

Capacity Building

Capacity building is any activity that improves an entity's ability to achieve its mission. In the case of scientific journals, capacity building often involves training and mentorship to improve editorial and administrative functions and processes. Such improvements, in turn, enable a journal to better attract and disseminate information that can improve human health by raising awareness of emerging issues as well as by inciting debate and reflection. In the words of the old maxim, capacity building is teaching a man to fish.

Environmental, occupational, public health, and medical journals published in developing countries occupy a unique niche in the scientific community. They provide research relevant to local situations that might not be published in international journals. Developing country journals encourage aspiring researchers and provide a forum to enhance publication skills. In addition, many developing country journals serve as an important resource for continuing education and, because of their lower cost, may be more accessible to health care professionals in impoverished areas.

Yet, journals in developing countries face many obstacles to providing critical information to local health practitioners, research scientists, and policy makers. Few of these journals meet the quality criteria required for representation in international indexing services. This content may therefore be largely unknown and inaccessible not only to readers within a journal's home country but also to the rest of the world, which could well benefit from the ground-level view of health topics such as arsenic poisoning, endemic disease, and hunger.

The major problems faced by journals in developing countries include:

- inadequate capacity for peer review and evaluation (such as difficulties in maintaining an anonymous peer review system, cultural beliefs that discourage criticizing more senior researchers, and lack of a pool of qualified and willing reviewers)
- lack of editorial skills among members of editorial boards
- lack of continuity of editorial members
- lack of resources and funding for publication and management (e.g., technological infrastructure such as in-house desktop publishing and knowledge of building journal websites; funding for printing and distribution of hard-copy journals)
- lack of business plans for the journals
- undeveloped production and marketing skills (such as inability to maintain a sustained publication schedule due to lack of resources)
- minimal full-time staff at the journal's disposal
- poor visibility of journals
- small number of manuscripts submitted to journals
- uneven quality of manuscripts submitted (hampered, for example, by uneven writing skills and the inherent difficulties of performing research in a developing country environment)
- publication of research results from developing countries in developed countries

- journals with no corresponding transfer of relevant information back to the developing countries' journals
- reluctance of local authors to publish in their journals due to citation index issues, perceived inferiority to international journals, and authors' belief that publication in international journals may facilitate more rapid career development

EHP, through its capacity-building efforts in Africa and Latin America, is committed to working with selected journals from developing countries to improve the quality of these journals and make their content more readily available to readers around the world.

African Medical Journal Editors Partnership Program

In 2003, representatives from the **John E. Fogarty International Center (FIC)** and the **National Library of Medicine (NLM)** met with the editors of five international journals (including EHP) and four African journals with three objectives in mind: 1) to develop a program to strengthen African medical journals such that they could provide training for African medical researchers, 2) to improve the quality and visibility of these journals, and 3) to make the journals a better resource for local researchers and policy makers. The African medical journals were chosen because they are published in countries that have active NIH-sponsored research and are part of the communication network developed by NLM for the **Multilateral Initiative on Malaria**.

The program, which subsequently became known as the **African Medical Journal Editors Partnership Program**, was first funded in 2004, with the **Council of Science Editors** (CSE) agreeing to serve as the administrative body for this project. Once the participating editors had identified the African journals' capacity needs, the following **partnerships** were established:

- **African Health Sciences** with **BMJ** (British Medical Journal)
- **Ghana Medical Journal** with **The Lancet**
- **Malawi Medical Journal** with **JAMA** (Journal of the American Medical Association)
- **Mali Médical** (MM) with **EHP** and the **American Journal of Public Health**

The project has achieved notable success in meeting its original objectives as established by annual formal evaluations. Each year the partner editors assemble in conjunction with the CSE annual meeting to discuss progress, problems, and plans. The annual evaluation consists of a pre-meeting questionnaire completed by the African editors, followed by a formal report comparing accomplishments against targeted goals.

Two of the four journals (African Health Sciences and MM) are now indexed in **Medline**, evidence of the heightened quality of these publications. The provision of technical equipment has allowed the journals to become more efficient and resulted in improvements in processing times and journal management. Performance indicators show that submissions have increased and the regularity of publication has improved. Each of the African partner editors has conducted a series of successful training workshops for authors and reviewers; by incorporating a training element for local facilitators, these

workshops are now becoming sustainable regular events.

MM and Malawi Medical Journal have also developed fully functional websites for their journals from scratch, with EHP providing web hosting for the **former**. MM has already observed a huge increase in traffic to its website.

Latin American Partnerships

With the expanding role of Southern Hemisphere countries in the global economy it is important to provide environmental, occupational, and public health information to Latin American communities and to share the research being conducted in Latin America with nations beyond its borders. In addition, there is a great need to advance professional development, research, and application of solutions to the widespread health problems faced by this region.

To help address these issues, EHP works in close collaboration with the Division of International Health at Mt. Sinai School of Medicine using funds from the FIC's **International Training and Research Program in Environmental and Occupational Health (ITREOH)**. Currently, EHP fosters capacity-building partnerships in Latin America to promote the development of regional journals that can become a source of definitive information on important health issues.

Ciência & Saúde Coletiva (CSC)

Through a collaboration with Mt. Sinai School of Medicine, EHP became aware of a Brazilian public health journal, **CSC**, which is the official Journal of the **Brazilian Association of Public Health (ABRASCO)**. CSC is published in Portuguese but also has English, French, and Spanish translations. The journal is accessed in all Latin America countries through the **Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO)**, a web-based library covering a selected collection of Brazilian scientific journals. The journal's mission is to serve as a vehicle for disseminating and critically reflecting on the history of public health, analyzing the state of the art of its component disciplines, and documenting the latest trends in thinking, theory, and practice in public health.

With assistance from the Mt. Sinai School of Medicine, EHP and CSC developed a partnership in 2004, working together to promote each other's journals as well as to co-publish selected review articles. EHP has also assisted CSC by evaluating its peer-review process and providing feedback to foster an even better process. EHP has also worked with CSC to evaluate the needs of its readership, explore the usefulness of introducing the **Digital Object Identifier (DOI)** system, and strengthen CSC's policy on competing financial interests.

A major success of the partnership has been the acceptance of CSC for indexing in **Medline**. With its inclusion in Medline the journal is now available to thousands more researchers globally.

The journal, which expanded to a bimonthly schedule in January 2007, is an Open Access publication with an excellent website. The journal is thematic in nature, with the majority

of the articles resulting from original investigations. The thematic nature of the journal provides a critical service to the health systems in Latin America and is well received by researchers, students, and policy makers.

Ciencia y Trabajo (C&T)

In 2003 EHP and the Mt. Sinai School of Medicine joined together with the **Asociación Chilena de Seguridad** (Chilean Security Association; ACHS) to transform a local journal, Boletín Científico, into a high-quality regional Latin American journal devoted to occupational and environmental health. The journal is now called **C&T** and is published by the **Fundación Científica y Tecnológica**. C&T has an international editorial board, is well funded, and is published regularly on a quarterly basis.

As part of this partnership, EHP helped revise C&T's format and coverage. EHP also evaluated and suggested improvements for C&T's peer-review process. In an ongoing program, EHP provides science news content to C&T, which the journal translates into Spanish for republication. C&T is not yet indexed by **Medline**.

Proposed Caribbean and Latin American Journal Partnership

Accessibility to Caribbean and Latin American journals is limited; these journals are poorly represented on international indexing services. With such poor representation, research reported in Caribbean and Latin American journals is not readily available even in the region. Various stakeholders including EHP are considering a partnership program that addresses the needs of Caribbean and Latin American journals in much the same way the African Medical Journal Editors Partnership addressed the needs of African journals.

For more information on partnering with EHP, please visit our **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**.