

Health Economic and Modeling Unit (HEMU) Capacity Building Workshops: Achievements and Challenges

Overview

The Health Economic and Modeling Unit (HEMU) capacity-building workshops have successfully enhanced participants' knowledge and technical skills in health economics, evaluation, and modeling. These trainings contributed to strengthening local capacity by equipping participants with practical tools to conduct economic analyses and health evaluations within their respective institutions and countries.

Achievements

The workshops have demonstrated significant success in developing participants' competencies and confidence in applying economic and evaluation frameworks. In many cases, participants have advanced to higher-level positions following their engagement in HEMU training, reflecting the value of the skills gained. The overall effectiveness of these workshops highlights their contribution to institutional strengthening and the expansion of health economic capacity across regions.

Challenges

(1) Communication and Language Barriers

One of the most prominent challenges encountered during the workshops involved communication difficulties arising from language differences between trainers and participants.

- **China:**
One-on-one translation using local interpreters was implemented. While this approach ensured that messages were accurately relayed, it significantly extended the duration of training sessions and often disrupted the flow of instruction. Furthermore, the accuracy of interpretation depended heavily on the translators' understanding of technical terminology and the level of trust between the trainers and translators.
- **Mexico:**
Simultaneous translation was employed, allowing participants to listen to the presentation in real time through headsets. Although this approach improved efficiency, it introduced delays during discussions, as trainers needed to pause to listen to translated questions before providing responses. This reduced spontaneity and limited two-way interaction.

(2) Cultural Considerations

Cultural differences also influenced workshop dynamics and participant engagement. The training team observed that expectations regarding trainer–participant interactions varied across regions. In some cultures, questioning instructors is perceived as a sign of disrespect, whereas in others it indicates interest and comprehension. These differing norms affected the level of participation and openness during sessions.

Additionally, variations in workday structures—such as extended tea breaks, lunch hours, and differing start and end times—impacted scheduling and delivery. Recognizing and adapting to these cultural factors proved essential to maintaining engagement and achieving training objectives.

(3) Sustainability of Capacity Building

While the workshops effectively enhanced individual participants' technical expertise, sustaining this capacity within organizations presented challenges. In several cases, participants who demonstrated strong performance and gained new skills were subsequently promoted to leadership or managerial roles. Although this advancement underscores program success, it often left vacancies in the technical positions the training was intended to strengthen.

Furthermore, knowledge transfer to new or incoming staff was not always systematic. As a result, recurring requests for additional training and consultation with HEMU were observed, suggesting a need for mechanisms to institutionalize skills retention and mentorship within participating organizations.

(4) Ongoing Support and Communication Limitations

Maintaining consistent post-training communication and technical support has also been challenging. HEMU team members balance multiple responsibilities, making continuous follow-up difficult. While email remains the primary mode of correspondence, it is often inadequate for addressing complex modeling issues that require real-time discussion, such as verifying data inputs, formula calculations, or model configurations.

Face-to-face interaction has proven to be the most effective method for resolving these technical challenges and ensuring the successful completion of country-specific projects. However, logistical and resource constraints limit the feasibility of regular in-person consultations.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

- (1) **Enhance Translation Support:** Develop a standardized glossary of key health economic terms to ensure consistent and accurate translation across languages.
- (2) **Cultural Adaptation Planning:** Incorporate a cultural orientation session for trainers to align facilitation styles with regional norms and expectations.
- (3) **Knowledge Retention Strategies:** Encourage countries to adopt a “train-the-trainer” model or mentorship system to ensure continuity of expertise following staff turnover or promotion.
- (4) **Hybrid Support Mechanisms:** Explore virtual collaboration platforms that allow for live modeling support, document sharing, and troubleshooting to supplement face-to-face interactions.
- (5) **Structured Follow-Up:** Establish a follow-up plan or periodic check-ins post-training to assess application of skills and provide targeted technical assistance.