

**International Network for the continuous Demographic Evaluation of Populations and Their Health
in Low- and Middle Income Countries**

INDEPTH NETWORK

Strategic Plan 2013-2016



**Version: November 2012
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Strategic Plan outlines the work of the International Network for the Demographic Evaluation of Populations and Their Health (INDEPTH) for 2013-2016. It is informed by assessments of the Network's strengths, achievements and goals as well as external development priorities, scientific advances and the changing funding environment. Our mission remains unchanged: to harness the collective potential of the world's community-based longitudinal demographic surveillance initiatives in resource constrained countries to provide a better, empirical understanding of health and social issues, and to apply this understanding to alleviate major health and social problems. We will continue to pursue this mission through interlocking programs in research, policy engagement and research capacity strengthening.

Building on an extended strategic development process 2011/12, deliberated and confirmed at our Annual General Meeting in Hanoi, Vietnam in November 2012, as well as discussions with and polling of the range of internal and external stakeholders, an independent review funded by one of our anchor donors/funders, our strategy for 2013-2016 will focus on the three core business lines of the INDEPTH Network:

Research

- Perform research to quantify and understand the demographic and health transition in the developing world through longitudinal population-based demographic and cause of death data, and discover what works and at what cost by conducting intervention and policy impact evaluations.
- Develop standardized tools and approaches to capture, share and compare data across member centres.
- Play an active quality assurance role to strengthen the quality, relevance and effectiveness of the research produced by member institutions as well as of the Network.

Policy engagement and communication

- Tailor, package and direct research outputs as appropriate for different audiences and stakeholders to reduce the critical gap between research findings and action.

Capacity strengthening

- Grow the talent of promising and productive scientists in the INDEPTH member institutions and enhance members' capacity to conduct world-class research.

To execute on these core areas, our organizational and management strategy for the next four years, 2013-2016, will focus on four priorities:

- Working effectively as one Network
- Improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the key research development efforts, namely Working Groups
- Unlocking funding for INDEPTH operating organs
- Managing Network growth.

We have articulated our network Theory of Change to link our activities and outputs to health outcomes and impact. To track our collective performance we will develop SMART indicators at a Network level as well as at the level of each Network organ (Full and Associate Members, Working Groups and Interest Groups, Secretariat, Scientific Advisory Committee, and the Board of Trustees).

Table 1: Summary of INDEPTH's Strategy 2013-2016 (To complete)

Priorities	Strategy 2013-2016
Core business lines	
Research	<p>Perform research</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Enhance membership requirements regarding submission of basic 'core' dataset · Recruit Deputy Director or equivalent to be single contact for multi-site collaborations · Strengthen scientific capacity of the Secretariat <p>Develop standardized tools and approaches to capture, share and compare data across members</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Support creation of metadata · Increase cross-site comparability of analytic variables · Support data sharing with the international scientific community including iSHARE and INDEPTHStats <p>Play a quality assurance role</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Establish a Data Quality Inspection Team (as part of iSHARE2) · Provide a Resource Center for data assurance on website, and a data repository for Network datasets. <p>PolicyTailor research outputs as appropriate for different audiences and stakeholders to engagement and reduce the critical gap between research findings and action communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Fill Communications vacancy · Support Working Groups to tailor output for publication · Organize forums, meetings and briefings with key stakeholders · Participate in international conferences and agenda-setting meetings · Strengthen collaboration with national and regional entities focused on population and health · Assess existing policies and the policymaking environment, and make relevant recommendations <p>CapacityGrow the talent of scientists in Member Institutions as well as enhance the capacity strengthening of the institutions to conduct world class research</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Create and fill Capacity Strengthening Coordinator role · Develop a strategic capacity building program
Working as one Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Improve communications between member centres and INDEPTH organs · Leverage and adopt social networking applications · More frequent face to face meetings of Working Groups · Encourage and where possible support more direct exchange visits
Improving efficiency and effectiveness of the Network	<p>Focus on Working Groups as a critical vehicle for conducting multi-site research</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Strengthen guidelines for WG leaders and members (briefings accompanying data requests, project management support) · Resources for face-to-face meetings for data analysis and write ups · Capacity support to WGs e.g., research fellows, admin etc. · Regular evaluation and tracking of WG progress
Unlocking funding for INDEPTH operating organs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Grants for the Network organs including Secretariat, SAC, Board · Research grants for multi-site collaborations and Working Groups including principal investigators · Sponsorship for events e.g. AGM · Fee for service (training, AGM participation, field opportunities for students) · Membership/subscription fee for members
Managing Network growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Focus not so much on further expansion as on pursuing key activities that
Measure performance against Theory of Change	

INTRODUCTION

VISION, MISSION AND OBJECTIVES

Vision: “INDEPTH will be an international network of longitudinal demographic research institutions that provides health and demographic data to enable developing countries set health priorities and policies based on the best available evidence, and to guide the cost-effective use of tools, interventions and systems to ensure and monitor progress towards national goals.”

Mission: “To harness the world’s HDSSs bringing empirical understanding to bear on critical persisting and emerging health problems.”

Objectives

1. To support and strengthen the ability of INDEPTH member centres to conduct longitudinal health and demographic studies in defined populations.
 - a. Results-based objective: To increase knowledge generation on health and demographic surveillance systems in low- and middle-income countries by 2016
2. To facilitate the translation of INDEPTH findings to maximise impact on policy and practice.
 - a. Results-based objective: To increase the use of INDEPTH’s evidence-based recommendations by governments and other stakeholders in their decision making by 2016
3. To facilitate and support research capability strengthening relevant to INDEPTH activities.
 - a. Results-based objective: To increase the generation and use of knowledge by local researchers in low- and middle-income countries by 2016

Organisational Values

INDEPTH believes that better health information can lead to better health policy. All INDEPTH member centres have an unwavering commitment to:

- Research quality and evidence
- Knowledge and experience sharing
- Investing in the next generation of developing country scientists
- Accountability and transparency
- Team work and togetherness
- Acting as one unified entity.

ADDED VALUE OF INDEPTH

INDEPTH connects individual Health and Demographic Surveillance System (HDSS) field sites and their host centres to global health actors and policy-makers. We offer the international community high-quality research capacity for multi-site studies that make use of longitudinal population-based demographic datasets from INDEPTH member institutions. We support scientists at the individual member institutions to enhance the quality of their output through the exchange of experiences, expertise and data. We magnify the visibility and influence of the research findings and our member institutions by creating linkages with a broad range of relevant stakeholders. Our added value varies by type of stakeholder. Here we articulate the distinctions between our value proposition to members, policy-makers and health research funders.

Added value to member centres

- INDEPTH provides capacity strengthening and technical advice to its HDSS members
- INDEPTH promotes HDSS capability to regional and international institutions as well as national institutes such as statistics offices and universities
- INDEPTH attracts funding for multi-centre studies and evaluations and maintains funder relations
- INDEPTH co-ordinates and supports the conduct of multi-centre studies in a transparent manner
- INDEPTH publishes and disseminates results of multi-centre studies
- INDEPTH provides a forum for scientists from member institutions to interact with peers at other member institutions as well as with global health actors and policy-makers

Added value to policy-makers

- INDEPTH is a network of 47 high quality HDSS sites in 21 countries that offers policy-makers access to up-to-date health and demographic information and trends from a variety of contexts
- HDSS continuously monitor all individuals in a given area for births and deaths, causes of death, in- and out-migrations. This provides policy-makers with an accurate and detailed view of population demographics that is particularly important in contexts where national statistics are either lacking or weak
- This monitoring system also provides a platform for the design and evaluation of a wide range of social, economic, behavioral and health interventions and research studies

Added value to health research funders

- INDEPTH is an international platform that connects global health actors to up to 47 high quality HDSS sites in 21 countries
- The Network offers the research and development community a “one stop shop” for high quality health research capacity for multi-site studies that require longitudinal population-based demographic and epidemiological datasets
- The Secretariat based in Accra, Ghana offers a coordination function for multi-site initiatives and a single point of contact for research sponsors

THEORY OF CHANGE

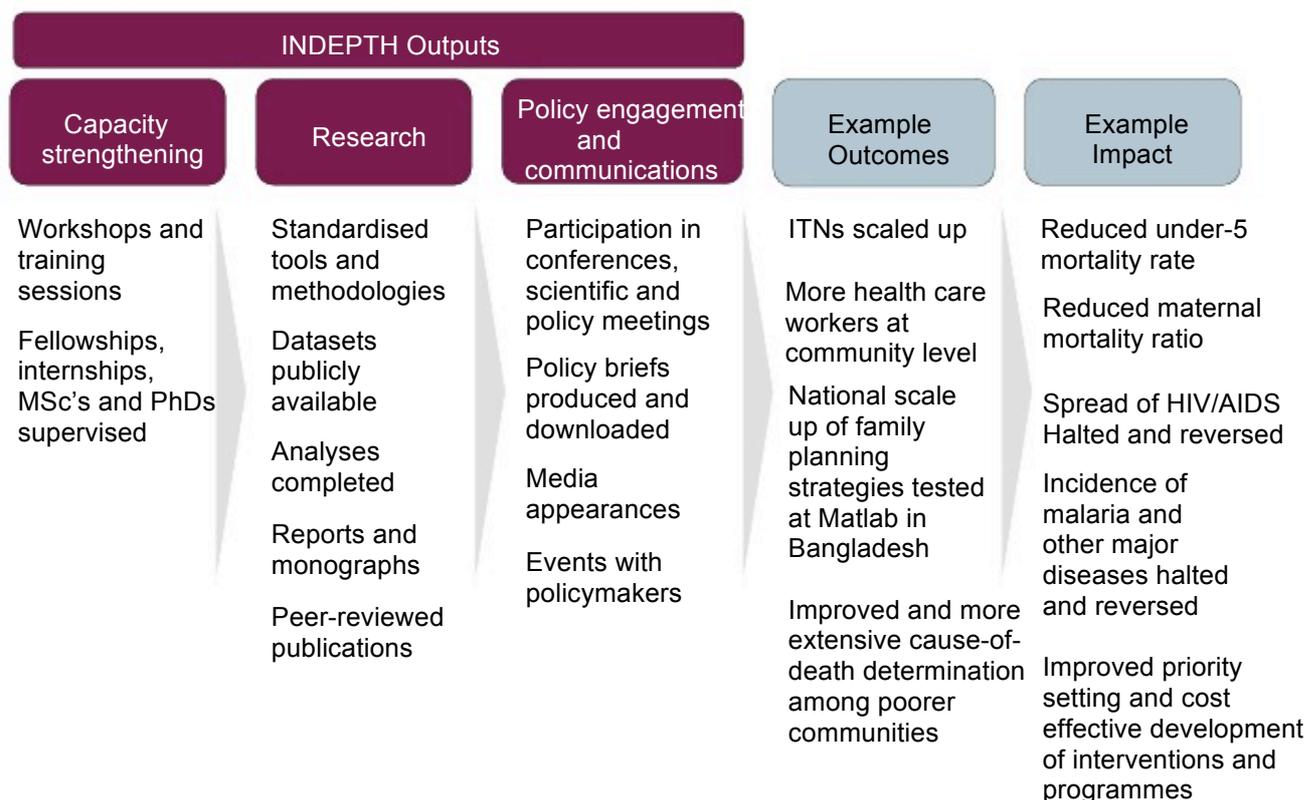
Each year, millions of people around the world die prematurely from preventable acute and chronic diseases. A contributing factor to this high burden of disease is the extreme lack of a reliable information base to support the identification, assessment and cost-effective prevention and treatment of disease and associated social issues in low and middle income countries. INDEPTH with its independent HDSS members provides a unique system for developing that reliable information base. However it is not enough to simply develop the information base when we know that much available evidence is not being used by policy-makers. The next phase of INDEPTH's development will therefore focus on both higher quality research outputs, and fostering the use of the evidence we generate.

A few recent highlights of recognized scientific and policy findings that have been developed, tested and demonstrated by HDSS members are:

- The effectiveness of Insecticide Treated Bed Nets (ITNs) in reducing the incidence of malaria mortality in West and East Africa
- The impact of deploying locally-based health-care workers on health outcomes in rural communities
- Family planning strategies tested at the Matlab centre have been adopted nationwide in Bangladesh
- A new WHO-endorsed instrument (InterVA-4) to rapidly assess cause-of-death by verbal autopsy in settings where a medical diagnosis is often not available or frankly absent.

While the outcomes INDEPTH seeks to support will not be directly attributable to INDEPTH's efforts alone, it is worth articulating the path through which INDEPTH's data and research responds to key health and social problems. This Strategic Plan takes us to 2016, the year succeeding the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). INDEPTH was founded in 1998 and incorporated in 2002, the period when the MDGs were adopted. The health-related MDGs are therefore a relevant though not exhaustive benchmark for the role and impact that INDEPTH seeks to achieve. As the health transition takes hold and the burden of disease changes, so will the health outcomes and impact INDEPTH seeks to achieve. This Theory of Change will therefore be dynamic and subject to changes in future periods.

Figure 2: INDEPTH Theory of Change



In the next four years, this overall Theory of Change will be decentralised to all organs of the Network, allowing each to articulate clearly how its individual activities link to outcomes and impact in their target areas. Doing so will result not only in the ability to measure performance and progress, but will also support cohesion within the Network where all stakeholders are aware of roles, responsibilities and expectations and accountable to each other. For Working Groups, we expect this will mean a sharper definition of research question being tackled as well as outlining the pathway to policy change once conclusive evidence is gathered. For the Board, it will mean focusing on which type of Network investments (in time and resources) should be prioritised and why. The Secretariat, as the custodian of the Network's Theory of Change, will facilitate and manage this process.

The global health community is increasingly recognizing the importance of evaluation, evidence collection and knowledge and more generation to complement the massive scale-up in global health investments seen over the past decade. Research is needed to improve the quality of decision making, enhance efficiency and build capacity for understanding why some programmes work better than others. INDEPTH, by articulating how its activities can help bring about change, will be in a much strengthened position to drive this agenda for health data as one of the few truly global South-led organisations.

SITUATION ASSESSMENT

INDEPTH is a Network of health and demographic surveillance institutions based in low- and middle-income countries that was set up by its member centres in 1998 to raise our research productivity by sharing experience and skills and undertaking multi-centre research projects, as well as to create a platform for engagement beyond our individual HDSS institutions. This vision has proved relevant and INDEPTH has made effective progress toward these goals over the past decade. Nevertheless, far more needs to be done to increase the quantity and quality of the research based on the HDSS data. We will therefore be making adjustments to INDEPTH's structures and working procedures to enable us to function more efficiently and to measurably increase our scientific and policy impact.

This is the **fourth strategic plan** of the INDEPTH Network and covers the **four years from January 2013 to December 2016**. In the first decade since our formal incorporation in 2002 we have established ourselves as a widely recognised credible Southern-led Network that is able to co-ordinate an extensive programme of cross-centre research and capacity development activities and manage sizeable budgets. We have benefited from strong leadership and have been largely successful at managing tensions that inevitably arise within any Network that controls substantial funds by operating in a transparent, accountable and democratic manner. We have helped to legitimise HDSS as an invaluable source of health research and information. Yet while our research capacity has extended, our policy engagement and capacity building budgets have not developed commensurately.

Our Network is made up of five operating organs:

- i) Full and Associate Members
- ii) Working Groups and Interest Groups
- iii) The Secretariat
- iv) Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC)
- v) Board of Trustees (Board)

Each organ has its strengths and challenges, opportunities and threats, which are summarised below.

i) **Full and Associate Members**

Each INDEPTH member institution is independently run and managed by its local team of scientists. Over the past decade, we have made significant progress in growing this Network by attracting member centres of different sizes and different strengths from across LMICs.

Over the coming four years, we will focus on enabling this membership to become a truly unified and functional entity, facilitated through knowledge and expertise sharing, as well as developing and applying common approaches and harmonising and standardising data to allow for effective aggregation, analysis and comparison. The primary focus of our strategy will therefore be to improve the **quality of HDSS research and analysis** generated by our member centres through standardised tools and approaches to collect, capture, archive, document, share and compare data across member centres. We will ensure a strategic **capacity-strengthening programme** that grows talent, address clear and analytic bottlenecks, and is embedded in a general strategy of knowledge and expertise sharing.

To do so, we will enhance our membership requirements to include core elements such as submission of a basic data set for inclusion in INDEPTHStats. These requirements are summarised in Figure 3 below. For those member centres that are not able to fulfill these criteria, dedicated support will be provided as the Network is fundamentally strengthened by additional and well-functioning full member centres.

Figure 3: Two tiers of INDEPTH membership with different requirements and benefits

	Full INDEPTH Members	Associate INDEPTH Members
Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing and pooling of core HDSS data • Leverage own expertise, capacity and capability to strengthen other INDEPTH members and associate members • Commitment to supporting the further strengthening of the Network and its member institutions • Acknowledge INDEPTH's contributions to own work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay annual subscription fee • Commitment to supporting the further strengthening of the Network including capacity, expertise and data sharing where possible • If an HDSS site, active progress towards becoming a full INDEPTH member • Acknowledge INDEPTH's contributions to own work
Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priority in scientific and capacity building activities (including management capacity building) • Can anchor a Working Group • Subsidized AGM attendance • Voting rights at AGM 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in scientific and capacity building activities if appropriate and space allows • Participate in Working Groups but at least one full member centre in each WG to anchor it • Attend AGM but generally at own cost

ii) Working Groups and Interest Groups

Working Groups (WGs) are a critical vehicle through which the Network performs its scientific activities and addresses priority issues. Each WG evolves from being an Interest Group which focuses on a specific research topic or project or programme that has been identified as of priority interest, and on which a number of member centres wish to work collaboratively. Working Group members are drawn from full members and associate members, the Secretariat and the Scientific Advisory Committee. Partnerships with leading scientists or institutions elsewhere are also possible.

Collaborating with others in addition to one's "day job" is always challenging, and interactions with members have at times been difficult. Centre participants are typically not directly compensated for their contributions to a Working Group. However, the benefits accrued can be significant, from specific training and learning opportunities, through being part of groundbreaking research that is beyond one's typical domain, to publications in top tier global health or development journals.

Over the next half decade, particular effort will be made to **improve the effectiveness and efficiency** of these interactions. Where possible and necessary, guidelines, training, funding and administrative support through satellite secretariats will be provided to WGs to boost their productivity. INDEPTH already has high-functioning examples of this: the Secretariat for the INDEPTH Effectiveness and Safety Studies of Antimalarials in Africa is stretched between Accra, Tanzania and Nairobi, while the Secretariat for advanced research on Adult Health and Aging, and Migration, Urbanisation and Health is stretched between Accra and Johannesburg.

iii) **The Secretariat**

INDEPTH is co-ordinated by a permanent executive body (“the Secretariat”) based in Accra, Ghana which is headed by a full-time Executive Director appointed by and accountable to the Board of Trustees. Our member centres rate the Secretariat most highly for its capacity development activities, but draw attention for concerted efforts on dissemination of the Network’s research findings to scientific audiences and policy-makers. A major focus of the Network’s strategy for the next four years will therefore be to strengthen our **policy engagement and communication function**. To do this, the Secretariat will need the support of all the other INDEPTH organs as it seeks to increase the policy influence of the Network and its constituents. On the basis of recent strategic discussions, we are certain that this will be forthcoming.

The frequency of member interaction with other member centres is lower than desired, particularly member centres outside one’s own geographic region. For most, the Annual General Meeting becomes the only time they meet and share at some length with other member centres. This pattern severely limits the sharing of knowledge, ideas and capabilities across the network. The Secretariat will therefore make its top organisational priority **working as one Network**, rather than clustering by geography. To enable the Secretariat to increase capacity sustainably, we need to seek **long-term funding**, not only for multi-centre research projects but also for targeted or tailored capacity strengthening and communication. As we focus on strengthening our weaker member centres and building a more compact community of member centres, we will **manage growth** more consciously, targeting new member centres who fill a strategic gap and meet a high bar in terms of research quality and capacity.

iv) **Scientific Advisory Committee**

The Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) assists in maintaining the focus of INDEPTH on the most important health, population and social issues and areas of greatest potential impact; encourages linkages between INDEPTH and related agencies, research bodies and networks; and helps maintain the highest scientific standard for INDEPTH studies. In addition, the SAC facilitates ongoing communication between INDEPTH and funder and key scientific stakeholders. The SAC consists of up to 15 members selected on their personal merits and achievements. Our focus over the next five years will therefore be to further leverage the SAC in keeping its finger on the pulse of global research trends; to monitor the progress and outputs from INDEPTH scientific activities (including research training) and to engage with new networks of potential collaborators and funders. This is especially important as the period 2013-2016 will span the MDG era (to 2015) and early post-MDG period when a major focus on sustainable development is likely.

v) **Board of Trustees**

The Board consists of ten total members: six elected members representing the member centres and selected by them; two appointed members selected by the elected members to reflect donor/funder perspectives; the Chair of the SAC; and the Executive Director as an ex-officio member. The Board elects its Chair from among all Board members and meets on a semi-annual basis. Its primary role is to provide oversight and accountability for the activities of the Secretariat and Network as a whole. The Board of Trustees is also responsible for appointing the Executive Director.

STRATEGY

RESEARCH

Perform research to quantify and understand the complex demographic and health transitions in LMIC settings through longitudinal population-based demographic, epidemiological and cause-of-death data; and discover what works, for whom and at what cost by conducting intervention research and impact evaluations.

INDEPTH's HDSS members have a fundamental comparative advantage in investigating research questions using multi-centre, population-based longitudinal and/or verbal autopsy data. The types of research question for which HDSS data are particularly powerful include:

1. Comparative demographic analyses, particularly those on topics about which Demographic and Health Survey and similar single-round retrospective surveys provide limited data, for example adult mortality.
2. Monitoring of cause-specific mortality trends, together with all other research that uses mortality from a specific cause or group of causes as its outcome variable.
3. Research that requires longitudinal data to sort out the ordering of events and hence potential direction of causality.
4. Research into interrelationships between various demographic statuses and events such as migration, child-bearing, health, residential arrangements, and mortality.
5. Cross-site observational research on the unintended positive and harmful impacts of existing health interventions that it would be unethical to investigate by means of experimental trials.
6. Interventions research that cannot be conducted on facility-based cohorts as it requires measurement of population-based outcomes.
7. Research that requires the identification of households that have been formerly linked by the co-residence of related members. E.g. inter-generational factors that requires the identification of parent child links during periods of co-residence, to follow children who have grown up and established their own households; research into the sequels of marital break-up or disruption due to mortality, where formerly co-resident family members can be followed into their new households.
8. Research that needs longitudinal data to validate survey instruments, or to develop methods for detecting and correcting reporting biases, for subsequent use in cross-sectional studies.

INDEPTH will campaign and work for fuller exploitation of members' data, but will not impose specific research topics on members. At the same time, regional or global priorities will be highlighted and may be supported. While not all research conducted by the members requires population-based longitudinal data, it does benefit from the established core infrastructure including long-standing relationships with countries. This argument will be carefully made to encourage funders for all projects funded through the INDEPTH Secretariat to contribute to the HDSS overhead funding.

As a supplementary strategy to the comparative studies pursued by Working Groups, INDEPTH will also look to commission a series of "Illustrative Analyses". This would entail an analyst working with one centre's data producing a research paper on a strategically important topic and demonstrating to other members what they can potentially achieve with such data. Backup documentation of how to produce the results will also be developed. Ideas for such analyses might come from Working Groups, or the Scientific Advisory

Committee, or be proposed to the Secretariat by individual researchers. The Network's recent volume on *Environmental Factors and Malaria Transmission Risk* and peer-reviewed journal supplements in *Growing Older in Africa and Asia* and *Migration and Health Dynamics* and *Climate Change and Mortality* are a few such illustrative analysis.

INDEPTH will also seek to establish a timetabled series of updated documents that are produced on a regular basis to translate the research findings for a wider policy audience. One such product will be a dynamic "Burden of Disease Profile". This will also be an important output for the planned iSHARE@ website. Other titles will be developed in consultation with member members and the SAC, and could include mortality estimates and trends, and fertility estimates and trends.

Develop standardised tools and approaches to capture, share and compare data across members

INDEPTH exists to improve the amount, quality and impact of the research conducted by members. To do this, INDEPTH and the member sites need to collect high-quality health and demographic surveillance data, analyze these data to generate findings, and make standardized data series and datasets available to the wider scientific community. The independent evaluation noted that members are utilizing their data more effectively than a decade ago and credited INDEPTH with contributing to this both through our capacity-strengthening activities and by implementing cross-site studies. Nevertheless we are constantly seeking to increase the Network's scientific productivity.

During the next four years 2013-2016 we will be focusing on an interrelated set of issues that are delaying the production of health statistics and preventing scientists elsewhere from maximising the value of the data. These concern the creation of metadata, increasing the cross-site comparability of the analytic variables, and supporting data sharing. INDEPTH members are already implementing standardised tools such as the Verbal Autopsy (VA) (now being automated as InterVA-4; this will also be the WHO standard). An important vehicle is the new iSHARE2 initiative. We will continue to encourage our members to use these standardised questionnaires.

INDEPTH is also taking the necessary steps to share HDSS data responsibly and widely with the international scientific community by conducting standardised quality controls. The major vehicle is our iSHARE2 initiative (in which 11 member centres are planning to have their data freely on the web. This project will prepare many more member centres not only to share data but also to improve the quality of data collected.

The Network has adopted key policies on these matters; to establish frameworks, improve its capabilities and IT systems; and establish an INDEPTH data repository.

Play a quality assurance role to strengthen the quality, relevance and effectiveness of the research produced by member institutions as well as of the Network

INDEPTH will invest resources to assure high quality data are generated by its member centres. Starting with the minimum data set condition for full membership, the Secretariat has established in consultation with the Scientific Advisory Committee and other stakeholders, an experienced data quality inspection team. As a first step, the Secretariat is providing on its website a resource centre for data assurance. The Resource Centre will contain a pool of resources including:

- Plausibility checks for HDSS data
- A list of common errors
- Updated INDEPTH Starter Kit to assist the establishing of new HDSS members
- Updated INDEPTH Resource Kit for old members to improve their operations and output.

POLICY ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION

Tailor research outputs as appropriate for different audiences and stakeholders to reduce the critical gap between research findings and action

INDEPTH has raised the profile of Health and Demographic Surveillance System (HDSS) sites as a source of critical health and development research and information, but more can be done to facilitate translation of findings into policy and practice. In essence, we aim to bridge a major evidence gap. We need to improve our reputation and that of our members as effective suppliers of high-quality health statistics that inform health policy and practice. We will put more effort into developing linkages with international agencies¹, scientific networks and associations whose mission aligns with ours. At the national level, the Network will do more to assist members build stronger relationships with stakeholders such as Ministries of Health, National Statistical Organisations and local universities.

Our methods for enhancing policy dialogue and communicating new knowledge to potential end users will include:

- Encouraging and supporting Working Groups to publish research findings and policy analyses in varied formats, including peer-reviewed articles in international journals, working papers and research reports, policy briefs, fact sheets, media releases and newspaper articles; our emphasis wherever possible will be on “open access”.
- Organising forums, meetings and briefings with key stakeholders
- Participating in international conferences and agenda-setting meetings
- Strengthening and collaborating with national and regional entities focused on population, health and development.
- Assessing existing policies and the policymaking environment, and on the basis of evidence, making relevant recommendations.

The goal is to maintain an ongoing dialogue with key stakeholders at all levels, to ensure that our work is known, understood and used by those who develop policies and programs.

CAPACITY STRENGTHENING

Grow the talent of scientists in Member Institutions as well as enhance the capacity of the institutions to conduct world-class research

So far INDEPTH has engaged in an extensive program of capacity strengthening among our member centres, primarily by conducting workshops to address specific and general deficiencies in data collection, management and analysis within the network. Beyond improving individual members, the goal has been to improve the general capacity of the Network to meet our objectives of conducting multi-centre studies.

¹These include COHRED, IUSSP, PAA, UAPS, INCLEN, DHS and NEPAD

The Secretariat will support these efforts more robustly. A critical avenue is introducing a new MSc in research-oriented data management (RDM). This will be in partnership with the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa, building on the well-established MSc in Population-based Field Epidemiology. Operationally, this will include ongoing strengthening of the role of a Capacity Strengthening and Training Manager ensure the Network's strategic capacity strengthening and training programme is based on short-, mid- and long-term needs and vision for capacity within the Network. This programme will be informed by the needs of member centres and the advice of the Board and the SAC. A key concern is to ensure that priority capacity strengthening activities address key bottlenecks and are well-targeted towards centre needs. The programme will then guide the annual schedule of long and short courses offered, help us collectively determine the funding priorities for capacity strengthening as well as fundraise for them.

There are also a significant number of other capacity strengthening programmes beyond our own that could benefit member centres. The Capacity Strengthening and Training Manager will keep a log of these programmes and encourage the member centres to apply.

ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT

WORKING AS ONE NETWORK

One of the main problems that networks in general face today is that they cease to operate as networks: Member centres deal with the Secretariat as a service provider, but do not deal directly with each other. This threatens the sustainability, as well as the effective fulfillment, of a Network's roles. In some cases, networks actually compete for funding and policy influence with their member centres. We address this by ensuring that cross-centre activities usually involve at least three member centres.

To avoid falling into these common traps, building a strong and compact network of member centres is a top priority for the period 2013-2016. In the terminology of the Civil Society Partnerships Programme of the Overseas Development Institute², INDEPTH will focus on the following functions to increase inter-member networking:

- Community building: Promote and sustain the values and standards of the members
- Facilitation: Help members carry out their activities
- Convening: Bring together different people or groups of people
- Investing / providing: Offer a means to give members the resources they need to carry out their main activities
- Filtering: Decide what information is worth paying attention to and organize the significant amounts of information generated by and targeted at the community
- Amplifying: Help take little known or little understood ideas and make them more widely understood.

Networks are capable of carrying out one or more of these functions simultaneously (and many activities would fall under more than one category) but there are important trade-offs between them. Each function requires specific skills, resources and systems, and overlooking these trade-offs can drive networks away from their original roles.

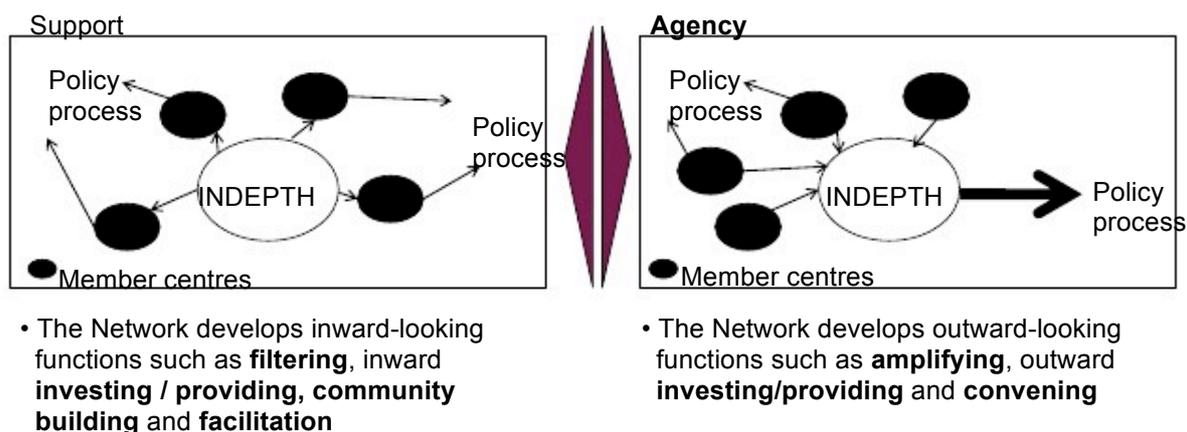
The role of the INDEPTH Network as we embark on the next challenging phase is shifting from a pure **support** role – supporting community development and learning among the members – to more of an **agency** role – amplifying the voice of our member centres on the global stage and convening policy-makers.

²To use ODI's terminology http://www.odi.org.uk/rapid/Projects/PPA0103/Link_function_form.html

In a **support network**, the Network supplies member centres with resources (funds, goods and services including technical advice and capacity strengthening) for member centres to carry out their own activities (research, advocacy etc) largely independently.

In an **agency network**, the Network itself becomes an agent of change e.g., co-ordinating research, communications. The Network develops a recognisable brand and develops outward-looking functions such as amplifying and convening. Member centres provide resources to the Network which in turn is charged with influencing the policy process.

Figure 4: INDEPTH is shifting from a pure support role to an agency role.



In practice most research policy networks have some characteristics of both and INDEPTH will continue strengthening its abilities to operate at both levels. In particular, INDEPTH needs to strengthen its “agency” role, accessing appropriate inputs from members especially data and scientific contributions, and leading the policy engagement process.

To work more as one network we need to strengthen both internal and external communications. Internally, the Network will invest in improving communications between our members and between Member centres and other INDEPTH, foster trust and legitimacy and build a true global community. In addition to scaling-up interactions through the capacity strengthening programme we will adopt social networking tools that enable more communication between members of the INDEPTH community and the sharing of knowledge and expertise. The current communications patterns between member centres continue to under-leverage the Network potential in sharing findings and methodologies, challenges, opportunities and solutions. However, there is significant scope for improvement. Exchange visits will also be encouraged, including where possible more frequent face to face meetings of Working Group members to consolidate relationships, shared learning and mutual support.

Externally, efforts will be dedicated to building and managing the level of communication with policy-makers, collaborators and the range of external stakeholders who would benefit from the knowledge generated by the Network. This will be at national, regional and international/global levels; it will not only stimulate demand for INDEPTH’s research products and services, but also grow the Network’s legitimacy and relevance globally, creating self-reinforcing virtuous cycle.

IMPROVING EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE NETWORK

The strength of INDEPTH lies in providing a structure through which research requiring the use of resources and data from multiple research centres can be carried out. Working Groups are a primary vehicle through which INDEPTH conducts its scientific activities. Each focuses on a specific research topic or project or programme that has been identified as of priority interest and on which a number of members wish to work collaboratively. Working Group members are drawn from members, the Secretariat and the Scientific Advisory Committee and at times external partnerships with leading scientists or institutions are formed.

Data retrieval issues, competing demands on people's time and inadequate analytic capacity in participating members have prevented some strategically important projects from getting off the ground and meant that some Working Groups have yet to bring their work to the point of publication. A major factor limiting the productivity of Working Groups is that most people participating in their activities have multiple competing demands on their time and find it difficult to give priority over a sustained period to the Working Group project when working from their home site. Resources will be required to improve the administrative support provided to Working Group leaders, hold additional data analysis and writing up workshops, and provide seed money to equip Working Groups that need them with dedicated post-doctoral research assistants. Linkages with existing programmes such as the masters programme in Ghana, Thailand and South Africa will be explored to provide this additional capacity.

To manage the process, the Network has divided its collaborative research projects into two categories:

1. Working Groups which get administrative support and where possible seed and support funding from the Secretariat
2. Interest Groups where the Secretariat plays a light-touch liaison role.

For collaborative research projects in the first category, the Secretariat will help Working Groups develop realistic work plans with milestones against which their programs could be monitored. Centre leaders will be informed upfront of the timelines of the portfolio of Network activities in which they are participating, to make it easier for them to link their contributions to INDEPTH into their other streams of activity.

Working Groups will then ensure that requests for inputs from members are both preceded and accompanied by a written briefing that accurately explains the overall scope and timetable of the project, the rationale underlying the request, contact details of an individual who can provide technical assistance including more hands-on support/guidance where required. Where new fieldwork or data collection is required, planning and training workshops will be convened. Written guidelines for Working Groups will be expanded to codify institutional learning about effective working practices. All Working Group leaders and members will receive a formal letter of appointment clarifying what is expected of them and enclosing relevant procedural documents.

It is the responsibility of the Working Group leader to follow guidelines and tighten project management, including completing activities that involve spending money in the financial years for which they have been budgeted. The Working Group leader will also drive the articulation of the Theory of Change for the Working Group, and the articulation of Key Performance Indicators (in collaboration with the Secretariat and the Scientific Advisory Committee).

It is because of this required formalization of the Working Group roles and responsibilities that additional support, both administrative as well as technical when required, will be provided by the broad Network, be it from the Secretariat, the SAC or member institutions. As highlighted above, over the coming Strategic Plan period, the SAC will take on a more direct role – monitoring the progress and outputs of Working Groups.

FUNDING FOR MEMBER CENTRES AND INDEPTH OPERATING ORGANS

A recent survey of our member centres highlighted support for fundraising as a vital need. While it is the Secretariat’s responsibility to seek funding for Network activities, it is not the mandate of the Secretariat to raise funds for centre-specific activities. Funding for centre-specific activities, when it occurs, should be conceptualised as part of the Network’s community building, facilitation and capacity development strategies. In other words, the Secretariat can organise capacity development activities that might include training in proposal writing but would not take on particular research proposals for centre-level research activities. That role should lie with member centres. This will further reinforce the fact that it is member centres and Working Groups who own and drive the Network’s scientific agenda.

Funding options for the INDEPTH Network include:

- Grants for the Network’s main organs including Secretariat, Scientific Advisory Committee, Board
- Research grants for multi-site collaborations and Working Groups
- Sponsorship for events e.g. AGM
- Fee for service (training, AGM participation, field opportunities for students)
- Membership/subscription fee for member centres

To strengthen INDEPTH’s value proposition to research funders, an independent Evaluation in 2012 by Paul Rosenberg recommended a full-time Scientific Programme Manager for the Secretariat who could act as the single point of contact for multi-centre collaborations, having clear responsibility for articulating the scientific justification for the work, for guaranteeing delivery of the outputs and for ensuring the primacy of the Network’s interests in its relationship with its partners.

Operationally, a number of additional resource requirements have been identified across the INDEPTH organs 2013-2016:

Figure 5: Summary of additional resources required

Organ	Additional resources required	Funding strategy
Secretariat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Policy Engagement and Communications Manager · Scientific Programme Manager · Web 2.0 tools and systems upgrades · 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Budgeted · Grants for Network Organs · Grants for Network Organs ·
Working Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Post-doctoral research assistants (salary or reassign existing Fellows from members to WGs) · Administrative support to Working Group leaders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Research grants · · Research grants

MANAGING GROWTH

Over the years INDEPTH has built an unusually strong Network of 47 health and demographic surveillance system (HDSS) field sites that are operated by 40 member centres across 20 countries in Africa, Asia and Oceania. Having established ourselves as a functioning research Network with a substantial portfolio of activities, our focus now is not so much on further expansion as on pursuing key activities that address medium-term objectives, respond to regional and global priorities, and help us to work more as one Network.

In the early days of the Network we looked to achieve broad membership and representation to achieve legitimacy as a global Network. In this next phase of our evolution, we are looking to develop a stronger and more compact community rather than simply encourage a lot of new member centres. This means we will strictly apply the criteria for full INDEPTH membership and accord associate membership to applicants that do not meet ALL of those criteria.

The requirements for full membership will now include a review of population, fertility, migration, mortality and cause-of-death data (based on the new INDEPTH Events History Analysis Format) and evidence of pregnancy monitoring. However, support and incentive structures that encourage new member centres to graduate from Associate to Full membership will also be established as appropriate.

MEASURING PERFORMANCE

Performance measurement will be central to this next phase of the Network's growth and evolution. Not only are funders increasingly requiring it, but it is vital that INDEPTH monitor its productivity in such domains as publications, graduate students, dataset production and policy translation. Measuring our impact will help to clarify our value proposition to a wider range of stakeholders.

Intermediate performance indicators will need to cut across our three business lines (research, policy engagement and communication, research capacity strengthening) and Network organs in order to clarify what is expected of each Working Group, member centre, Secretariat, Scientific Advisory Committee and the Board. They will allow for a complete view of the Network given our inherent inter-relatedness. Regular tracking towards defined targets will help identify critical issues as they arise so that they can be addressed in good time. Consistently, on an annual basis, we expect to critically review intermediate outputs and aggregate Network productivity in the domains just noted.

The Network has developed a results-based monitoring system with a log frame to report on outputs and outcomes of this Strategic Plan.