

Research

Background

Research is necessary to create a better understanding of the underlying mechanisms that cause the needs and, (health) problems of individuals and communities living in complex circumstances as fragile states and low income countries. Research in this context needs to be participative, action and solution oriented to produce the options for action and the evidence for specific interventions. The production of evidence is only the first step towards the application and implementation of sound health policies. Research within HealthNet TPO is also used to develop procedures to translate knowledge in activities that change health policies.

Evidence based interventions

HealthNet TPO defines the development and implementation of evidence-based interventions for public health in the realm of post-conflict and complex emergency situations as its core business. Implementing programmes and conducting research are therefore narrowly linked. The process is best described as a 'cybernetic loop' that integrates research outcomes as feedback into the programmes. Research is part and parcel of basically all HealthNet TPO activities, as research is implemented to prepare, support and evaluate interventions. Some research activities are a fully funded integral part of programme implementation. Other research is funded separately, and is done on the basis of monitoring and evaluation data by us or in collaboration with academic partners. Research is also undertaken as an individually funded activity or conducted by partners under the umbrella/aegis of HealthNet TPO or as a partner in a consortium of research groups and other organizations.

Objectives

The main objective of research within HealthNet TPO is the focus on development of and increase effective interventions, knowledge and expertise. A second objective of research within HealthNet TPO is related to monitoring and evaluation of the field activities. A consolidated monitoring and evaluation design is part of any proposal for a field activity and allows implementing the data collection that is required to serve the ongoing project, enrich future project cycles, and add to a wider set of research questions, like improvement, quality control and efficiency of the intervention techniques. Last but not least, HealthNet TPO uses (publications of) research to promote its expertise and position in the field among other experts and professionals.

Methodologies

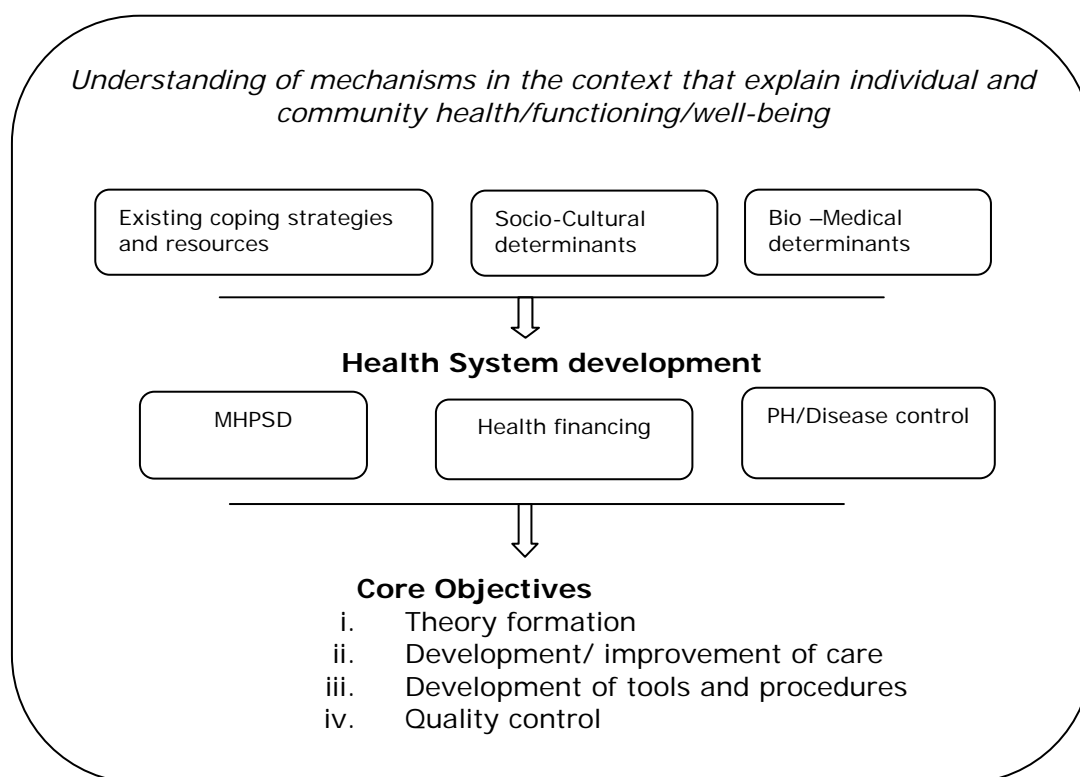
HealthNet TPO stresses the importance of both operational and academic research in order to address the above-mentioned objectives. HealthNet TPO uses methodologies from several relevant disciplines (eg social sciences, medical sciences/epidemiology and economic sciences). In doing so we employ a variety of qualitative and quantitative research methods, including (but not limited to), case studies, process evaluations, treatment efficacy studies, treatment mechanisms and processes research.

The choice of the methodology will be dictated by the overall goal: the development of effective, evidence based interventions. Some of the traditional types of research that apply strict scientific procedures have long term or indirect effects on projects. Other types of research, eg action research can yield effect in a short time span. Depending on the research subject and the preferred methodology, the 'loop' of applying results in implementation design may take anything between days, weeks, months and years.

We aim to gain in-depth understanding of local resources, capacities, beliefs and needs, as well as by monitoring the effect and applying academic research; we build the evidence base to disseminate successful models. Accordingly, HealthNet TPO has lead and participated in multidisciplinary academic research projects and has performed research within service-oriented projects and programs.

Research Themes

HealthNet TPO's present research programme covers a range of research activities within the different operational themes (eg health system development, disease control, health financing, public health and mental health and psychosocial distress). The general main objective of the current research programme is to link the burden of disease with biological and social determinants in relation to (development of) interventions, (cost-) effectiveness and (possibilities of) financing (see scheme).



More specific objectives

- Identification of individual and community indicators to describe and define the relationships between health and context;
- Identification of individual and community mechanisms to describe and define health (status), functioning and wellbeing;
- Exploring Individual and communities' perspectives: from health beliefs, help seeking behavior, to perceptions of what health care should deliver;
- Implementation of state-of-the-art knowledge in local, culturally informed research designs and applications;
- Integration of relevant sectors that promote or sustain health – eg livelihood empowerment, education, advocacy, health system development and health economics;
- Exploring and defining interactions of themes from the major domains: health financing, disease control, mental health and psycho-social well-being, mother and child health.

In addition, the overall perspective of the research programme anticipates on ongoing and future issues:

- Need for quality improvement of current project activities;
- Development and implementation of activities within the framework of MFS II;
- Collaboration with other organizations.

Community Mobilization

- Understanding of community mechanisms that contribute to strengthening resilience and healing;
- Exploring existing resources and coping strategies that help communities recover from warfare and rebuild their lives and society;
- Development of research tools and methods for collection and analyzing of data.

Socio-cultural mechanisms and determinants of health

- Exploring contextual factors of (mental) health and social functioning, including the erosion of (social) support structures, poverty, violence and structural (gender-based) injustice;
- Exploring connections between and integration of (mental) health and non-health sectors, including human rights and poverty alleviation;
- Exploring effects of community-based services, resources and processes on individual and community health;
- Development of research tools and methods for collection and analyzing of data.

Public health and disease control

- Epidemiological research into the occurrence of diseases and risk factors for diseases;
- Effectiveness of existing and new health practices and health programmes;
- Community perceptions related to health problems and health services.

Mental health and psychosocial support

- Development and (process) evaluation of implementation, organization and financing of context-appropriate care packages/ systems for vulnerable populations in fragile states;
- Exploration and evaluation of treatment and support mechanisms and processes for mental health and psychosocial problems;
- The integration and up-scaling of mental health in primary health care in fragile states;
- Exploring mental health status and subsequent risk and protective factors of populations in post disasters and complex emergencies;
- Long-term preventive effect of resilience-promoting and community-mobilization interventions;
- Evidence building of specific interventions or treatments; i.e. substance abuse treatment; mother and child care (psychosocial aspects).

Health financing

- Exploring local perceptions and beliefs of health, help seeking behaviour and explanatory models of health in public services and health financing models;
- Exploring user perspectives in public services and health financing models;
- Exploring community/contextual perspectives in public services and health financing models;
- Development of subjective indicators for assessment of impact and effectiveness of health financing models.