

A Brief Overview of Issues Addressed by EJHD Publications (Including Index)

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Abstract

Background: The Ethiopian Journal of Health Development (EJHD) has been in print for twenty five years now. On the occasion of its silver jubilee anniversary, it may be of interest to reflect on its activities and the possible impacts it has made on health development of the country.

Objective: To highlight the major issues that have been addressed by the Ethiopian Journal of Health Development during its publication in the last 25 years

Methods: Going through the index of articles published during the 25 years of the Journal's existence and comparing them with the original objectives of the Journal and achievements made in the major health policy and programs of the country.

Results: A total of 704 articles were published in the EJHD between its first issue in July 1984 and Volume 22 No3 of 2008. Among these 577 are original articles, 14 are review articles and the rest include: brief reports, special reports, updates, opinions, news, book reviews, letters to the editor and editorials. In addition, the Journal has published abstracts of papers presented at the third (38) and fourth (46) annual conferences of the Ethiopian Public Health Association (EPHA) in 1992 and 1993.

Conclusions: Overall, publications in the EJHD seem to reflect issues that are relevant to the Ethiopian health sector and its programs. However, the extent to which the publications have addressed health sector issues as well as the original objectives of the journal needs to be revisited for strengthened future action that meaningfully impact policies and programs.

Introduction

The Ethiopian Journal of Health Development (EJHD) was launched in 1984 with the first issue appearing in July of that year (1). Originally the editorial office of the EJHD was the Department of Community Health, Faculty of Medicine, Addis Ababa University. This was because the Journal was launched as an organ of the then National Health Development Network of Ethiopia (NHDN-E) and the secretariat office for NHDN-E Committee at the time was the Department of Community Health.

NHDN-E was established as 'an institutional arrangement whereby the country can mobilize, organize, coordinate and strengthen its own technical capacities to meet the challenges of achieving "health for all by the year 2000" (2).

The Journal was intended to focus on important topics in community health and health development that include (3):

- Health policy and health politics;
- Health planning, monitoring and evaluation;
- Health administration and organization of health services;
- Hospital administration;
- Health manpower, including training;
- Health economics, financing and health development;
- Health statistics and health information systems;
- Maternal and child health, including family planning;
- Environmental health and water;
- Food and nutrition;

- Health education;
- Epidemiology and communicable diseases;
- Community involvement and inter-sectoral approaches to primary health care;
- Drug supply and distribution;
- Socioeconomic factors related to health and health services,
- Medical geography,
- Broader topics on scientific work on health care technologies,
- Rights and obligations of community participation in health care; and
- International health organizations and technical cooperation among developing countries.

As the year 2009 marks the 25th anniversary of the EJHD, it would be appropriate to reflect back on the outputs of the journal during these years. Therefore, the objective of this article will be to highlight the major issues that have been addressed by the Ethiopian Journal of Health Development during its publication in the last 25 years. In addition to outlining the major themes and topics of the articles published within the last 25 years, attempt will also be made to assess the quality of manuscripts; whether the publications are addressing the initial objectives of the journal; and what impact, if any, has been brought about on health policy and programs as a result of the publications. In addition, the article would conclude by trying to suggest on possible ways by which the Journal can be made more effective in the future.

Methodology

The methodology used for this assessment includes desk review of all the EJHD publications in terms of number

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and issues addressed. In analyzing the issues that were addressed by the Journal, the approach adopted includes looking at the articles from the perspective of the Journal's original objectives as well as from the perspective of the overall health sector development program.

Findings

The list of publications from the first issue in 1984 to volume 22 (3) in 2008 is annexed. In addition, the summary of the list is shown in Table 1. Accordingly, the total number of articles published in EJHD during the last twenty five years was 704. These articles have appeared in 22 volumes and 70 numbers/issues (58 regular and 12 special). This total number (704) includes all categories of articles published in the Journal. These categories include: original articles, review articles, editorials, brief communications, news and reviews, letters to the editor, short communications, special reports, brief reports, updates, book reviews and opinions.

Table 1: Total Volumes, Number and Years of Publications of Articles in EJHD (1984 – 2008)

Volume	Number	Year	# of Articles
1	1	1984	12
1	2	1984	11
2	1	1987	9
2	2	1987	1
3	1	1989	7
3	2	1989	8
4	1	1990	11
4	2	1990	28
5	1	1991	10
5	2	1991	6
6	1	1992	10
6	2	1992	6
7	1	1993	7
7	2	1993	8
8	1	1994	8
8	2	1994	7
8	Special	1994	1
9	1	1995	8
9	2	1995	9
9	3	1995	7
10	1	1996	10
10	2	1996	10
10	3	1996	9
11	1	1997	14
11	2	1997	13
11	3	1997	17
11	Special	1997	8
12	1	1998	11
12	2	1998	14
12	3	1998	14
12	Special	1998	10
13	1	1999	11
13	2	1999	13
13	3	1999	16
13	Special	1999	1
14	1	2000	15
14	2	2000	15
14	3	2000	11

14	Special	2000	2
15	1	2001	8
15	2	2001	10
15	3	2001	10
16	1	2002	14
16	2	2002	15
16	3	2002	13
16	Special	2002	8
17	1	2003	11
17	2	2003	8
17	3	2003	12
17	Special	2003	3
17	2 nd	2003	1
	Special		
18	1	2004	15
18	2	2004	11
18	3	2004	15
19	1	2005	13
19	2	2005	11
19	3	2005	12
19	Special	2005	6
20	1	2006	11
20	2	2006	10
20	3	2006	13
21	1	2007	12
21	2	2007	12
21	3	2007	7
21	Special	2007	3
21	2 nd	2007	4
	Special		
22	1	2008	12
22	2	2008	12
22	3	2008	12
22	Special	2008	12
Total			58 regular and 12 special
			704

In addition, the Journal has published 84 abstracts that were presented at some of the annual conferences of the Ethiopian Public Health Association (EPHA).

The EJHD was initially published twice every year until 1994 when an additional special issue appeared. Since 1995 the Journal started to be published in three regular issues, in addition to special issues that appeared more frequently (almost every year from 1997 onwards). There were no special issues during the years 2001, 2004 and 2006. On the other hand, special issues appeared twice both in 2003 and 2007.

Over the years, there were about eight articles on studies done outside of Ethiopia. All articles were written in English and there were no articles published in any other language (except for some announcements that appeared in Amharic).

Table 2 shows the distribution of the articles published as categorized by the eight elements of Primary Health Care (PHC). Articles related to prevention and control of locally endemic diseases comprised about 28% of the publications while those related to maternal health were about 18%. In terms of categorizing by PHC elements,

articles related to immunization (4%) and provision of essential drugs (2.8%) were relatively fewer.

Table 2: Articles and Abstracts Published in EJHD Categorized by PHC Elements (EJHD 1984 – 2008)

PHC Elements	Articles	Abstracts
Education about health problems (health education)	101	11
Adequate food supply and nutrition	87	6
Safe water supply and basic sanitation	42	5
Maternal and child health including family planning	125	20
Immunization against major diseases	29	2
Prevention and control of locally endemic diseases	199	18
Treatment of common diseases and injuries	101	17
Provision of essential drugs	20	5
Total	704	84

Another attempt to categorize the articles according to components of the Health Sector Development Program (HSDP), an important program of the health sector during the later years, is shown in Table 3. According to this categorization, articles related to information, communication and education (16.6%) and those related

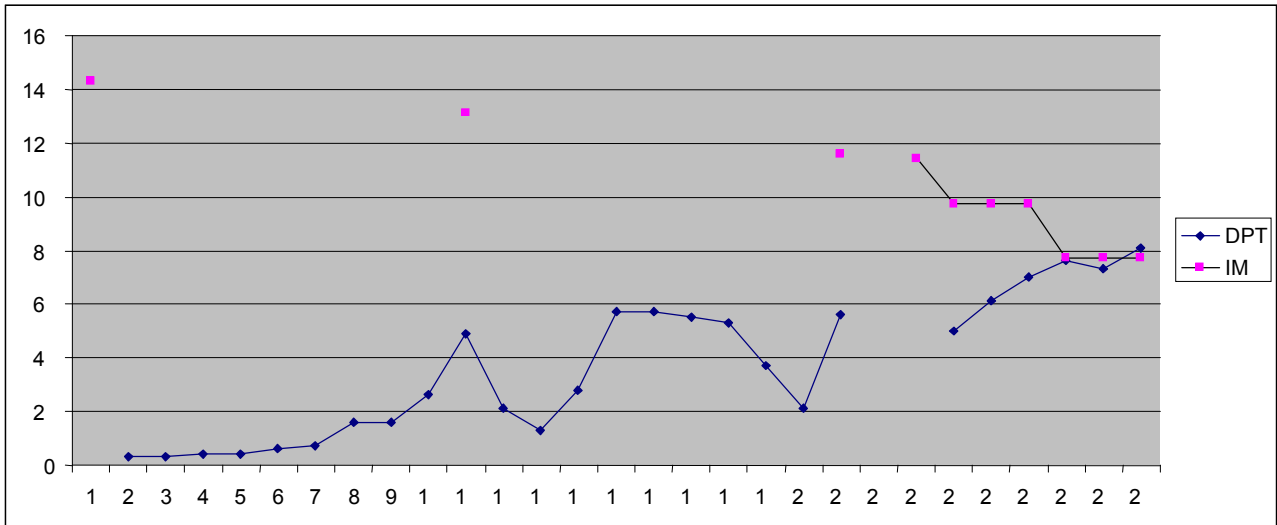
to health management information system (14.6%) comprise the major proportions. On the other hand, articles on health care financing (1%) and those related to health facilities rehabilitation and expansion (0.28%) were relatively very few.

Table 3: Articles and Abstracts Published in EJHD, Categorized by HSDP Components (EJHD 1984 – 2008)

HSDP Components	Articles	Abstracts
Health service delivery and quality of care	8	2
1.1 Curative care & utilization of health service		
1.2 Reproductive health and essential obstetric care	82	17
1.3 Child health service	67	4
1.4 EPI and NID	40	0
1.5 Malaria program	17	0
1.6 TB and leprosy	37	3
1.7 HIV/AIDS/STI control program	84	0
1.8 Environmental health	30	4
2. Health facilities rehabilitation and expansion	2	2
3. Human resource development	13	1
4. Pharmaceutical supplies and management	15	2
5. Information, communication and education	117	5
6. Health sector management	10	4
7. Health management and information system, M&E and OR	103	17
8. Health care financing	7	7
9. Crosscutting issues	59	5
10. Governance and relations with stakeholders	13	0
Total	704	73

In an attempt to get some insights on the possible association of the issues addressed in the Journal with developments in the overall health system, some trends with regard to the issues published in the Journal during the last 25 years are shown graphically. These are Graph 1, showing trends in immunization coverage (as a proxy to control of communicable diseases), and Graph 2,

showing trends in population growth (as a proxy to maternal health and family planning). According to these graphs, achievements seem to be significant in terms of communicable diseases control while it seems that there is still a lot to be done in terms of activities related to population growth and maternal health.

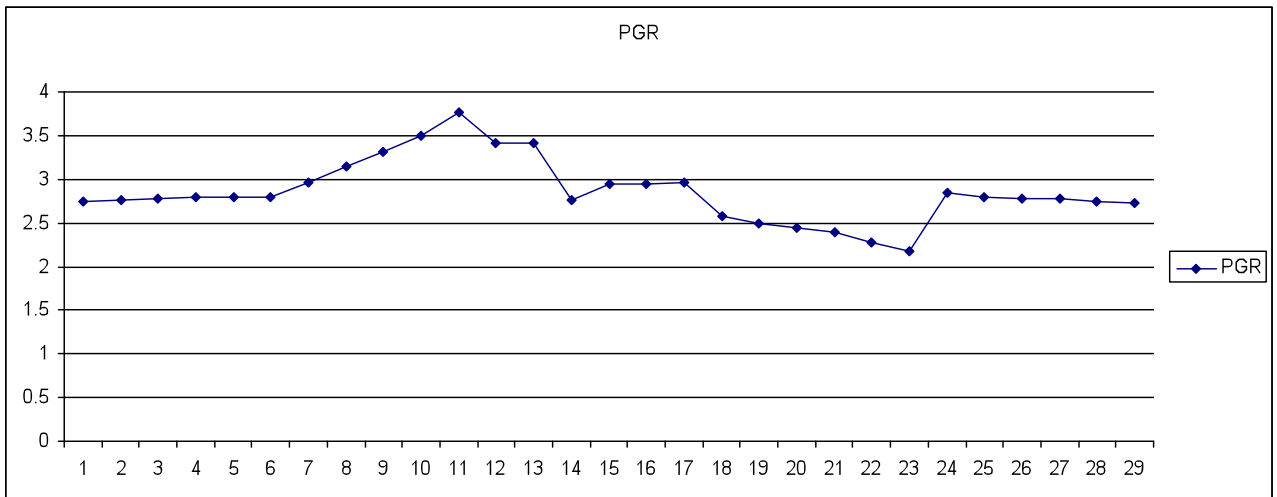


Graph 1: Trends in immunization coverage (DPT3) and Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) in Ethiopia (1980 – 2008)

Discussion and the way forward

When the social goal of Health for All through PHC was declared in 1978, it was warmly received in Ethiopia as the right approach that corresponded well with national objectives (4). Following PHC, the other major health program that was introduced in the country within the sector-wide approach to health development is the Health Sector Development Program (HSDP). The HSDP, a major component of the country’s macro-economic development framework the Plan for Accelerated and

Sustainable Development to end Poverty (PASDEP) (5), is a 20-year plan with rolling five year plans. HSDP-1 covered 1997/98 to 2002, HSDP-2 covered 3 years (2003-2005) and HSDP-3 is to cover 2006 – 2010. Embodying most of the ideas of PHC, and in line with achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), now the major focus of HSDP are; attacking poverty-related diseases (HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis), child survival and programs aimed at the reduction of maternal mortality (6, 7).



Graph 2:– Trends in population growth rate in Ethiopia (1980 – 2008)

At establishment, the EJHD was intended to be ‘a forum for the exchange of ideas on all aspects of health development and primary health care’ (8). This initial objective of the Journal was indeed perfectly in line with the overall health sector program of the country, as the country’s health system at the time was geared towards achieving the goals of “Health for All by the Year 2000” through the Primary Health Care (PHC) approach (9).

Even with the change in the political governance of the country in 1991, most of the activities outlined in the health policy drafted by the new regime in 1993 still reflected the objectives of the PHC approach (10, 11).

A brief reflection on the twenty five years journey of the Journal shows that its publications have attempted to touch on most of the issues that are relevant to the major

health sector programs of the country, even if with extents that vary among components. From the perspective of the HSDP, issues of health facility expansion, health care financing, drug supply and distribution, health services utilization and human resources for health have been addressed to much lower extent than they deserve. This is especially noteworthy when one notes the fact these same issues were among the important topics outlined in the original objectives of the Journal. Among the topics that got major attention were those related to IEC, health information system and HIV/AIDS and STI control. It is obvious that issues of creating health awareness and health information should get attention in a developing health system such as that of Ethiopia. Most of the IEC related publications are also parts of those that come with HIV/AIDS control activities (an activity that has got significant local and international support during the last three decades) (12, 13).

In terms of EJHD articles impacting on health sector programs and policies, it may be difficult to make direct association or come up with effects attributable to them. However, as all the publications are results of research within the country's health system, it may be possible to indicate some patterns of associations with trends. For instance, the fact that high proportions of articles published were related to the prevention and control of locally endemic diseases can be favourably associated with the positive trend in immunization coverage. On the other hand, even though the proportion of articles related to maternal health was also substantial, trends in population growth and other maternal health related indices do not seem very encouraging.

Overall, even though it is difficult to have full control of the nature of manuscripts to be submitted to the Journal, mechanisms should be devised that encourage publications of articles on priority issues to the health sector. Publication of special issues, one such mechanism

used by the journal, should be continued and strengthened. In addition, as EJHD is also the organ of the EPHA, the Association should forge strong links with the sector for health systems and operational research arrangements to generate evidence that impact on policy and programs on priority issues.

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