



STORIES OF CHANGE

EFFORTS OF THE ETHIOPIAN KNOWLEDGE TRANSLATION TEAM TO EXPAND THE REACH OF RAPID REVIEWS TO NON-HEALTH SECTORS

Contributors: Firmaye Bogale, Mamuye Hadis, Sabit Ababor, Tesfaye Dagne, and Tsegaye Getachew

The introduction of Rapid Reviews (RRs) to the social sector beyond health has been one of the focus areas for the Knowledge Translation (KT) team at the Ethiopian Public Health Institute (EPHI). For years, the KT team has been at the forefront of evidence synthesis and Evidence-Informed Decision-Making (EIDM), offering rapid review services to support public health decisions. However, extending these efforts to other sectors has proven more challenging. The limited success outside the health sector is not from a lack of effort but rather due to challenges in engaging sectors unfamiliar with rapid reviews and the EIDM process. Previously, the KT team had attempted to build the evidence synthesis and RR production capacity of researchers and policymakers within the social sector by engaging the Plan and Development Ministry in Ethiopia. Yet, these efforts were limited due to resource constraints to push the level of co-production further. As a result, much of the capacity-building was focused on a theoretical understanding rather than practical, hands-on experience, limiting the depth and breadth of stakeholder engagement.

The East African Regional Evidence Support Initiative (EARES), has allowed the Ethiopian team to revitalize the introduction of RRs to the social sector. There are two reasons that allow for this reintroduction: a) additional funding from the LEEPS partnership has given resources to engage with other sectors, and b) the focus on gender within EIP allows the work to be multisectoral, specifically giving an entry point to stakeholders like the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs.

The Ethiopian Public Health Institute (EPHI) is part of the East African Regional Evidence Synthesis Initiative (EARES), established by the Centre for Rapid Evidence Synthesis (ACRES).

Working in Ethiopia, Malawi, Tanzania, and Uganda, the initiative aims to accomplish the following objectives:

- Develop an evidence base to support priority SDG and development sector policy questions in reproductive health and clean energy
- Cultivate the next generation of EIP leaders in the region
- Build new, and strengthen existing, evidence units in delivering responsive and timely evidence for priority development sector policy-making processes in reproductive health and clean energy, through innovative methods, including the rapid response service

Policymakers gained new insights and information from the Rapid Response Brief, enhancing their understanding of the issue and potential solutions. The forum discussed the different options in the RRB and opted to trial with one of the identified strategies; the use of letter reminders to the women that come to the HIV clinic. The letter reminders are personalized to the recipient and written by a doctor or medical officer at the HIV clinic reminding the lady of the importance of HPV screening and requesting them to schedule an appointment for the screening. The local governments are currently designing the implementation guidelines of this strategy and planning for its logistical needs for a successful implementation.

So far, the joint activities by the KT team at EPHI and decision makers from the Ministry of Plan and Development, Ministry of Gender and Social Affairs, Oromia Health Bureau, Addis Ababa City Health Bureau, and Family Guidance Association (FGA) among other researchers from universities and research institutes included a priority setting exercise on policy/decision questions on reproductive health and gender. Participant reflections highlighted the significance of introducing rapid reviews, as demonstrated by comments such as “... *honestly, I wasn't aware that such a service and product existed, and we have many questions we could apply rapid reviews to...*”. One should note that; these efforts must be tailored to the specific needs and contexts of each sector to ensure its effectiveness.

The renewed efforts have been further improved from previous engagements by allowing some stakeholders to go beyond just training and be involved in co-producing RRs. This has marked a point in paving the way for a more structured and strategic approach to integrating RRs across different sectors.



Two priority RRs have just been developed, with a specific focus on gender and reproductive health; areas that are vital for both social and health outcomes:

1. Challenges and opportunities female entrepreneurs face in Ethiopia
2. The role of social media in access and utilization of reproductive health services

The development of these two rapid reviews are crucial in addressing the challenges on the ground and questions of decision-makers. Moreover, they will demonstrate the value of rapid reviews in the social sectors that will foster discussions around the standardization and system integration of EIDM.