Increasing access to health coverage requires stronger health systems

Global symposium provides evidence on ways to expand health care to most vulnerable

19 November, 2010, Montreux, Switzerland: A call for a new international society for health systems research, knowledge and innovation concluded the 4 day meeting being held this week on health systems. More than 1 200 experts from around the globe came together for the first time here. They proclaimed a new era for health systems research to become an established "third pole" of medical research, complementing biomedical and clinical research.

A new analysis by John-Arne Røttingen of the Norwegian Knowledge Centre for the Health Services showed that health systems research, while growing, is still on average only 10% of total health research, and of that, only about 10% is led by scientists in the countries where the most serious system problems are â€“ the low and middle income countries.

The cry for country ownership and developing the capacity to create better systems was a main focus at the symposium. High out-of-pocket expenses and lack of access to quality health care, drugs, vaccines, health care workers and facilities are critical barriers in most developing countries.

The symposium was organized by the World Health Organization, the Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases (TDR), the Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research, the Special Programme of Research, Development and Research Training in Human Reproduction (HRP), and the Global Forum for Health Research, in partnership with more than 20 other major funders, demonstrating the growing interest and support for this field.

Symposium organizers are planning future events to build on the momentum created at this meeting, and to carve out stronger and more numerous research methods and studies. The World Health Organization's Assistant Director-General of Health Systems and Services Carissa Etienne said in her concluding remarks, "We must move quickly to bridge the divides, to build capacity and to invest in health systems research in low and middle income countries." She said she looked forward to future meetings, when health systems research has helped more women access antenatal care, and more children to live beyond their first years.
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On the symposium website at www.hsr-symposium.org:
Concluding symposium statement, videos and PowerPoint presentations of all plenary sessions, blogs, news coverage during the week, background papers, and more.

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