

NHRSa: STRENGTHENING NATIONAL HEALTH RESEARCH SYSTEMS

A FLEXIBLE APPROACH

No two countries have the same national health research system. There are common features, but the structure, power relations and priorities for development differ considerably between countries.

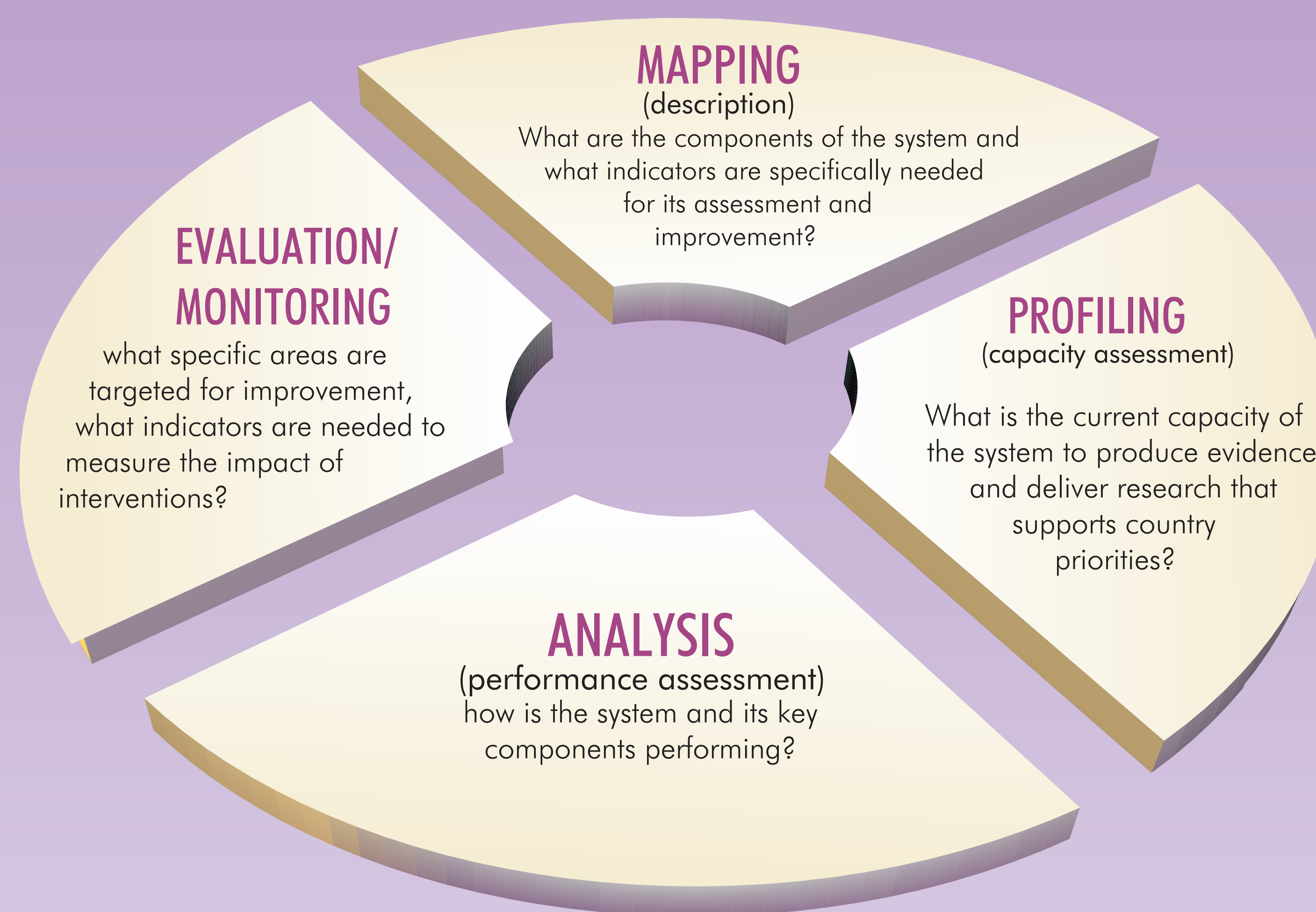
The approach to national health research system assessment (NHRSa) in developing countries is now being tested by COHRED with several partners. It gives decision makers and research managers a rapid overview of the current state of their system, helping them define priority areas for targeted improvements.

There cannot be a viable "one size fits all" assessment or set of indicators that suits all countries. Equally, there is no need for every country to create their specific assessment system. And there is a need for international comparability.

With NHRSa, decision makers select from a set of indicators and design an analysis framework that gives information that is specific to their needs and national situation. Data collected in a generic part of the assessment is useful for international comparison and sharing with other countries or international bodies.

FOUR ASPECTS OF NHRSa

The processes are modular. They can be used in sequence or in parts, depending on national needs



KEY FACTS

The National Health Research systems improvement approach:

- **Practical information for decision makers.**
It provides them with information they need to improve their health research system to deliver national goals.
- **Step-by-step NHRS improvement.**
It builds a long-term process of incremental NHRS improvement; not a technical data collection effort.
- **Quick action and early improvements.**
It provides decision makers data needed to improve their health research system at an early stage.
- **Consensus on evidence and data gathering approaches.**
It encourages players in national health research players to build a common vision of requirements. In this process they agree on evidence needs, facilitate data collection, interpret findings and plan and implement solutions to identified problems.

TESTING & VALIDATING NHRSa

The NHRSa concept was developed in a series of partner consultations in 2005 and early 2006. Validation and review with countries has been progressing in 2006:

- WHO WRPO, the Institute for Health Systems Research in Malaysia, Cambodia, Mongolia, the Philippines, Lao PDR, Shanghai/China and Viet Nam - a multi-country consultation and review.
- Cameroon and Tajikistan - use of NHRSa as part of national NHRS strengthening processes.
- Gulf Cooperation Council and WHO EMRO, involving 10 Middle Eastern countries - use in a regional consultation and country self-assessment exercise of NHRS.
- Trinidad & Tobago - use in NHRS strengthening processes.
- Central Asia - use for planning the regional central Asian mapping initiative.

NHRS INDICATORS

What countries really need... ...specifically-tailored information

In a four-country consultation facilitated by COHRED on needs for NHRS assessment, representatives of VietNam, Mongolia, Philippines and Cambodia reviewed a basket of more than 300 indicators promoted for use by the WHO and others for health research system assessments.

While 100% of indicators were chosen by at least 1 country...
Only 19% of indicators were highlighted as useful by all countries.

Countries voiced a need for NHRS improvement activities that meet their specific national situations.

Results of a consultation on National Health Research Systems Analysis in the WHO Western Pacific Region Penang, Malaysia 9- 11 May 2006.