Three Strategic Challenges for Generating Political Priority for Global Surgical Care

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Study background

- Presenting mid-course results
- Independent study
  - No external funding
  - Encouraged by members of global surgical community
- Conducted by:
  - Two social scientists and one surgeon
  - All supportive of cause
- Aims:
  - Identify strategic challenges for advancing political priority
  - Identify opportunities to address challenges
Study background

- Orientation:
  - No prescriptions offered
  - Solutions valuable only if generated by community
  - Seeking to spark productive deliberation

- Focus:
  - Global actors
  - With recognition that national and local are critical levels

- Results come from:
  - Analysis of data including interviews and documents
  - Challenges community members themselves identify
Study context

- **Scarce resources**: surgery as one among many competing global health priorities
- **Some issues** (AIDS, polio) do better than others (mental health, surgical conditions) in priority/resource generation
- Grounded in **Lancet framework** on determinants of political priority for global health initiatives*

Findings: three strategic challenges

- Governance
- Solution definition
- Public positioning
Governance

What it refers to:
- Organizational structures for collective action

Why these matter:
- Enable community to steer effectively toward agreed upon goals

Example
- Task Force for Child Survival and Development
Findings on governance

- Fragmented community
- Many talented and passionate advocates, but dearth of unifying leaders
- No consensus on what guiding institutions needed
- Grassroots civil society support almost non-existent
“It’s not even different pieces of the puzzle because if you put them all together you still have nothing.”

-- Statement from respondent
Solution definition

What this is:
- Consensus on how problem is to be addressed

Why it matters:
- Policy-makers more likely to act when:
  - They know what they are being asked to do
  - They think they can do something about the problem

Example:
- ‘Immunize children’
Findings on solution definition

- Agreement on problem
  - Surgical care grossly neglected
  - The glue that binds this community

- Disagreement on solutions
  - Debates over what’s ‘essential’ and use of that term
  - Debates over who is qualified to do surgery
  - If offered $500 million, would there be consensus on how that should be invested?
Solution definition: agreement on problem but not solutions

“The end goal is the same: to build capacity and to reduce the surgical burden of disease....But there is no consensus on how to get there.”

-- Statement from respondent
Public positioning

- What it is:
  - Framing of issue that inspires external audiences to act

- Why it matters:
  - Only some resonate widely
  - Different frames resonate with different audiences

- Examples:
  - Case of HIV/AIDS
  - Finance ministers v. health ministers
Findings on public positioning

- Facing misperception that surgery is costly
- Useful arguments being advanced on burden, cost-effectiveness, primary healthcare
- But something missing (an emotional connection?): not taking hold
“Within the general public there is an unconscious bias that surgery is a luxury item that can’t be afforded even though it has been shown to be cheaper than condom distribution with regard to DALYs saved.”

-- Statement from respondent
Strategic challenges

- **Governance**: How should governing arrangements be altered to facilitate collective action?
- **Solution definition**: How to develop common strategy that is sensitive to context?
- **Public positioning**: What framing(s) of the issue are needed to attract external support?
Linkages among challenges

Effective governance

Consensus solution definition
Strong public positioning
Strong opportunities

- Committed and highly knowledgeable community
- Multiple forums to bring about collective action
- Evidence on global burden and cost-effectiveness
The concern

- How to leverage these strengths to meet the governance, solution definition and public positioning challenges?