

Developing sustainable, international partnerships model to build capacity in HIV and STIs

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Introduction

HIV/AIDS presents a major public health challenge, leading to increased demand for enhanced educational and research skills. Effective public health responses in prevention and management of HIV/STIs require strong human resources, focused on the development and implementation of evidence-based policies, together with lifelong learning and the generation of new knowledge.

The University of Sydney has been delivering a Masters program in HIV, STIs & Sexual Health for over twenty years, and is able to draw on an extensive network of content experts, together with specifically designed online resources. We wished to explore how best to leverage Australian pedagogic and research skills in HIV/STIs into an Indian setting, in order to build human resource capacity.

The aim of the partnership was to develop an educational program at the Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI) with which to build local capacity to strengthen human resources in the field of HIV and STIs, and to extend and strengthen India's response.

Methods

As part of the international development of the University of Sydney's Masters Program, training partnerships were formed with overseas institutions having cross-disciplinary and professional representation from both service and NGO sectors. PHFI was chosen as an institutional partner in India on the basis of its academic track record, extensive network of institutions and the broad background of Faculty members. Financial support was obtained from the Australian Government's aid agency.

The project started with scoping visits and training of core members of the academic team through Global Intensive Professional Program in HIV/STIs (GIPPH). A Collaborative Partnership model (Figure 1) was developed, with three key phases:

Phase 1: Stakeholder engagement

- formation of an Activity Advisory Committee;
- stakeholder survey and national stakeholder workshops, to establish local needs pedagogic skills development

Phase 2: Clarifying local need

- curriculum mapping and development to reflect local educational priorities

Phase 3: Operationalising

- pilot delivery, followed by regional expansion.

Results

The University of Sydney partnered with the PHFI, due to their focus on public health education, coupled with their technical and pedagogic expertise. 27 local faculty members of PHFI and affiliated organisations were trained in Australia and an enabling environment created by reciprocal visits and close collaboration.

A "Partnerships in public health education workshop" was held, along with a meeting of the Activity Advisory Committee at the University of Sydney, to understand key aspects of the proposed course. This was followed by national consultation in India, with participation from academic institutions, the Indian National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO), NGOs, representatives from key populations and prospective participants.

Results

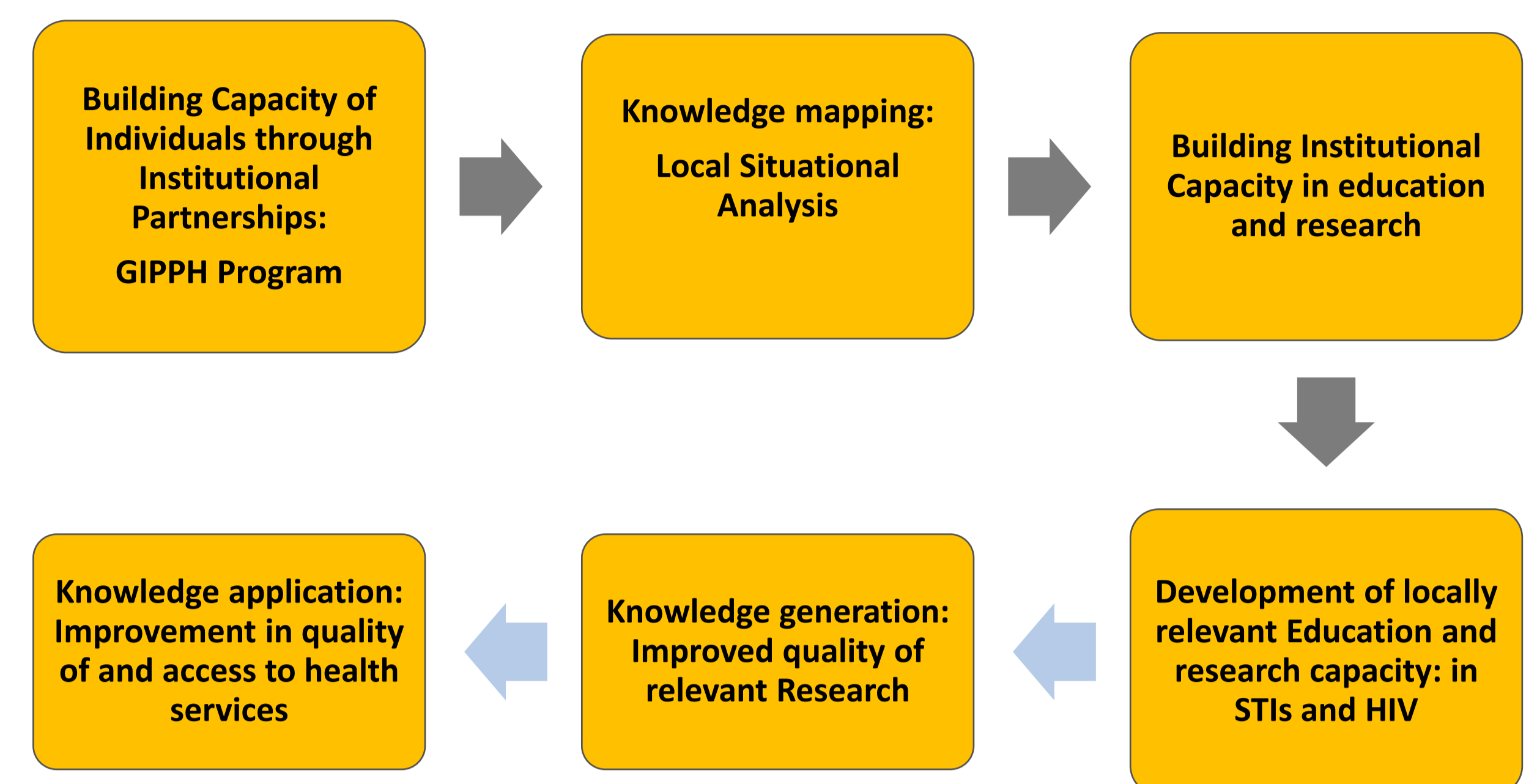


Figure 1 . Collaborative Partnership Model of Capacity Building in HIV and STIs

A mapping of an HIV educational course in India was done and the manuscript published. NACO's human resource capacity building initiatives were also mapped, to inform the development of a new course, and published as a manuscript.

A draft modular curriculum (Table 1) was developed by a core team of academics from University of Sydney and PHFI and discussed at the second in-country workshop. Each module was assigned a primary author and a designated reviewer. An independent expert reviewed the outline of the program, to ensure constructive alignment.

To minimise costs, an e-learning site was developed using open source software and containing jointly developed content. (Figure 2)

A jointly developed pilot course was delivered at the Indian Institute of Public Health, Delhi, PHFI, from Jan to June 2014. This involved a blended learning approach, combining online and an intensive contact phase, conducted jointly by PHFI and University of Sydney staff. Based on feedback from participants and other stakeholders, and also to explore the feasibility of a completely online program, the second delivery in 2014 was conducted in an exclusively online format, with delivery of virtual sessions. A total of 53 students successfully completed the course in 2014 and a further 29 students are undertaking the course in 2015. (Table 2)



Figure 2. Screen shots of the online portal and brochure of the Certificate course

S. No.	Name of the Module
1	Introduction to STI & HIV/AIDS
2	Biology and Clinical Orientation
3	Epidemiology & Surveillance
4	Biomedical Treatment Strategies
5	Prevention Technologies
6	Working with Vulnerable Populations
7	Behaviour Change Communication and Advocacy Strategies
8	Project Management & Leadership

Table 1. Modular curriculum

Batch	Enrolments	Male	Female
2014 Batch I	19	14	5
2014 Batch II	34	17	17
2015 Batch	29	18	11
Total	82	49	33

Table 2. Student enrolments

Funding: Program was funded by grants from the Australian Aid program of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (formerly AusAID). Program partners, University of Sydney and PHFI contributed financially and in kind.

Conclusion

- Clarity of purpose, careful matching of institutions and effective communication were keys to building informed partnerships.
- The leveraging of existing expertise, local adaptation, together with the use of open-source software has led to the development and running of a cost effective, scalable capacity-building resource.