

Critique a Research Article

Can International Health Programmes Be Sustained After the End of International Funding:

The Case of Eye Care Interventions in Ghana

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**Can International Health Programmes Be Sustained After the End of International
Funding: The Case of Eye Care Interventions in Ghana.**

▪ The background of the research presented in the article is the newly created innovative “sustainability science.” Therefore, one of the main supportive arguments of Blanchet and James is that nowadays, everything, including environment, cities, live hoods and agriculture, must be sustainable. It is generally agreed that sustainability is the main component of health interference in developing countries. Nevertheless, the factors that can constrain or enable the sustainability are not studied well. The notion does not even have a clear definition. That is why it can lead to the vague and ambiguous methods for measuring sustainability in the sphere of health care. Therefore, the authors of the article have focused on the eye care program in Ghana. However, in order to generate evidences, they need to translate sustainability into definite indicators. The research was based on the innovation theory and the following important attributes: relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, triability and observability. The purpose of the study is to explain the relation of the innovation attributes to continuation of activities. The objective of the study that was carried out in Ghana can be defined as identification of sustainability factors by focusing on peculiar characteristics of health activities that were common for the Brong Ahafo regional hospitals. The uniqueness of the study is that the article presents the first health systems research based on the investigation of health activities and their attributes with regard to the general situation in a middle or low income country. Moreover, the researchers took into account the diffusion of innovations theories and its relationship with the level of continuation of activities.

▪ The initial objective was to identify sustainability factors with regard to the health activities implemented in Ghana district hospitals. The research started eighteen months after the

end of the funding provided by the Swiss Red Cross. The results showed that there exists important relationship between the attributes of health activities and the level of these activities continuation. The activities with the higher-scored attributes were more sustained and vice versa. According to this dependence, the least sustained activity was school health screening as it held the lowest score according to four attributes: compatibility, complexity, triability and observability. In contrast, facility-based consultations were more sustained than other activities. The hospital managers perceived them as not complex and very compatible. All these results led the researchers to a conclusion that the specific activities within this or any other health program can be predicted by means of diffusion of innovations theories. In addition, it was proven that various components of a health program should be extricated in case there is a necessity to find out which health activities are more likely to be continued. Such methodology is also useful for predicting the innovations' development over time. In order to come to such conclusion, the authors referred to the literature review method and measured continuation activities on the basis of the statistics of 2008-2009 in 11 hospitals and 51 interviews with district and regional health authorities, managers and other healthcare staff.

- The authors provide a literature review related to the period that characterizes 10 years after the eye care support program was implemented. The readers can also find statistics on the eye illnesses in Ghana before, during and after the Swiss Red Cross funding. In the literature review that is based on 59 sources, one can also find data on the economic level of life in the country and health districts in Ghana, and on the amount of professional doctors and ophthalmologists. All the information is given with regard to the changes that took places between 1992 and 2006. Such background information contributes to understanding the reasons behind the international funding and the research itself.

- The research is relevant to health issues today because the development of sustainability in Ghana can become a background for study or funding predictions of other lower development countries. In addition, tendencies of the development of facility-based consultations, cataract surgery, outreach activities and school health in the period that comprised 10 years after the international funding create a basis for the future study of the development of the same issues in the next decade.

- The research described in the article is a non-experimental comparative research. It compares not only the variables in progress and different time periods, but also the compatibility of different activities in the same period. The research design consists of a literature review and descriptive part based on the survey of the health sphere workers.

- Considering the fact that the purpose of the study was to investigate the continuation of activities that are related to the eye care program, the sample consisted of the population that had ophthalmological diseases. The interviewed workers were those, who worked in the same sphere. All the participants of the research lived in Ghana and referred to the district hospitals of Atebubu, Bechem, Dormaa, Drobo, Goasso, Kintampo, Nkoranza, Sampa, Techiman, Wenchi and Yeji. It is essential to emphasize on that the sample was appropriate for research and reflected the information about the chosen districts. However, lack of information on the rest seven district hospitals obviously decreases the accuracy of results that reflect the sustainability in Ghana in general.

- The results of the research show the effectiveness of international health system support for the poor countries. Considering the fact that any possible care program for the low or middle developed countries cannot last forever, it is essential to study a further situation in supported areas in order to know the final achievements of the program. Moreover, the division

of sustainability into several activities helps the better developed countries to improve funding programs, and shows what spheres need more attention. Practically, the programs that support the “needy” spheres of the poor countries’ healthcare system are very important as they can not only improve the level of lives and economy, but save lives, too. In such a way, assessment of the program effectiveness is an important step to improve it.

- Regarding the limitations of the research that were mentioned in the article, it is essential to underline that some ways to improve it could be more deep and attentive collection of the medical records that may be inaccurate because of flaw backs of the district hospitals’ system, mistakes of workers and database shortcomings . In addition, the lack of information about seven district hospitals of Ghana pushes to the idea that the research is not full and needs to be completed.

- The writing in the article is clear and straightforward. The structure is logical. The results and the conclusions are scientific, credible and well-understood by the readers. The background information that explains the situation in the country together with all notions makes the article simple for understanding by any audience.

- To my mind, the further research can be focused on each of the ten years separately. It will let the researchers follow the progress of each of the activities and find out the factors that have an impact on sustainability and its components.

- To sum it up, the research article is focused on a timely question and can be used to assess the effectiveness of the financial health support that developed countries provide to the poor ones. Although the results are not very accurate because of data limitations, the general conclusion is that the continuation of activities following the funding depends on such factors as compatibility, complexity, triability and observability. Considering the results, one can say that

it is quite logical to implement innovations if the result is visible and the complexity can decrease its development. Paying attention to the spheres that were researched (facility-based consultations, outreach activities, cataract surgery and school health), it becomes important to find ways to show the importance of school health to the population as it contributes much to the future raise of health level and professionalism in the country. In general, the research is exceptionally valuable for the sphere of healthcare. It offers new ideas on innovative techniques implementation and their further regularization through analyzing such important components as relative advantages, compatibility, complexity, triability and observability.

Reference List

Blanchet, K., and James, P. (2014). Can international health programmes be sustained after the end of international funding: The case of eye care interventions in Ghana. *BMC Health Services Research*, 14:77, 1-21.