Columbia (3), Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana (2), India (3), Iran, Jamaica, Kenya, Lebanon, Malaysia (2), Mexico, Nigeria (2), Rwanda, South Africa (6), Tanzania, Uganda (2) & Zimbabwe. The Network serves as a platform for its Centers to share expertise and experiences and to facilitate collaborations between them. In addition, GESI will work to attract funders interested in supporting the Network Centers.

In June 2017, Dr. Neal Haddaway from the Mistra-EviEM led on a workshop organized by the GESI Secretariat at the American University of Beirut, which

focused on “the use of evidence synthesis in the environmental field, and the concept of systematic maps”. Participants were from environmental and health backgrounds. To increase accessibility to the sessions, we used the GESI social media platforms to live-stream.

Moreover, during the Global Evidence Summit in Cape Town, September 2017, Dr. Biljana Macura presented on the perspective of the environmental field as part of the workshop regarding “building capacity in conducting systematic reviews”, that was organized by GESI, in collaboration with the Centre for Systematic Reviews in Health Policy & Systems Research (SPARK) and the Eppi-Centre. After that, participants were asked to reflect on how they can implement similar efforts in their institutions, and to discuss potential challenges.

References

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