

# EquitAble

Enabling Universal and Equitable Access to Healthcare  
for Vulnerable People in Resource Poor Settings in Africa



Trinity College Dublin



Stellenbosch University



Ahfad University for Women



University of Namibia



University of Malawi



Healthcare can be neither universal nor equitable if it is less accessible to some sections of society than it is to others. EquitAble is a four-year collaborative research project comprised of researchers from Ireland, Norway, Namibia, Malawi, South Africa, and Sudan. The EquitAble project has produced empirical knowledge on enabling universal and equitable access to healthcare for vulnerable people in resource poor settings in Africa. EquitAble brings together several teams comprised of both leading and upcoming researchers, from two European and four African countries. This strong consortium, with established project management and research credentials, presents a valuable opportunity to provide data to inform crucial policy decisions, as well as building research capacity in this area.

EquitAble ([www.equitableproject.org](http://www.equitableproject.org)) – a European Commission FP7-funded Project - undertook policy analysis, intensive ethnographic analysis, and extensive household surveys across Namibia, Malawi, South Africa, and Sudan. EquitAble is led by Professor Malcolm MacLachlan of the Centre for Global Health and School of Psychology, Trinity College Dublin. EquitAble has developed a new policy analysis framework - EquiFrame - which assesses the degree to which vulnerable groups and core concepts of human rights feature in health policies, based on a comprehensive development and validation process. EquiFrame evaluates 1) the extent to which 21 Core Concepts of human rights are addressed in policy documents, and 2) coverage of 12 Vulnerable Groups who might benefit from such policies. Using this framework, analysis of 51 policies across Namibia, Malawi, South Africa and Sudan, confirmed the

relevance of all Core Concepts and Vulnerable Groups. Further, this analysis has highlighted some very strong policies, serious shortcomings in others, as well as country-specific patterns. As described by Paul E. Farmer, Editor of Health and Human Rights, EquiFrame is a ‘theoretical tool that facilitates the integration of human rights concepts into policy-making. It offers a smart and pragmatic strategy for promoting global health equity by moving rights-based concepts forward in policy makers’ toolkits’.

The EquitAble project Work Package that developed EquiFrame was led by Professor Mutamad Amin, Director of Research at Ahfad University for Women, Omdurman, Sudan, a former Minister of Health. It was the guiding framework for the development of Malawi's first National Health Policy, and will be used to guide all future health policy revision and development in North Sudan. There are currently plans to use EquiFrame in other countries, and it has already been used to evaluate the health-related donor policies of the Governmental aid agencies in Ireland, UK and Norway. More than 10 papers have now been published using EquiFrame; ethnographic work is currently being published and the consortium has conducted analyses of its unique quantitative data-set of over 32,000 people across 17 sites in Africa.

EquitAble Project Manager Dr. Hasheem Mannan affirms that “currently our health systems and policies and practices are not inclusive for vulnerable groups such as woman-headed households, displaced populations and persons with disabilities”. While the importance of addressing the health needs of vulnerable groups in low-income countries is increasingly being recognised, there are many challenges in how this should be addressed and implemented for different categories of vulnerable people. While different groups of vulnerable people present some similar challenges for their equitable access to healthcare, there are also distinctive challenges presented by different groups. This project focuses on the challenges that persons with disabilities present to achieving universal and equitable access to healthcare in resource poor settings.

The focus of project EquitAble on activity limitations in Africa aims to provide data that is crucial to enable universal and equitable access to healthcare in resource poor areas. It aims to provide the disability sector with data to develop evidence-based advocacy; government

ministries with opportunities to implement evidence-based policy decisions; and service providers with data to enact evidence-based practice. However, this project goes beyond making recommendations and producing guidelines; it addresses the process of bridging the evidence-policy-practice gaps, by identifying barriers and facilitators for the implementation of research findings, thus enabling the project to have a real impact.

The research results arising from EquitAble will feed much-needed empirical data and analyses into on-going debates in the field of public health regarding how best to plan interventions that promote access to healthcare and prevent failures in health systems. Such systems-failures, such as multiple drug resistance and exacerbation of health problems, could be cured or prevented with better information and greater accessibility. Finally, this consortium is committed to disseminating the Project's findings to a broad range of people with activity limitations and other characteristics that may make them vulnerable to inequitable access to health services. These groups are also traditionally amongst those with whom research results are seldom shared.



The EquiFrame manual is free-to-download at [www.equitableproject.org](http://www.equitableproject.org). Further details are available on the EquitAble project website [www.equitableproject.org](http://www.equitableproject.org), or by visiting the Centre for Global Health website: [www.global-health.tcd.ie](http://www.global-health.tcd.ie).

**Work Package 3: Intensive Qualitative Study; Data collection from all four project countries, 2012**





**Feedback Workshops, Worcester and Madwaleni, South Africa, 2012**

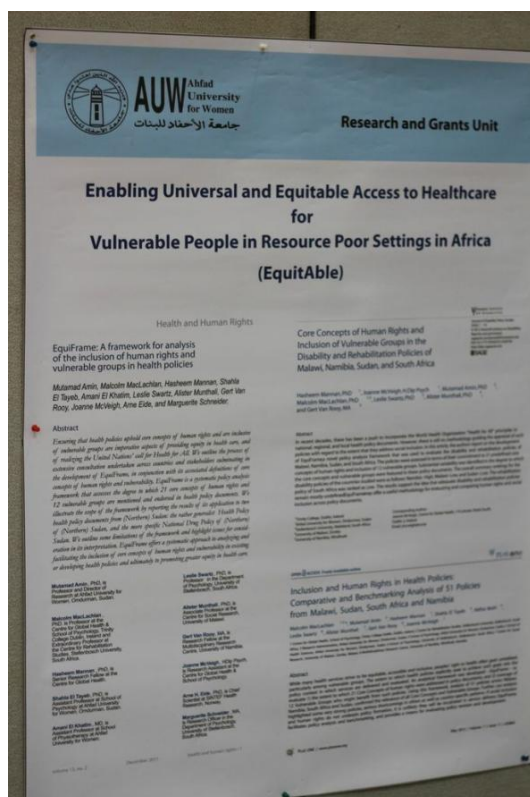


**Work Package 4: Extensive Quantitative Study; Training of Enumerators and Data collection across  
Namibia, Malawi, South Africa, and Sudan, 2011**





## Equitable Closing Ceremony, Ahfad University for Women, Omdurman, Sudan, February, 2013



**Representatives from Sudanese Ministry of Health and EquitAble, February 2013**



**EquitAble Project Team, Ahfad University for Women, Omdurman, Sudan, February 2013**





