Executive Summary
Strategies to enhance community engagement in research: The way forward for Ethiopia

Included:
- Description of problem statement and barriers for community engagement in research
- Strategies to enhance community engagement in the research process

Who is this evidence brief for?
Researchers, academicians, policymakers, funders, and other stakeholders with an interest in the problem addressed by this evidence brief

Why was it prepared?
To inform deliberations, initiate and facilitate discussions among the researchers, academicians, policymakers and other relevant stakeholders about engaging communities in research projects by providing the best available evidence on enhancing community engagement in research in resource-limited settings like Ethiopia.

What is evidence brief?
Evidence brief bring together global research evidence (from systematic reviews*) and local evidence to inform deliberations about health policies and programmes

*Systematic Review: A summary of studies addressing a clearly formulated question that uses systematic and explicit methods to identify, select, and critically appraise the relevant research, and to collect and analyse data from this research

Full Report
The evidence summarised in this Executive Summary is described in more detail in the Full Report

This report was prepared by Knowledge Translation Directorate of EPHI and Department of Health, Behavior, and Society, Jimma Institute of Health, Jimma University
Executive Summary

This evidence brief summarizes the best available evidence describing the problem in resource-limited settings like Ethiopia and effective strategies to address the issue within the context.

The problem: Minimal or non-existent community engagement in research

Research efforts are poorly embedded in and linked with communities, especially in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) (George et al., 2015). A recent systematic review conducted by Birhanu et al revealed that there is minimal community engagement in research projects in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and this is even worse when community empowerment is considered (Birhanu et al., 2022). There is also a lack of in-depth accounts of what constitutes effective community engagement and is still determined largely by a combination of intuition, experience, and opinion (Birhanu et al., 2022; George et al., 2015; Vanderslott et al., 2021). Moreover, there are no studies, that reported community engagement in research addressing poverty-related diseases in the Ethiopian context (Birhanu et al., 2022).

Barriers for community engagement in the research process

Several factors that could affect community engagement in the research process in resource-limited settings have been identified. These factors include:

- Lack of understanding about the concept of community engagement in research
- Difference in expectation and interest regarding the goal of research
- Absence of shared understanding between communities and researchers
- Lack of representativeness (diverse perspectives and populations)
- Lack of exchanging in knowledge, experience and lessons learned among researchers
- Lack of trust and respect
- Lack of transparency in communications and the research process
- Lack of funding and sustainability after the project ends
- Absence of standard frameworks for recording and reporting community engagement activities

Strategies to enhance community engagement in research

The following strategies are forwarded to inform researchers; research and academic institutions and research funders for considerations to develop, expand, and effectively engage communities in research.
Enhancing researchers’ and relevant stakeholders’ understanding of concepts, processes, and values of community engagement in research

Promoting and adapting community-based participatory research and collaborative relationships

Ensure inclusions of diverse perspectives and populations in the research methods and fitting the methods into the local context

Exploring and using existing community structures and platforms

Embedding mechanisms for accountability, transparency and responsibility in the research process

Developing standardized procedures for community engagement in research and standard reporting mechanisms

The way forward for Ethiopia:

A practical guideline, framework, and institutional platform or structure should be developed to strengthen community engagement in the research process.

References


George, A. S., Mehra, V., Scott, K., & Sriram, V. (2015). Community participation in health systems research: A systematic review assessing the state of research, the nature of interventions involved and the features of engagement with communities. PLoS ONE, 10(10), 1–25.


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