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Summary

On 6th May 2016, SHARE convened two sessions at the 14th International Federation of Environmental Health (IFEH) World Congress on Environmental Health held in Lilongwe, Malawi. In the morning SHARE and the African Institute for Development Policy (AFIDEP) co-convened a plenary session entitled 'Role of WASH Research in Policy and Programme Development', and in the afternoon the Malawi Epidemiology and Intervention Research Unit (MEIRU), SHARE, and WASHTED (University of Malawi - Polytechnic) co-convened a parallel session entitled 'Tackling Undernutrition Through WASH'.

The Plenary: Role of WASH Research in Policy and Programme Development

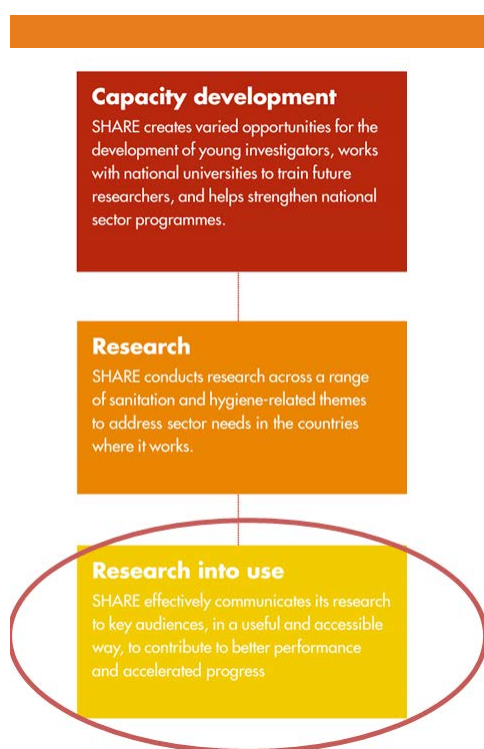
Setting the scene for the third day of the **Congress**, this session explored the importance of undertaking relevant in-country research, and using research in the development of evidence-based policy and programme development.



The panellists

The session was opened by Dr Abiba Longwe, Knowledge Translation Manager at **AFIDEP**, who presented on integrating evidence from research into policymaking. First she outlined several barriers that should be considered when seeking to ensure that research is translated into practice, specifically: poor packaging and communication/dissemination of evidence to decision makers, no clear institutional framework (e.g. no guidelines) for guiding research and data use, and incomplete and/or poorly analysed routine data.

Then Dr Longwe highlighted the emerging opportunities for increased research uptake in Malawi and further afield, such as getting involved in policymakers' activities (e.g. technical working groups) and partnering with policymakers in research projects. For example, AFIDEP recently partnered with the **United Nations Population Fund** (UNFPA) to support the Government of Malawi in assessing the country's prospects of harnessing the demographic dividend and exploring the policy options that the Government could adopt within the context of Malawi's long-term development plans; read more about this [here](#). She closed by emphasising the need to be clear from the outset on the change being sought and how policymakers will use the evidence generated to inform/deliver this change.



This is very much the approach SHARE adopts and as such her presentation nicely set the scene for the second presentation - delivered by Erin Flynn, Policy Research Manager, and Emily Balls, Monitoring and Evaluation Officer (both at SHARE) - which provided an overview of SHARE and the changes it is trying to achieve globally and within Malawi.

First Erin outlined SHARE's aim - to contribute to achieving universal access to effective, sustainable and equitable sanitation and hygiene by generating, synthesizing and translating evidence to improve policy

and practice worldwide - and its current **body of research** being conducted under Phase II (2015-2018).

Next Erin and Emily highlighted that in order to contribute to better performance and accelerated progress, SHARE communicates its research to key audiences through a '**Research into Use**' approach - which sees research being translated into targeted policy briefs, reports, blogs, news stories, newsletters, practitioner manuals and training guides, and subsequently disseminated - and tracks its progress through an outcome mapping process which is participatory and inclusive.

Emily concluded by highlighting the challenges to measuring an organisation's impact on achieving universal access to sustainable and equitable sanitation and hygiene, specifically: the difficulty of ascertaining policy influence from qualitative data, the time lag between research and policy or practice influence, and the challenge of quantifying/isolating the impact of one organisation's

(i.e. SHARE's) contribution in the context of a complex programme with multiple actors.

Attended by more than 100 delegates, the two presentations were followed by a lively question and answer session with the presenters.

The Parallel Session: Tackling Undernutrition Through WASH

This two-hour session brought together key stakeholders from Malawi's WASH and nutrition sectors to:

1. Highlight evidence supporting the integration of WASH into nutrition policies, plans and programmes;
2. Showcase successful examples of WASH and nutrition integration;
3. Report on the new SHARE-funded research project in Malawi, which is expanding the evidence base in this field.

Attended by more than 30 government officials, donors, and international and local academics and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the session comprised of five presentations followed by an expert panel discussion. Chaired by Professor Moffat Nyirenda, Director of [MEIRU](#), the presenters/panellists included:

- Erin Flynn, Policy Research Manager at SHARE
- Holystone Kafanikhale, Principal Environmental Health Officer at the Ministry of Health and National Coordinator of the Open Defecation Free Taskforce
- Emma Mbalame, Deputy Director of Water Supply at the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation & Water Development
- Lucy Mungoni, WASH Specialist at [USAID's Malawi](#) Country Office
- Kondwani Chidziwisano, SHARE Fellow at the [University of Malawi - Polytechnic](#)

Presentations

Erin Flynn kicked off the session by providing an **overview of the WASH-nutrition nexus**. Key to her presentation was a focus on the research gap linking the impact of integrated nutrition and WASH intervention programmes on the long term nutritional status of children. She concluded by emphasising that nutrition-specific interventions cannot alone adequately address the current deficit in nutritional outcomes, adding that global efforts will require a more comprehensive and ambitious approach, including the scale-up of high-impact interventions with greater focus on the “window of opportunity” or first 1000 days of life (from conception to a child's second birthday), after which the damage is largely irreversible.

Next **Emma Mbalame** summarised the **current status of WASH and related policies** implemented to date to achieve the sanitation targets of the Sustainable Development Goals, Malawi's Vision 2020 and Malawi's Growth Development Strategies (I and II), and outlined the importance of integrating nutrition in sanitation and hygiene activities. She emphasised the need to: utilise evidence-based research for advocacy and to increase understanding of the WASH-nutrition linkages; strengthen the enabling environment for WASH and nutrition integration at various administrative levels and with donors; allow nutrition evidence to influence WASH targeting; and develop an effective monitoring and evaluation framework. However, Emma also highlighted that as a Government Ministry, there is not much that has been implemented on the ground to integrate WASH and nutrition due to a lack of guiding sections in policy supporting integration. Similarly, little to no research has been done in Malawi to demonstrate the relationship between sanitation, nutrition and food hygiene. She concluded by emphasising that going forward policymakers need to take into consideration the linkages between WASH and nutrition when devising sustainable policies and strategies.

Holystone Kafanikhale then delivered a presentation on the **Ministry of Health's perspective on WASH and nutrition integration**. He explained that although there has been progress on increasing sanitation coverage nationally, the Ministry of Health has not fully utilised different opportunities to integrate nutrition and WASH in its activities due to the lack of supporting policies. For instance, he mentioned the lost opportunity to integrate WASH in community nutrition counselling and promotion activities.

Next **Lucy Mungoni** spoke about **USAID's experiences of integrating WASH and nutrition in its programming** through the development of two strategies for Malawi that promote WASH and nutrition integration and emphasise the need for co-locating interventions, coordinating and collaborating better within partners. Informed by USAID's global Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Strategy (2014-2025) and Water and Development Strategy (2013-2018), the Malawi nutrition strategy highlights the importance of WASH for nutritional improvements and calls for increased coordination of WASH and nutrition activities, while the water and development strategy aims to save lives and advance development through improvements in WASH programmes and the sound management and use of water for food security and good nutrition.

She explained that, with the Government and other partners, USAID has already rolled out the two strategies through activities such as **Njira**, **UBALE** (United in Building and Advancing Life Expectations), **Tiwalere** (Orphans and Vulnerable Children Programme) and **IMPACT**. Lucy concluded by demonstrating that through such initiatives some significant lessons have been learned. For example, developing a coherent behavioural change strategy - with long-term focus - maximises results and can foster innovation. Likewise, integrating WASH and nutrition in communities reinforces adoption of preventive practices.

Finally, Kondwani Chidziwisano provided an update on a **three-year SHARE-funded study** being conducted in collaboration with MEIRU which seeks to determine the effectiveness of combining WASH and food hygiene interventions on the incidence of diarrhoeal disease in children under the age of five. The study will entail developing, implementing and evaluating an integrated community-based WASH and food hygiene intervention in Chikwawa District, Malawi. It is designed as a randomised control trial (with two treatment groups and a control group) and, as well as being informed by formative research, will build on **previous successful SHARE projects**. Further information is available here and/or in Appendix 1.

Panel discussion

Prof Nyirenda expertly facilitated an insightful panel discussion during which session participants raised some very interesting questions about the presentations and provided valuable feedback on the new SHARE study in Malawi with the view to increasing its effectiveness. Core issues arising in relation to the latter included:

- The importance of ensuring other ongoing/planned WASH-related interventions in the study (implemented by NGOs or the Government) do not interfere with the SHARE study/intervention.
 - Tracy Morse, Research Fellow with the University of Strathclyde and SHARE's National Coordinator in Malawi, commented that the research team is part of a larger network of researchers and NGOs working in the Chikwawa region and, to remove external sources of bias, the research team will ensure that there are no other research or implementation activities taking place concurrently within the Traditional Authorities in which the proposed SHARE study will take place.
- The need to clearly define 'improved sanitation' - which, to date, has not been clearly defined in Malawi - as it is a key indicator for measuring the intervention's impact.
 - Kondwani commented that this issue has already been addressed by the research team insofar as the study will use the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme's definition of 'improved sanitation'.
- How communities participating in the study will be sensitised about the intervention. Might a 'care group model', as used by the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) initiative, be adopted? Furthermore, might there be opportunities to collaborate with other partners implementing awareness campaign activities (albeit on different issues) in Chikwawa District?
 - Tracy commented that we are currently entering the formative stage and that the project will be looking at all available models in Malawi. This will include meeting with existing and potential partners, field visits to other programmes, and ensuring that all interventions developed

will integrate with existing government led programmes to improve opportunities for scale up and sustainability.

- What the research team is doing to address the issue of ethics during implementation of the tested intervention.
 - Kondwani responded that the proposed research project is governed by the University of Malawi College of Medicine Research Ethics Committee's standard ethical approval processes (COMREC), i.e. the rights and welfare of individual participants (including children) will be upheld, and the interventions proposed will pose minimal risk to all participants and adhere to the principle of beneficence at all stages.
- The financial barriers to integrating WASH and nutrition activities given the tied-nature of donor funding (often resulting in these activities being separately funded).
 - Holystone explained that the Government is planning to review its WASH and nutrition policies and developing a strategy that would integrate the two issues and deliberately encourage donor partners and implementing agencies to consider WASH and nutrition as a one package.
 - Lucy mentioned that USAID has already started approaching the two issues as one because such integration saves resources and contributes effectively to the wellbeing of children.

All in all, the day was a great success. SHARE, and the SHARE-funded, MEIRU and **WASH TED**-run study more specifically, gained excellent exposure in a global setting and insightful discussions on the salience of WASH and nutrition integration took place.

Promisingly, momentum was strong at the national level for greater coordination, collaboration and integration between the two sectors in Malawi - particularly within a Government policy context - and some interesting examples of WASH-nutrition integration in practice were shared.

Event Feedback

We also received some very positive feedback in the event feedback forms (n=19), with 74% of respondents reporting they intended on applying their learning from the event and/or using the event materials in their work, and 90% of respondents reporting that the opportunities for learning new information and improving their knowledge at the event were excellent or good.

74%

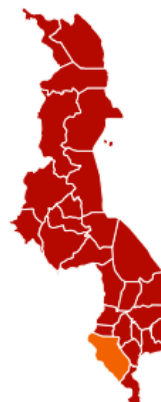
of respondents (n=19) think they will apply their learning from the event and/or use the event materials



Appendix 1: Infographic Illustrating SHARE Phase II Study in Malawi

New research: reducing diarrhoea in children under five in Malawi

Assessing the relative effectiveness of food hygiene and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) interventions in preventing diarrhoeal disease in U5s in Chikwawa District.



The situation

760,000 U5s die annually from diarrhoea



What we want to know

How effective are WASH and combined WASH and food hygiene interventions in reducing diarrhoea in U5s?



Research: Phase 1

Formative research - Chikwawa, Malawi

Design intervention



What we'll measure

1. Diarrhoea incidence
2. Change in no. of pathogens
3. Contamination pathways affected
4. Changes in household practices



Research: Phase 2

Cluster RCT: 20 clusters of 20 U5s from different households



Outputs

Journal papers
Toolkit
Training



Relevance

Show the impact of these methods on reducing diarrhoea & identify the pathways and causes



Find out more

www.sharerresearch.org

Produced by



The Sanitation and Hygiene Applied Research for Equity (SHARE) consortium contributes to achieving universal access to effective, sustainable and equitable sanitation and hygiene by generating, synthesising and translating evidence to improve policy and practice worldwide.



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Building knowledge. Improving the WASH sector.

The Sanitation and Hygiene Applied Research for Equity (SHARE) consortium seeks to contribute to achieving universal access to effective, sustainable and equitable sanitation and hygiene by generating, synthesising and translating evidence to improve policy and practice worldwide. Working with partners in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, two regions with historically low levels of sanitation, SHARE conducts high-quality and rigorous research and places great emphasis on capacity development and research uptake.

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