

# Research Strategy

## Global Health Cluster

### 2022-2027

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## VERSION CONTROL TABLE

Version number	Purpose/change	Author(s)	Date
1.	Initial draft	Skar, Frøen	March 2022
2.	Consultation draft to the research strategy group	Research strategy group	March 2022
3.	Revised draft	Skar	May 2022
4.	Consultation draft to the global health cluster	Global health cluster	May 2022
5.	Revised draft	Skar	August 2022
6.	Consultation draft to the research strategy group	Research strategy group	September 2022
7.	Revised draft	Skar	October 2022
8.	Consultation draft to the cluster leadership	Cluster leadership	November 2022
9.	Final version	Skar	November 2022

## 1 GLOBAL HEALTH CLUSTER

The Norwegian Institute of Public Health (NIPH) work within global health is related to knowledge generation, preparedness, infrastructure, development of public health institutions, and policy development (2021 Global Health Development Plan). The Global Health Cluster (Helsetjenester Global; HTG) coordinates and supports efforts in adherence to this plan through three main strands of work: global health research, implementations of public health initiatives with partner countries, and policy guidance and advice for national and global institutions as well as partner countries.

The NIPH contributes with research of global health interests across most domains of public health including health systems. Hallmarks of the research based in HTG are collaborative projects with partners and implemented in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC) and the wider global health community; applied and secondary research focused on public health issues and priorities specific to the partner country's setting; and most often in coordinated efforts with national public health authorities of our partner countries. In this setting of proximity between research, implementation collaboration with partner countries, and policy guidance, it is a priority of the research strategy to strengthen internal collaboration and synergies between our research, implementations, and policy guidance.

## **2 PROCESS OF RESEARCH STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT**

A research strategy provides the direction and organization by which research is conducted. The contact person for research in the cluster leadership, Ane-Marthe Solheim Skar, initiated the development of a research strategy for the Global Health Cluster and received support for the initiative by the cluster leadership in March 2022. After initial meetings between Skar and Frederik Frøen, the research director within the Division for Health Services (hereafter “research director”), a voluntary research strategy team was put together. The information about the work and invitation to join the team was shared at a cluster meeting and by e-mail. In addition to Skar and Frøen, group members in the research strategy team were Kjersti Mørkrid Blom-Bakke, Unni Gopinathan, Lieke Fleur Heupink, Eleni Zoumpoulia Papadopoulou, and Victoria Charlotte Simensen. This group met three times (May, June, August 2022), to discuss the thematic direction, values and quality of research, and organization of the research within the Global Health Cluster. These four topics are intimately interdependent – impact depends on high quality and ethical research and implementation, and the research implementation depends on the aims in impact and excellence. Across all four: Where are the synergies between HTG’s work and resources in the three main stands of work, namely research, implementation, and policy guidance?

Firstly, what are the **thematic direction** of research in HTG? The impact of proposed research is the first, and in global health often the main, criterion by which our research is evaluated. What themes with the potential of high impact do our owners, funders, stakeholders and users prioritize? Where can HTG research have the biggest impact, and what are our comparative advantages to succeed? In meeting one, the research strategy team addressed implementation science as the global health cluster’s common ground.

Secondly, what are the **values that will guide the research** in HTG? The integrity of research depends on adherence to a core set of values. As researchers, we have the responsibility of evaluating the consequences of the decisions we make, such as the language we use or the questions we raise. What should be the set of values that are expected to be adherent to in the research conducted at HTG?

Thirdly, what should be the **qualities of research** in HTG? Although there is no absolute agreement on what defines quality and excellence in research, some general criteria and/or questions to consider might facilitate high-quality research. Undertaking research of insufficient scientific quality is wasteful, and the NIPH is already implementing several strategies to strengthen high-quality research. But what are the qualities and ambitions of research with and in LMIC and the wider global health community that should be hallmarks of HTG research?

Lastly, how should research be **organized, planned, and implemented**? What do we have and what will be needed in human, infrastructure, and funding resources? How should the Research strategy be followed up?

Following these discussions, Skar wrote a draft of the research strategy and received feedback from the research strategy group, before the employees in HTG were involved in the process of defining and specifying the themes and priorities of the research strategy at a cluster seminar the 9<sup>th</sup> of May 2022. Based on feedback at the cluster seminar, there was support for focusing on implementation research (see Figures 1-3). The final version of the research strategy was submitted to the research strategy group again, and then to the global health cluster for review and comment in October 2022. Based on the last comments and feedback, the cluster leadership reviewed, commented, and then approved the final version of the research strategy in November 2022.

Figure 1: *Feedback from the Global Health Cluster on scientific qualities that should drive our research*



Figure 2: Feedback from the Global Health Cluster on how we should ensure scientific quality of our research

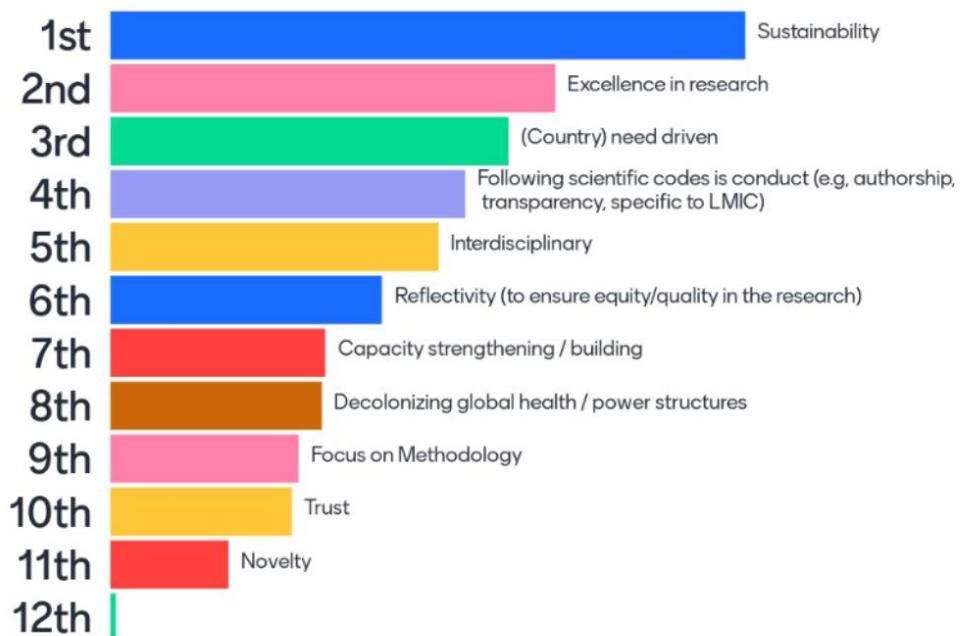


Figure 3: Feedback from the Global Health Cluster on what should be the thematic areas of our research



### **3 THEMATIC DIRECTION OF RESEARCH**

HTG will prioritize implementation research to develop evidence-based knowledge which corresponds to both internal and external needs and priorities:

1. Align with internal priorities

Research projects should be in line with existing plans for global health initiatives in the Global Health Cluster and the institute (Utviklingsplan for global helse).

2. Demand driven

Research projects should align with priorities outlined by the Research Council of Norway, the EU and other relevant funders and with the needs of country partners.

3. Capacity building and strengthening

Efforts to strengthen capacity in scientific research should be integrated with every research proposal in the health care settings we are working in, meaning that we will build and strengthen existing expertise.

## **4 PRIORITY IMPLEMENTATION RESEARCH**

The translation of evidence-based methods, guidelines, interventions, or policies into practice remains a challenge, with both barriers and facilitators at inner and outer context level. Implementation science, the “scientific study of methods to promote the systematic uptake of research findings and other evidence-based practices into routine practice, and, hence, to improve the quality and effectiveness of health services” ([Eccles & Mittman, 2006](#)) has a huge potential to improve public health and facilitate progress toward health equity ([Baumann, & Cabassa, 2020](#); [Theobald et al., 2018](#); [World Health Organization, 2016](#)). Thus, implementation science can help close the gap between knowledge and practice.

Implementation research should be prioritised to maximize the potential benefits of global health research. This might include, but is not limited to, testing the effectiveness of programs, policies or interventions while also investigating how these could be successfully implemented. We use a broad definition of implementation research, in line with the definition given by the Research Council Norway:

“Research for effective implementation should be understood broadly to include research on interventions with proven efficacy as well as programmes and policies with the potential to substantially reduce disease burden and promote health equity. It encompasses assessment of “real world” impact of interventions, including on health outcomes such as illness, survival, physical growth, and cognitive development. It also focuses on acceptability, adoption, appropriateness, feasibility, fidelity, cost, coverage, scalability and/or sustainability of interventions, programmes, and policies. It may encompass other factors that affect implementation, including overarching aspects such as the organization, financing, and governance of health systems and the impact of global-level institutions, financing mechanisms and policy processes, which often shape the parameters for health and health equity in LLMICs.”

### 4. Prioritize community care settings to maximize reach and public health outcomes

We shall not prioritize specific topics or countries as long as any of the 5 criteria are met. Thematic priorities could be determined by any of these criteria.

## ACTIONS AND INDICATORS

Actions and indicators for evaluation of success related to whether we produce research within the thematic priorities outlined in the Research Strategy:

Aims	Actions	Indicators	Responsible
1. Align with internal priorities	- Make sure research projects align with cluster and institute level strategy plans	- All projects are evaluated and listed as being in line with internal priorities	PI*s, with support from the research leader
2. Demand driven	- Make sure research projects align with priorities of funders, global needs, and key stakeholders	- All projects are evaluated and listed as being in line with global needs and priorities of key stakeholders	Pls, with support from the research leader
3. Capacity building and strengthening	- Build and strengthen capacity within HTG - Make sure research projects build local capacity	- All project descriptions include capacity building strategies	Pls, with support from the research leader
4. Prioritize implementation research	- Apply for funding for implementation research projects - Evaluate whether it is possible to include implementation science elements in ongoing projects	- All projects review the possibility to include implementation research	Pls, with support from the research leader
5. Prioritize community care settings	- Apply for funding for implementation research projects within community care settings	- New projects will be conducted in community care settings	Pls, with support from the research leader

\*Principal Investigator

## 5 VALUES THAT WILL GUIDE OUR RESEARCH

We should conduct ethical and inclusive research to maximize our research impact through empowering and promoting equity and dignity. Key guiding values that should guide our research include ethics, inclusiveness, and a focus on impact and sustainability.

1. We should follow the [Declaration of Helsinki](#).
2. Our research should align with the [global ethics code](#).
  - a. Fairness, including stakeholder involvement (user involvement), dissemination of findings to local communities, partnership with local researchers, and clear and formal agreements.
  - b. Respect, including proactive approach to cultural sensitivity, local assets and ethical approvals.
  - c. Care, including informed consent tailored to local requirements, clear procedures for complaints of misconduct, ensure the safety and wellbeing of Research participants, and development of risk management plans.
  - d. Honesty, including clear role expectations, responsibilities and conduct, honest presentation of information, ensure absence of corruption and bribery, and follow local data protection standards.
3. Ensure equal authorship
  - a. transparent process: discuss authorship and division of responsibilities with partners when planning the study and continue discussions
  - b. be inclusive
  - c. acknowledge people contributing who are not on the authorship list
  - d. follow the Vancouver convention on authorship
4. Ensure inclusive research. This might include considering the following factors when designing a study, recruiting participants, writing up the research results, and disseminating the findings: Underrepresented and underserved communities, stigmatized groups, age, gender and gender identity, sexual orientation, economic status, national and cultural background, and religion.
5. Maximize research impact
  - a. Dissemination. Have thorough discussions and make initial plans, which are updated along the way, on how, to whom, and when to disseminate research findings.
  - b. Knowledge translation. Identify and work towards knowledge translation of the research process itself and the research findings.
  - c. Sustainability. Think about how to make the research sustainable from the first phase of development of a study. Make a sustainability plan which addresses facilitators and barriers to sustainment to ensure that our research findings will be sustained and maintained once put into practice. Use implementation frameworks which address sustainability.

## **ACTIONS AND INDICATORS**

Indicators for evaluation of success related to whether the research we produce is in line with our values outlined in the research strategy:

- A. All ongoing projects will evaluate their work against the values expectations stated under 4
- B. All new projects will address the values expectations in their application and develop a follow-up plan

Responsible: The PIs.

## **6 QUALITY EXPECTATIONS OF RESEARCH**

HTG will strive to develop high-quality research. Relevant measures that translate our values to concrete research practices include, but are not limited to:

- 1. Follow global guidelines for quality of research, e.g., reporting guidelines, guidelines for documenting, sharing, and reuse of data, prioritization methods/checklists for research priority setting (e.g., Child Health and Nutrition Research Initiative (CHNRI))
- 2. Be informed by systematic reviews of the available evidence base or include systematic reviews
- 3. Prioritize methodological rigor.

## **ACTIONS AND INDICATORS**

Indicators for evaluation of success related to whether the research we produce is in line with the quality expectations outlined in the research strategy:

- A. All ongoing projects will evaluate their work against the quality expectations stated under 5
- B. All new projects will address the quality expectations in their application and develop a follow-up plan

Responsible: The PIs.

## **7 ORGANIZATION OF RESEARCH**

HTG aims to organize our research in a way that will strengthen and support our research activities. On an organizational level, we will strive towards the following (please see actions and indicators):

### **1. Ensure a supportive research culture**

We want to establish a supportive research culture where research activities are encouraged. A supportive research culture is linked to several of the other aims, including collaborative communities and leadership support. We want HTG to be an attractive workplace for researchers involved in high-quality global research projects. It takes long-term efforts from cluster members and the leadership to create and maintain a supportive research environment.

### **2. Strengthen internal and external collaboration**

- a. Collaboration within the Global Health Cluster. We need to take advantage of the multidisciplinary opportunities within HTG. We have expertise in different, but related fields, with the potential to perform greater with increased collaboration. There is a need to establish collaboration structures to enable collaboration.
- b. Collaboration at the institute level. Several environments at the institute level are working with related topics to the ones covered at the Global Health Cluster. Increased collaboration would have the potential to strengthen our research, as well as make us appear more united for external partners. For this to happen, there is a need for establishing collaboration structures and embedding the research with other clusters and at the institutional level.
- c. External collaboration. To build strong research teams we are dependent upon external collaboration, both in Norway and abroad.

### **3. Prioritize professional development support**

For the Global Health Cluster to be an attractive workplace for researchers, we need to offer career development opportunities for both junior and senior researchers. Likewise, there needs to be a continuous focus on this through guidance and coaching.

### **4. Ensure sustainable research funding**

Sustainable funding is a prerequisite for every research project, to enable long-term planning and predictability.

### **5. Ensure leadership support**

Effective leadership is linked to employee engagement and performance. Leaders have the responsibility to make decisions and turn action into results. As such, leadership support is important for successful strategy implementation, including organizational structures and processes.

### **6. Successful implementation of the research strategy**

The actions and evaluations of the research strategy need to be followed up. Roles and responsibilities need to be stated and communicated, and a timeline needs to be decided upon.

## ACTIONS AND INDICATORS

Indicators for evaluation of whether we meet the standard for how to organize the research as stated in the research strategy:

Aims	Actions	Indicators	Responsible
1. Ensure a supportive research culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Include the whole cluster in development of the research strategy</li> <li>- Visible support of research, e.g., include the whole cluster in research activities (feedback to applications, share findings in cluster meetings, etc.)</li> <li>- Assess current climate for the leaders to act based on real-time data</li> <li>- Presentation of research projects at Global Health Cluster meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Positive feedback on inclusion, participation, and open discussions</li> <li>- The research group meets frequently, look at calls, how to support one person to get a PI, etc.</li> <li>- Research group responsible for the science club (monthly)</li> </ul>	Cluster leadership, research group
2. Strengthen internal and external collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop a research lag and collectively work to deliver to the research strategy</li> <li>- Establishing collaboration structures for research within the cluster</li> <li>- Teamwork training</li> <li>- Close linkage between policy, implementation, and research</li> <li>- Establish collaboration structures for global health research and embed the research with other clusters at the institutional level</li> <li>- Build competency on effective teams and team development</li> <li>- Build/take part in strategic collaborations, partnerships, and networks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A research lag is developed and meets regularly</li> <li>- Collaboration structures are implemented</li> <li>- Cluster members are committed to the common outcomes</li> <li>- Increased communication and collaboration with other parts of the institute</li> <li>- Strong multidisciplinary and cross-cultural research teams</li> </ul>	Cluster leadership

Aims	Actions	Indicators	Responsible
3. Prioritize professional development opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Offer career counselling, guidance, and coaching</li> <li>- Provision of career opportunities</li> <li>- Leaders will include career development as focus in the appraisal and development review (“medarbeidersamtale”), followed by conversations between personal leader and research leader</li> <li>- Review skills needs, individually and as a group, to identify gaps and act upon this</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All researchers have had the opportunity to participate in professional development activities</li> <li>- Internal mentoring</li> <li>- PhD network</li> </ul>	Cluster leadership
4. Ensure sustainable research funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ensure support in the cluster and organization to identify calls and developing applications</li> <li>- Apply for external research funds</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Submitted research applications</li> </ul>	Cluster leadership, research lag, PIs
5. Ensure leadership support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- One cluster leadership member responsible for research activities in the cluster</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Leaders are perceived as proactive, knowledgeable, supportive, and perseverant</li> </ul>	Cluster leadership
6. Successful implementation of the research strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The progress will be reviewed in the cluster leadership and with the research team twice a year (December and June) followed by cluster involvement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Review each of the aims, actions, and indicators</li> <li>- The plan will be reviewed and revised yearly</li> </ul>	Research leader, research group