

Introduction to the World Bank Flagship Course on Health Systems Strengthening and Health Financing

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Introduction

On the 13th to 17th of June this year an introduction to the World Bank Flagship Course on Health Systems Strengthening and Health Financing was conducted in Suva, Fiji. This was the first time the World Bank Institute's renowned Flagship Principles on Health Systems Strengthening and Health Financing have been presented in the Pacific. The "Flagship Program" is widely regarded as the World Bank Institute's most successful and longstanding capacity-building initiative in health in developing countries. The course was made possible by the joint collaborative efforts of the **World Bank Institute (WBI)**, the **Nossal Institute for Global Health (NIGH)** (through the AusAID-funded Health Policy and Health Finance Knowledge Hub), the **Asia Network for Health Systems Strengthening (ANHS)**, and the **Centre for Health Information, Policy and Systems Research (CHIPSR)** (through the Fiji School of Medicine).

A total of 12 countries were represented and included participants from Vanuatu, Tuvalu, Tonga, Solomon Islands, Samoa, Papua New Guinea, New Caledonia, Nauru, Kiribati, Fiji, Federated States of Micronesia, and Australia. The 43 participants came from Government health ministries, regional organisations (SPC), United Nations organisations (WHO, UNFPA) and donor organisations (AusAID,

NZAID). Conveners and presenters for the course came from the collaborating organisations.

Origins of the WBI Flagship Course

The first flagship course was delivered in association with the Harvard School of Public Health and presented in Washington in 1997. The motivating factor behind the development of the course was a request by European donors to develop a learning program on health sector reform and sustainable financing. Originally the course was conducted out of the WBI office in Washington however over the years it has also been presented abroad, and most recently here in the Pacific. Course content is continually revised and edited using new knowledge, experience and feedback received during course offerings. Since its first offering, the time-frame for delivery of the course has been reduced from 4.4 weeks to 3 weeks.

The flagship course has three main objectives. The first objective is to facilitate the transfer of cutting edge knowledge on health sector reform and sustainable financing to developing countries. The second is to empower country clients to implement policies and programs to render their national

health systems more equitable, efficient, qualitative and financially sustainable. The third objective is to strengthen the capacities of partner institutions and networks of professionals to take the lead in designing, adapting, and sustaining Flagship learning programs in local areas and local languages. Ultimately the aim of all three objectives is to provide policymakers, academics and other interested stakeholders with an understanding of how to assess their health systems and identify tools and policy options to reach desired health outcomes.

Origins of the WBI Pacific Flagship Course

The idea for having a Pacific flagship course originally came out of the NIGH following the establishment of the Health Policy and Health Finance Knowledge Hub in 2008. This was one of four hubs funded by the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) and was set up to build knowledge, evidence and expertise, and to inform health policy dialogue relevant to Asia and the Pacific. Through the research work of the Hub a need was identified in the Pacific for strengthening of health systems. Discussions of a long-term capacity development program for improved health systems policy was suggested and NIGH initiated discussions with the WBI on the possibility of running the flagship course in the Pacific. The WBI got NIGH connected with ANHS who had previous experience running similar courses in the Asia region. ANHS agreed to assist by providing trainers to assist in coordinating the delivery of the course in the Pacific. Fiji being central amongst Pacific Island Countries (PICs) was ideal as venue for the flagship course. NIGH then engaged CHIPSR as the local partner to assist in the planning of the course. This set the stage for the first offering in the Pacific of the World Bank flagship course.

Because the course had not being previously conducted in the Pacific, the collaborating organisations agreed that a smaller offering of the course could first be offered to gauge

the interest of PICs and gather feedback on the relevance of the program. This feedback would assist in contextualising the WBI's flagship program to a PIC context. An evaluation team was formed to participate in the course while at the same time assess the course and later make recommendations for development of future course offerings. A one week course was developed which discussed two policy control knobs (finance and payment) of the total five health policy control knobs that encompass the WBI health systems strengthening framework. Thus the abbreviated course was presented as an introduction to the flagship framework.

Lessons and outcomes arising from the course

Much was learnt over the one week course for both participants and presenters. Three important outcomes and points of discussion which generated much interest are briefly outlined below.

- As a learning development tool the course introduced people to the WBI health systems strengthening framework. The framework consists of five control knobs (finance, payment, organization, regulation, behaviour) that can help drive better health outcomes and strengthen health policies. The control knobs enabled participants to speak a "common language" about dimensions of health system strengthening and achieve deeper understanding of health financing issues and sustainable financing options. The objective was not to sell a model of reform but rather to equip participants with the knowledge and tools needed to think systematically about health systems and identify policy options.
- The program provided participants with skills to analyse and diagnose health systems challenges and develop and critique policy responses. Through group work, participants were introduced to the

diagnosis method of a 'diagnostic tree'. This method took participants through a diagnostic journey to finding the root causes of performance problems. It allowed participants to prioritize health system outcomes and overcome the bottlenecks to achieve them.

- An interesting debate centred on Social Health Insurance (SHI) during the plenary discussions on financing options for the Pacific. Currently majority of the health systems in PICS are government funded and there was agreed consensus that other means of financing health were imminent to reduce the financial health burden of the government. While most participants dismissed the feasibility of SHI in the Pacific, little of the participants had clear knowledge and understanding of what SHI was. The course helped participants gain a better understanding of the various financing schemes (insurance both social

and private, provider payment methods, donors, tax revenue, self pay, community financing, out-of-pocket payments) which were practised in other parts of the world and fruitful discussions were generated on options suitable and feasible in a PIC context.

Course feedback from participants

Overall participants were satisfied with the introductory course and interest was shown by the different PICs on engaging in a future offering that would encompass the entire flagship program as delivered in Washington, albeit to incorporate within the teaching material cases and examples that were more akin to a PIC context. There were also several suggestions of incorporating more group participation and group work to allow participants to comprehend the theoretical concepts presented in the sessions.

Table 1: Summary of participant's evaluations

<i>Question</i>	<i>Responses</i>
<i>Relevance</i>	The course was considered very relevant, with all participants rating the course between 3 and 5 in terms of relevance to their current work.
<i>Length of Course</i>	Most participants - regarded the course as too short - thought that more content should be added to the course curriculum
<i>Learning approaches</i>	The large majority would like the course to be more participatory. Presentations were considered too long. Participants would like the course to include a balance of theoretical and practical approaches.
<i>Usefulness of sessions</i>	Feedback indicated that all sessions were useful to most participants. Group work was highly rated.
<i>Sessions for future</i>	The large majority of participants reported that they would like future Pacific Flagship Courses to address all of the control knobs.
<i>Relevance to PICS</i>	The large majority of participants suggested that more Pacific examples should be included within presentations. Some participants suggested that smaller Pacific countries should be grouped separately, and that it is important to consider the diversity of Pacific countries.

Outcomes arising from evaluation team

The evaluation team consisted of the course presenters, course organisers, and selected participants who had also attended the flagship course in Washington. The team

spent half a day reviewing the events of the 1 week training. The following are some of the important conclusions arising out of the evaluators meeting.

- The time duration of the course was insufficient. Next offerings of the course would consider a time period greater than a week. This would allow presentation of more material as well give groups more time for discussions and participatory involvement.
- Candidates invited to participate in the course should meet a clear set of selection criteria. The criteria should select persons with a level of knowledge and expertise that enables them to understand the presented material with ease as well as actively participate in group and plenary discussions. Setting such admission criteria guidelines can also help keep total course numbers to 40 and less. There was also the suggestion that the course be run twice where one course would be for implementers and mid level technical officers and the other for senior policy makers.
- Agreed that the course would need to be tailored to PICs so as to allow for interactions, knowledge exchange, capacity building and problem solving across the Pacific region. The preparation of case studies, more identifiable with PICs would give a better understanding on the feasibility of Health Reform in PIC countries. Persons from PICs would be trained to assist in convening and/or presenting at future PICs flagship courses. A train-the-trainers course would be planned.
- The following sessions were suggested to be included in future flagship courses
 - o Behaviour, organization and regulation control knobs
 - o Implementation of National Health Accounts
 - o Public Private Partnerships
 - o Models of Health System organization

Participants of the Pacific World Bank Flagship Course, June 2010



The Future

The Flagship Program is an instrument or vehicle that has demonstrated value added and is available to the organizations here to help scale up efforts to strengthen health systems in low and middle income countries.

PICs would profit to engage in learning programs such as this, for nothing less than to strengthen our health systems and health policies so as to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of health care delivery.

Conclusion

Overall the course was successful and the objectives achieved. This report concludes with the opening address by Dr Ken Chen, WHO regional representative, whose address epitomises the purpose of holding a first ever introduction to the WBI flagship course on health systems strengthening and health financing.

Chief Guest Dr Chen Ken – WHO regional representative

Firstly, I would like to welcome you all to Fiji – in particular I welcome the coordinators of this important program. I also welcome participants from Vanuatu, Tuvalu, Samoa, Papua New Guinea, Kiribati, Nauru, Federated States of Micronesia, Australia and Fiji. We have a truly ‘Pacific flavor’ to the venue, and the participants. Their participants from national Ministries of Health, UN Agencies, donor agencies and academic institutions present a truly sectoral approach to addressing health sector issues of reform and financing.

This is a landmark opportunity for us in this region – it is the first time the course has been offered in the Pacific – so it’s a great honour for Fiji and for the Fiji School of Medicine to host this course. The course has been organized through a partnership of the World Bank Institutz-e, The Asia Network for Health Systems Strengthening, Fiji School of Medicine and the Nossal Institute for Global Health at the University of Melbourne. I might mention that the Fiji School of Medicine is celebrating

its 125 anniversary this year – reportedly the oldest institution in Fiji.

This Flagship course will therefore feature in the activities of this important celebratory year for the Fiji School of Medicine. FSMed will be proud of this achievement. The Flagship course is well known among the UN Agencies and the donor community. It has a reputation for assisting the diagnosis of health systems issues and presenting a context specific policy approach to management.

The course is not prescriptive – it presents a framework for describing the health system as it is and identifying ways to develop tools and policy options for improving the system. In short, it assists in analyzing health system challenges and opportunities and develops and critiques policy options for improvements. I expect that the participants are keen to learn from this experience – as the challenges we have are not easily resolved – as you will see - and the approaches we have used in the past have not always been successful. So we are keen to learn and to contribute in group work.

The topics of Reform, Achievable Goals, Health Financing, Social Health Insurance, Resource allocation, Efficiency and Equity, and Market issues will be the areas on which the concept of ‘control knobs’ is developed – a method of visualizing our management policy responses to these issues.

I wish the participants well in this course and anticipate that the Flagship Course facilitators will achieve their objectives. Please enjoy Suva – you have beautiful location for the course here at the Novotel – so we anticipate positive outcomes and strengthened relationships and networks. Indeed this is one of the benefits of working regionally – we are all dealing with the same issues and there is no need to struggle in isolation – this network – the one that you form this week – will be important as you share your stories and work towards common successes. I wish you a productive and happy week here in Suva.

Thank you