



Source: Nepali Times

## Second National Health and Population Summit

*This special series report summarizes major discussions and highlights of the Second National Health and Population Summit organized by Nepal Health Research Council (NHRC) in Kathmandu, Nepal. This includes documentation of the pre-summit discussion on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 2-day summit.*

### Introduction

In order to mark 25 years of establishment of Nepal Health Research Council (NHRC), NHRC organized Second National Health and Population Summit on April 11 and 12 in Kathmandu. A pre-summit conference was also organized on April 10. The major objectives of the summit as mentioned by NHRC are:

- To bring health and population scientists together to promote evidence-informed decision making process for optimal health and wellbeing of Nepalese people;
- To encourage health and population scientists and practitioners for responsible conduct of research on health and development; and
- To discourse and find way out the way forward on emerging health and population issues for strengthening national health system of Nepal in order to achieve SDGs.

## Pre-Summit Conference

A pre-summit conference was organized on April 10 with the theme, **Sustainable Development Goals: What Should Nepal Aim For**. The discussion was mainly focused on the role of data in achieving SDGs.



### *Inaugural Session*

Giving his keynote speech during the inaugural session, **Dr Yuvraj Khatiwada**, Vice Chairperson of the National Planning Commission, highlighted that before we move ahead in terms of devising our plans to achieve SDGs, we need to review where we stand in terms of status of country's public health status. Dr Khatiwada opined that with the Ministry of Health's vision to moving forward to attain Universal Health Coverage (UHC), there is a need to review and reflect the existing social protection schemes and out of pocket expenses.

Dr Khatiwada opined that any global goals are difficult to achieve when we do not have appropriate mechanisms to measure the disaggregated levels of data such as gender inequality and intra-household disparity. He also touched upon the need to generate and utilize data more frequently by improving capacity of data generators and collectors with efficient recording, reporting and visualization in order to monitor health outcomes on a regular basis. Dr Khatiwada suggested for setting standards for overall data management in order to promote evidence based planning and execution.

Likewise, **Dr Giridhari Sharma Paudel** presented a unique feature of 17 goals of SDGs supplementing and complementing each other rather than being in isolation. He discussed about goals 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10 and 11 very much related to health. Dr Paudel presented the government's plans to meet the goal targets by 2030 in different phases from 2017, 2020, 2022, 2025 and leading up to 2030. He also admitted government's lack of preparation in achieving some indicators such as for risk management.

Dr Paudel during his presentation also highlighted major challenges of achieving SDGs targets – the major one being mainstreaming these targets into national agenda and priorities, given country's own national priorities and contextual factors. He was also conscious of the fact that greater inter-sectoral coordination would be required across the ministries to attain these goals that are interlinked with each other. Moreover, according to him, there is also a need for efficient resource mobilization in terms of financial management and disbursement in federalist structure. Another major challenge, according to Dr Paudel is the need for efficient information management to quantify the goals and targets for their effective monitoring.

**Dr Padam Bahadur Chand**, Chief Specialist at Ministry of Health during this discussion opined that all bodies at all levels from national to regional and local need to be on the same page in terms of their preparation and understanding about SDGs. Dr Chand focused on capacity building of all bodies and institutions first for the readiness to implement SDGs. Dr Chand also highlighted the need to reflect upon the government's efforts and achievements in attaining the MDGs and building on those lessons as he said, 'no country is starting from zero, we need to learn from how we contributed to achieving MDGs'.

During the inaugural session, **Dr G D Thakur** from Public Health Administration Monitoring and Evaluation Division (PHAMED) of Ministry of Health stressed on the importance of health as a precondition to achieve sustainable development for any country. Dr Thakur also pointed out two major challenges in terms of achieving SDGs: capacity crunch in terms of ability to conduct quality research; and weak information management system. Therefore, he focused on strengthening the capacity of government employees to conduct quality research/survey and improve information management practice by strengthening the reporting system and introducing e-health system.

### **Panel Discussion**

A panel discussion was also held on SDGs, which was moderated by Professor Dr Madhu Dixit Devkota. The panelists included prominent figures in the health sector of Nepal.

Director General of Department of Health Services, **Dr Pushpa Chaudhary** also reiterated the need to learn from our experiences in achieving MDGs to be better prepared for attaining goals of SDGs. Dr Chaudhary also highlighted the need to reflect on investment versus outcome whereby our investment in various sectors should be reflected in achieving indicators set nationally.

**Dr Iqbal Anwar** from Bangladesh also shared his country experience as he mentioned that it is difficult to implement SDGs as context matters. He suggested in the need to address inequity issues in the health sector by encouraging private sector involvement but regularizing private sector at the same time. Dr Anwar also made a point of 'one size does not fit all' situation and therefore the country should define its own priorities based on local context.

**Dr Sharad Onta** representing Institute of Medicine (IOM), Tribhuvan University highlighted that human resources in health sector is one of the major determinants in successful implementation of health related SDG goals and targets. Dr Onta admitted of lack of qualified expertise to be able to make sound decisions and even the qualified experts are not being involved in planning of policies and programmes. Dr Onta also shaded light on social accountability of the health workers while providing services as he opined that the 'what' of service will only tell the half of the story while it is equally important to understand and evaluate the 'how' of service.

**Dr Yagya Bahadur Karki**, member of National Planning Commission stressed on the need to revisit health policies in line with SDGs. According to him, there is also need to develop indicators based on evidence so that they could be achievable.

**Dr Khem Karki**, Member Secretary of NHRC also highlighted the need for high quality research to promote evidence-based policy making. Dr Karki, also reiterated for responsible conduct of research abiding by high ethical standards.

**Dr Paul Rueckert** representing GIZ touched upon the need of indicators to be tracked real time. For this, he suggested more investment of the government on routine information system and harmonization of information systems where all data/information are collected through a single platform.

**Dr Ashish KC**, representing UNICEF Nepal considered health sector reform as a 'black box' that needs to be opened to understand the real problems and find local solutions. These barriers, according to Dr KC can be mitigated only by understanding the local context and coming up with viable options – why are they the change catalysts and how do they offer solutions to the existing problems.

**Dr Shiva Adhikary** from Patan Academy of Health Sciences stressed on the need to improve efficiency of utilization of resources.

A **WHO official** highlighted the importance of avoiding duplication by government and various development partners through harmonization of efforts in achieving the SDGs. She also delivered a message that SDGs are a new aspiration for development of Nepal and all our energy and efforts should be streamlined towards achieving them.

**Dr Manav Bhattarai** from the World Bank discussed about how different aid modalities are following a sector-wide approach and in order to achieve the intended goals of SDGs, there is a need for institutional change. Dr Bhattarai viewed that there are various priorities for the government and the state should take responsibility on identifying the right priorities. Dr Bhattarai ended his short speech

with a strong message that we need to seclude ourselves from the seductive development buzzwords and work towards achieving the actual development indicators.

## **Contextualizing UHC in Nepal – A Special Session on Pre-Summit Conference**

**Dr P B Chand** started this session with the changed understanding of UHC. Initially, UHC was considered as highest attainable standard of quality and now he regards UHC as a public health tool acceptable to all. Dr Chand described that public health interventions in Nepal have gone through various developments. According to Dr Chand, major challenge in implementing UHC is that it should be made across the sectors and address diversity issues. He also mentioned about the overarching principles of NHSS in UHC viz. multi-sectoral approach, health systems reform, quality health services and equitable access to health services. Dr Chand also highlighted the need for clustering of health facilities, especially in decentralized settings for effective health service delivery. Dr Chand also touched upon an important reform required in our health system where there is bottom up planning but funding system is top-down. He also pointed out that Nepal is a regional head in women's and child health but the accessibility and quality of services need to be improved considerably.

**Dr Shiva Acharya** discussed about two types of UHC indicators – categorical indicators (which are only for short term) and continuous indicators (that allow for progress). According to Dr Acharya, health system is a MEANS while health protection to citizens is an END. Dr Acharya also talked about the coverage indicators in terms of population (who are covered); service (what is covered); and finance (how deeply is it covered). Dr Acharya opined that Tanahashi model could be effective in terms of improving the service coverage. He was concerned with catastrophic payment increasing in the last few years and the concentration curves showing that the poor in Nepal are in financial shock. As a long term strategy for better implementation of UHC, he suggestions three strategic pathways:

- Identification of cost effective approaches in service delivery
- Identification of health systems engineers and building their capacity
- Linking service delivery with SDGs and ensuring that SDGs bring out synergistic effects through quality and comprehensive health services.

**Dr Atul Dahal**, in his presentation about the association of UHCs in attainment of SDGs took through the development of UHC agenda. UHC as a concept took momentum since 2005 onward through WHAs and UN Assembly Resolutions. Dr Dahal highlighted that UHC focuses on three major dimensions: finance, people and services. Dr Dahal also stressed on the importance of incorporating UHC as it helps in countering deadly diseases such as diarrhea and CVD as well as contributes in dealing with disparity in education, health and other social sectors. As a concluding statement, Dr Dahal highlighted the importance of ownership by policy makers that the UHC is not just about services but more about political will.

**Dr Madhusudan Subedi** as a remark to the presentations made by Dr Chand and Dr Acharya opined that there is more focus on the health outcomes evaluating through numbers and figures but we are

missing the socio-cultural context - which could also be a determinant of our health outcomes. Dr Subedi gave an example that a woman feels reluctant to discuss about her fertility issues with the doctor while she lives just nearby a renowned fertility centre. Dr Subedi considers this not as an accessibility issue but the socio-cultural context that makes her feel shy or reluctant to discuss such issues with her husband. Such socio-cultural context, according to Dr Subedi should also be studied through rigorous qualitative research and those findings, if relevant should inform the policies.

## Day 1 of Summit

### *Inauguration Ceremony*

The Second National Health and Population Summit was inaugurated by **Rt Honourable President Smt. Bidhya Devi Bhandari** at Rastriya Sabha Griha, Kathmandu. Inaugurating the summit, the President encouraged conducting such national events that promote practice of quality research and evidence generation. The President also was concerned that though our statistics show improved health outcomes, at the public level, the services have not yet been reached. The President urged the Ministry of Health to provide basic health services to the people and address needs of the disadvantaged communities. She also stressed on the delivery centres to be more service oriented than being profit oriented. The President also highlighted the need to focus equally on promoting Ayurvedic centres and their modernization as per the requirement.

Likewise, Honourable **Minister for Health Ram Janam Chaudhary** in his short speech reiterated the importance of improving our research practice which will help the ministry to take evidence informed policies and actions.

**Dr Khem Karki** – Member Secretary of NHRC during the inauguration ceremony of the summit gave a brief description of the history of NHRC and its advent in promoting health research in Nepal. He described the objectives of the summit: promoting health research by bringing all health and population scientists in a singular platform and taking the agenda forward in terms of generating evidence to inform policy and change practice to attain Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Dr Karki expressed his gratitude for Dr Mrigendra Raj Pandey's leadership that led to the establishment of the council 25 years ago. In these 25 years, according to Dr Karki, NHRC has trained over 4000 researchers and has been successful in generating fund from 500,000 NPR to 50,000,000 NPR over 25 years with just 5% of financial support from External Development Partners. Dr Karki expressed his satisfaction that the research environment is gradually being improved and more debate and discussion is required about what sorts of research need to be promoted at the national level to generate more evidence on national priority areas.

**Dr Senendra Raj Upreti**, Acting Secretary of Ministry of Health highlighted that the time is opportune to hold such a national summit of health and population scientists, as we are moving towards initial years of SDGs. Dr Upreti also stressed on the need for strong policy commitment to design and implement Universal Health Coverage packages. Dr Upreti was optimistic that more quality evidence generated from health research will contribute to informed decision making.

**Dr Yubraj Khatiwada**, Vice Chairperson of National Planning Commission stressed on the need to identify policies and programmes that are most effective. According to Dr Khatiwada, new challenges such as drug resistance, climate change are the newly emerging challenges and appropriate mitigating measures need to be identified. Noticing good progress made in the health sector, Dr Khatiwada expressed that in the coming years, health proportion of national budget could go up to 8% and with greater investment at national level, there is also need for multi-stakeholder engagement and partnership to achieve the intended targets and outcomes.

### **Presentations on Day 1**

**Dr Madhusudan Subedi**, during the opening presentation titled, 'Opportunities and Challenges of Health and Sustainable Development in Nepal' highlighted economic development, social inclusion and environmental sustainability as three cornerstones in Nepal's path towards achieving SDGs. In this journey, he pointed out 5 areas of critical importance namely: People, Prosperity, Peace, Partnership and Planet. Dr Subedi mentioned that targets that the country defines should be ambitious and practical at the same time and moreover national commitment is required to give the strategic headway through political will. Dr Subedi also mentioned the need for political and institutional coherence so that both policy makers and implementers are on the same page in terms of achieving the intended targets and goals.

On Day 1, 23 presentations were made in the following sessions:

- Plenary Session 1
- Parallel Session 1: Health Systems Research: Reproductive and Sexual Health and Rights
- Parallel Session 2: Chronic Diseases and Health Promotion

### **Poster Presentations**

Poster presentations were made during session breaks. 90 poster presentations were made on Day 1. Some snapshots of the poster presentations:





## Day 2 of Summit

On Day 2, 33 presentations were made in the following sessions:

- Plenary Session 2
- Parallel Session 3: Maternal and Child Health and Nutrition
- Parallel Session 4: Environmental and Occupational Health
- Parallel Session 5: Universal Health Coverage
- Parallel Session 6: Emerging and Reemerging Infectious Diseases

Poster presentations were also made during the session breaks. 23 poster presentations were made on Day 2.

## Closing Ceremony

During the closing ceremony, the summit organizers also presented a Draft Declaration of the Summit. Dr Khem Karki read the draft declaration for endorsement by the Summit participants. Major points included in the draft declaration were:

- UHC as a key strategy to achieving SDGs
- Social justice and health equity – foundation for SDGs
- Commitment to: research ethics, knowledge synthesis and translation of evidence, working together with academicians
- Promoting research culture and evidence
- Adequate resource allocation required
- Nurture participatory decision making

The participants welcomed the draft declaration and endorsed the declaration with some feedback for amendment, especially including highlighting the role of Public Private Partnership (PPP).



The highlight of the closing ceremony was the award presentations for health and population scientists. The names of awardees for various categories are presented below:

- **Best Poster:** Uday Narayan Yadav
- **Best Oral Presentation:** Uddhav Sigdel
- **Young Researcher Award:** Roshan Thapa
- **Senior Researcher Award:** Mahesh Shah
- **Silver Jubilee Award:** Yubraj Paudel

NHRC team presented the criteria how the awardees were selected and also showed the EXCEL sheet how the scoring was done as a commitment to maintaining transparency while selecting the suitable candidates for the award.

## Participants' Views about the Summit



**Dr Atul Dahal – National Professional Officer, WHO**

As we are moving towards SDGs, we should not leave aside the unfinished agenda of MDGs. Likewise, in the current context, we are facing evolving challenges such as of NCDs, mental health, road traffic accidents, among others. Universal Health Coverage is a pivotal component in achieving SDGs with its overarching principles of accessibility and affordability. It seems that in SDGs, health has lost its place but in actuality, health is now considered an integral component of sustainable development and many goals apart from goal 3 are interlinked with health.

We need to see SDGs through a macro level where goals are not in isolation but rather complement each other. In this context, a paradigm shift is required with more focus on integrated approach. Accountability is the key in successful attainment of SDGs and therefore regulatory frameworks need to be established. Governance should be tightened up and there needs to be institutional capacity building in order to implement the programmes and policies and withstand any challenges that come forward. Health sector reform agenda should link with benefits, interactions and change.

To address the social determinants of health, financial hardship of the people need to be addressed through investment in development and opening up of productive sectors. SDGs also open up doors for public investment in health. As we move forward from MDGs to SDGs, we need to address the inequity issues – addressing those left behind and providing accessible and quality services. First of all, services should be reached to all needy population. Moreover, if the services are reached but are not of quality, we should still consider those services as unreached.

**Deepak Karki, Senior Manager – Strategic Evidence and Research, Population Services International (PSI) Nepal**

In this summit, I found a good mix of senior and junior researchers and policy makers which is encouraging. This diverse representation of groups helped in the debates and discussions being more interactive. For students and junior researchers who are just starting their careers, this summit has provided a good opportunity of exposure and capacity development.



NHRC is celebrating its 25<sup>th</sup> year of establishment this year, which is a great achievement in itself. Now, NHRC should invest more time and resources in building capacity of researchers. Rather than just implementing research, responsible conduct of research is important. It is also equally important to focus on quality of research. A big challenge is that we still lack high quality research that gets reflected in reputed peer reviewed journals. In most of such journals, we have foreigners as Principal Investigators. Therefore, we need to improve the quality of our research and academic writing practice. However, this advent that NHRC has started organizing such national level summits is a great start.

In terms of advancing towards SDGs, quality of evidence matters as it is one of the critical pathways to designing locally tailored programmes. There is also a need for common ownership to consider attainment of SDG goals and targets as a common responsibility that links with national reputation. At the implementation level too, we lack quality human resources which is the ground reality. Together we need to combat these challenges through an integrated effort.



**Nagendra Luitel, Research Manager, Transcultural Psychosocial Organization (TPO) Nepal**

Research culture on health and population issues is not yet matured but I am hopeful that it will get maturity in the coming years if such practices are promoted more often. These sorts of summits will help in peer learning where we learn from our fellow researchers and get to know what sorts of research are being designed. However, I noticed that more quantitative and clinic studies were reflected in this summit. More focus on social research also needs to be promoted. Likewise, if criteria are developed for paper presenters about the outline of the presentation, it would be more effective in maintaining uniformity of presentations and keeping track of the time for the presenters.

Another aspect we need to consider is the quality of the research being conducted. There is a need to improve capacity of the researchers and take ethical aspects more seriously while implementing any study. As a civil society representative as well as a member of research fraternity, I should not be looking this summit as an opportunity to highlight personal research work but also setting the agenda of the topic of the research, in my case mental health.

As a way forward in terms of such summits and conferences contributing to agenda setting, I think research organizations working in a sector for many years should take lead in organizing a panel/symposium in such conferences so that there is rigorous debate and discussion on a similar issue. Furthermore, the conference organizers also need to spend more time in planning of issues that need to be debated and discussed to generate more interest in the research community not only within the country but also at the global scale.

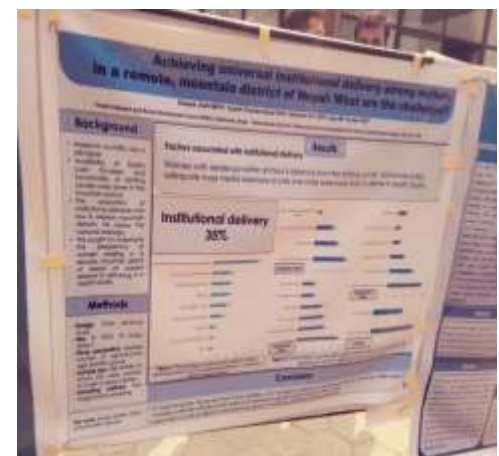
## HERD's Participation in the Summit



As a research and development organization committed to promoting research practice in health and social development, HERD participated in the event.

Five abstracts by HERD researchers were selected for poster presentations:

- Achieving Universal Institutional Delivery among Mothers in a Remote, Mountain District of Nepal: What Are the Challenges? by **Deepak Joshi**
- Barriers affecting Young People's Access to and Use of Family Planning Services: A Review of Literature from Nepal by **Shophika Regmi**
- Media as a Medium: Providing Rapid and Reliable Information to Design Response Actions through Media Monitoring Immediately After Nepal Earthquake by **Sudeep Uprety**
- Strengthening Media Response to Urban Health Issues in Nepal by **Sudeep Uprety**
- Prevalence of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and associated factors among adolescents after 2072 Nepal Earthquake by **Deena Giri**



The Summit was also well documented through **HERD's social media** accounts, especially Twitter – documenting major activities throughout the 3 day event, which was well appreciated by the summit participants.

## ***Views by HERD Researchers about the Summit***

### **Shophika Regmi, Project Manager**

It was a great experience attending 2nd National Summit of Health and Population Scientists in Nepal organized by NHRC. The two-day event with sharing of research and programmatic works by professionals/students from different organizations/institutions followed by insightful discussions towards achieving Sustainable Development Goals was a very good learning opportunity for me. I got a chance to share findings of a research and implementation project through a poster in this summit. This was undoubtedly a wonderful platform to portray your work to wide cadre of expertise and get their insights. Overall, the exchange of ideas and technical expertise and socializing opportunities were the key achievements from this event. I express my heartfelt thanks to the organizer and the presenters for providing me this golden opportunity.

### **Deepak Joshi, Senior Officer – Research, Monitoring and Evaluation**

Linking the research conference like this with SDGs and MDGs during the preconference event was the specialty of this event. Lessons learnt from the MDGs and further way ahead for the SDGs during the panel discussion seemed to be effective in attracting the audience interest. Likewise, thematic presentation of the research findings were good. However, presentation slides and posters lacked a uniform guideline. Many posters were attractive and had interesting evidence. It would have been better if the poster presenters were provided a bit more time to explain their posters and the posters could also have been managed in a more spacious area for easy mobility of visitors. Discussion was more centered around the findings. However, considerable weightage should have been given to discuss on methodology to encourage rigorous research. On a positive note, there was diversity in the participants: students, teachers, young professionals, senior researchers and this is an encouraging platform for them to move ahead. These sorts of presentations of research findings, I hope triggers more debates and discussions among the programmers and policy makers.

### **Sudeep Uprety, Senior Officer – Research Uptake and Communications**

The Second National Summit of Health and Population Scientists in Nepal was a very good experience in totality. As a media researcher, I got an opportunity to present two of my research works, which was quite an achievement in itself. It is a rarity when you submit two abstracts for a summit/conference and both get accepted. So, that way, I am grateful to NHRC for allowing me to showcase my work. It was indeed a fruitful experience for me as a young professional to observe the length, breadth and depth of research being conducted in Nepal. Yes, I was not very encouraged to see that very few young professionals were given opportunity for oral presentation, I think we are gradually moving forward towards the right direction. Personally, I think poster presentations could have been valued and

managed in a better way. Overall, I am very impressed to see the academic and research culture gradually taking its shape in Nepal and luckily we are being a catalyst in this change in some way.

### **Deena Giri, Project Support Officer**

I was very delighted when I got an opportunity to participate in the “Second National Summit of Health and Population Scientists in Nepal” organized by Nepal Health Research Council from 10<sup>th</sup> April to 12<sup>th</sup> April 2016. This was my first such conference after graduation where I also got honored to present my poster. After attending the conference, I was inspired to note that I had something to contribute in the field of public health. Before this, I was not actually aware about the true strength of research work. In the closing session, scientists were honoured with awards with different titles. Though it made me sad for a moment when no award was honoured to any female, on the other hand, I realized that females have still a lot more to do and it also motivated me to work even harder. Consequently, the time that I spent in the conference was really a quality time, I would love to grab such opportunities in the future as well, and lastly I would like to thank NHRC for providing such an excellent opportunity and platform for researchers like us.

### **Conclusion**

The Second National Summit of Health and Population Scientists in Nepal is a good start but this advent of promoting health research in Nepal should continue with greater engagement of both policy makers and the research fraternity to take the health related agendas forward and mainstreaming them as national priorities.

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