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THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTE FOR GLOBAL HEALTH
AND DEVELOPMENT

Institute for Global Health and Development

Newsletter | Issue No. 2



Message from the Director

Welcome to yet another read in the series of regular updates from the Institute. Quarter one, 2022 was productive and action-packed, in that the Institute officially launched the national node of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Solutions Network and made strides in getting some of its key programmes off the ground.

Everything you learn about the Institute in this issue will reflect its commitment to climate action and impacts on health, health injustices, and socioeconomic inequalities. We welcome your feedback and potential contributions, and hope that you will find the content of this edition informative and engaging.

Zulfiqar A Bhutta, FRS

Distinguished University Professor & Founding Director

Bulletin

Launch of Sustainable Development Solutions Network, Pakistan (SDSN Pakistan)



The national node of United Nations' Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), housed within the Institute for Global Health and Development was officially launched at the seminar, '**Pakistan's Challenges of Climate Change, Health, and Nutrition in the Context of Sustainable Development Goals: Strategies for Change**' on March 6 and 7, 2022 at the Aga Khan University Auditorium, Karachi. It was a gathering of prominent local and international experts, including Professor Jeffrey Sachs, President

SDSN Global, and Senator (R.) Javed Jabbar as keynote speakers of the convention. Also in attendance were Mr Zakir Mahmood, Chairman, Board of Trustees, AKU as Chief Guest, Mr Sulaiman Shahabuddin, President, AKU, and Dr Carl Amrhein, Provost and Vice President, Academic.

The AKDN and AKU leadership took the opportunity to assert their commitment to adapt to and mitigate the impacts of climate change and develop climate resilient communities in the regions they serve. They also highlighted the crucial role of IGHD in advance scholarship, research, and capacity development in the areas of climate resilience and climate justice. Click [here](#) to read more.

Inaugural Meeting, Leadership Council, SDSN Pakistan



On 7 March 2022, Dr Bhutta chaired the inaugural meeting of the Leadership Council of SDSN Pakistan.

The Leadership Council is primarily responsible for strategic oversight of SDSN, Pakistan's work. It has convened members with diverse expertise and across relevant disciplines, including academia, policy, advocacy, civil society, and human rights. Some of the representative institutions include Sustainable Development

Policy Institute, Islamabad, Planning Commission of Pakistan, UNDP Baluchistan Office, and UN Youth Activism from Swat.

The discussion was set to achieve a unanimous voice around the goals of the Council and encourage dialogue on SDSN Pakistan's priorities and future action. The Council members also extended their support for comprehensive network analysis of SDG leaders, in-depth systematic review of published literature, and expanding the national node with active and effective SDG mobilising institutions in the country.

Although, the members will meet once a year in-person, majority of the Leadership Council's future meetings will be organized virtually to reduce the carbon footprint of SDSN Pakistan's work.

Research and Publications

Women in Science



A four-year-long programme, Women in Science aims to enhance future capacity in women's reproductive and perinatal health research, potentially reduce current inequities, promote gender equality in science, and facilitate female researchers in taking up leadership roles across key LMIC regions (South-Central Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa).

The programme will enroll a select group of early-career women scientists and researchers, who will participate in the self-assessment modules, earn fellowship opportunities at the University of Oxford, get mentored by renowned scholars, and compete for fully funded research grants in Maternal & Perinatal Research of 18 months.

This research project is jointly implemented by the Institute for Global Health and Development, Centre for Global Child Health at the Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids), and the University of Oxford, with the funding support of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Dr Zulfiqar A. Bhutta and Dr Jai K. Das are co-Principal Investigators of the programme.

Programme applications will open soon. Click [here](#) to learn more.

Building a Consortium to address Climate Change, Health, and Complex Challenges (CHOICE)

This programme seeks to improve health and wellbeing and address inequalities in South-Central Asia

and Sub-Saharan Africa by implementing health and health-related sustainable development goals (HHSDGs). The programme will enroll multisectoral think tanks and regional consortia in five countries, including Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan, Ghana, Madagascar, and Kenya.

CHOICE will conduct five country case studies to explore the challenges around mental health, nutrition, food systems, and gender equity, create a framework to track progress, and advocate for the HHSDGs with government and civil society stakeholders.

CHOICE will be jointly implemented by IGHD and the Centre for Global Child Health at the Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids), Canada. Dr Zulfiqar A. Bhutta and Dr Jai K. Das are co-Principal Investigators of the programme. Please stay tuned for more updates on this programme.

Uplifting Communities



On March 5, 2022, Dr Bhutta led a day-long visit to Matiari and nearby settlements/villages for the University's leadership, including Mr Zakir Mahmood, Chairman, Board of Trustees, AKU, Mr Sulaiman Shahabuddin, President, AKU, Dr Carl Amrhein, Provost & Vice President - Academic, Dr Anjum Halai, Vice Provost & Dean, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, and Dr Adil Haider, Dean, Medical College, Pakistan. This visit provided an overview of the efforts to uplift rural communities of Matiari since past three decades, and an opportunity to discuss the future outlook.

Matiari district was handpicked around 30 years ago as a research field because of its demographics and health injustices in service, equality, and accessibility. These challenges led to high mortality and morbidity, especially amongst women and children.



Today, with the support of district and provincial governments, much progress has been made in improving maternal and child health. With well-equipped research and training centre and structured community outreach programmes, health accessibility and inequalities have improved, including women and child health and nutrition and early childhood development.

To know more about the work in Matiari, click [here](#).

Research Scientists at IGHD



Dr Jai K Das

*Assistant Professor, Department of Paediatrics and Child Health
& Assistant Director, Institute for Global Health Development*

What do you find most challenging about research in climate science and health?

First, there is very little recognition of the scale of climate induced health problems, especially in the developing world. Such health issues occur over a longer time span, which leads to underestimating its actual magnitude and the urgency it deserves.

Second, there is lack of research around the causal relationship between climate sciences and other interacting factors. And last, this domain of research is deficient of interface between climate science and associated health and policy implications, which impedes future evidence.

As a paediatrics research scientist, what has surprised you the most about children's health and wellbeing in Pakistan?

Widespread disparity in child health indicators never ceases to surprise me. It is strongly influenced by various socio-demographic factors, including place of residence, education, poverty index, and access to quality of care. This disparity exists not only across provinces but also within provinces. One example of inter-provincial disparity is child morbidity and mortality clustered around urban slums and rural areas. This reflects the dire need of making health accessible to most vulnerable communities and improving the underlying social determinants of health.

What is your vision for the Institute for Global Health and Development?

Though the Institute is in its early years, I envision it to be a regional and global leader in the areas of climate action, gender equity, agriculture, food security, and Sustainable Development Goals. A very few institutes are working on these key thematic areas in the developing world. IGHD aims to become an advocate for the developing countries across South-Central Asia and East Africa and contribute towards policy-relevant and targeted evaluations.



Dr Zafar Fatmi

Professor & Section Head, Department of Community Health Sciences & Associate Faculty, Institute for Global Health Development

What do you find most challenging as a research scientist of environmental science and health?

Environmental science focuses on the health effects of environmental factors that are mostly outside the immediate control of the individual. Thus, observation or intervention/prevention efforts of involuntary population exposures involve scientific, practical, and ethical issues, which are different from the common

health problems.

Is there a correlation between climate change and our overall health?

Environmental sciences study the environment in which an individual lives rather than their personal characteristics or lifestyles. The approaches to measure and sample for environmental science usually compete between population distribution and hazard distribution. Environmental exposures usually do not differ significantly amongst individuals within one area. Scientists must assess a large number of low-level inter-correlated exposures, which often occur in complex mixtures. Thus, health impacts are difficult to disaggregate from climate change.

What is your message to climate science researchers and enthusiasts?

We know lot more on global front about climate change. However, we need to localize the climate science, generate evidence, and determine its impact in local context and microenvironment. Knowledge generation at the local level can subsequently motivate people and governments to act on climate change. Climate researchers are urged to focus on human health impact studies, as climate crisis in essence is a health crisis. The science and advocacy to measure the impact of climate change on common man is the key to bring change.

Webinars and Dialogues

Learn from some of the renowned scholars, policy advocates, and global health experts who partnered with IGHD over the past two years to engage upon key global health challenges.



Senator (R.) Javed Jabbar: Calamities of Change



Achieving the SDGs: Has COVID-19 made this impossible?



Professor Jeffrey Sachs: A path for Pakistan to achieve sustainable development



Webinar: Women in Science and Global Health

Click [here](#) to explore all webinars and talks organized by the Institute.

Celebration



Dr Zulfiqar A Bhutta has been presented the [John Dirks Canada Gairdner Global Health Award](#) for outstanding achievements in global health research.

The Gairdner Awards are widely regarded as Canada's most prestigious prize for medical science and the Global Health Award, one of the highest awards in this discipline worldwide.

Click [here](#) to read more.



Dr Jai K Das, Assistant Professor, Department of Paediatrics and Child Health, has been given an additional role and appointed as Assistant Director, Institute for Global Health and Development, effective December 2021.

As Assistant Director, he will not only steer the Institute's rich and geographically diverse research portfolio, but also support the Chair in firming up the Institute's leadership in climate change and health, agriculture, food security, and nutrition, and gender equality and women empowerment.

Collaborate With Us

The Institute invites expressions of interest from faculty members at AKU and other universities for cross appointment as 'Associate Faculty'. Internal appointments involve a nomination and vetting process, and must include the support of the Institute's Director and the Dean of the home entity at AKU. Cross appointments from external institutions are possible, with the process involving an assessment of potential conflict of interest and a commitment of adherence to AKU's Human Resources and other policies. To submit an expression of interest, [apply here](#).

We would like to hear from you. Share your comments, queries, and suggestions with us at ighd@aku.edu