ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND:

Local health systems research (HSR) provides policymakers and practitioners with contextual, evidence-based solutions to health problems. However, producers and users of HSR rarely understand the complexities of the context within which each operates, leading to the "know-do" gap. Universities are well placed to conduct knowledge translation (KT) integrating research production with uptake. The HEALTH Alliance Africa Hub, a consortium of seven schools of public health (SPHs) in East and Central Africa, was formed to build capacity in HSR. This paper presents information on the capacity of the various SPHs to conduct KT activities.

METHODS:

In 2011, each member of the Africa Hub undertook an institutional HSR capacity assessment using a context-adapted and modified self-assessment tool. KT capacity was measured by several indicators including the presence of a KT strategy, an organizational structure to support KT activities, KT skills, and institutional links with stakeholders and media. Respondents rated their opinions on the various indicators using a 5-point Likert scale. Averages across all respondents for each school were calculated. Thereafter, each school held a results validation workshop.

RESULTS:

A total of 123 respondents from all seven SPHs participated. Only one school had a clear KT strategy; more commonly, research was disseminated at scientific conferences and workshops. While most respondents perceived their SPH as having strong institutional ties with organizations interested in HSR as well as strong institutional leadership, the organizational structures required to support KT activities were absent. Furthermore, individual researchers indicated that they had little time or skills to conduct KT. Additionally, institutional and individual links with policymakers and media were reported as weak.

CONCLUSIONS:

Few SPHs in Africa have a clear KT strategy. Strengthening the weak KT capacity of the SPHs requires working with institutional leadership to develop KT strategies designed to guide organizational structure and development of networks with both the media and policymakers to improve research uptake.