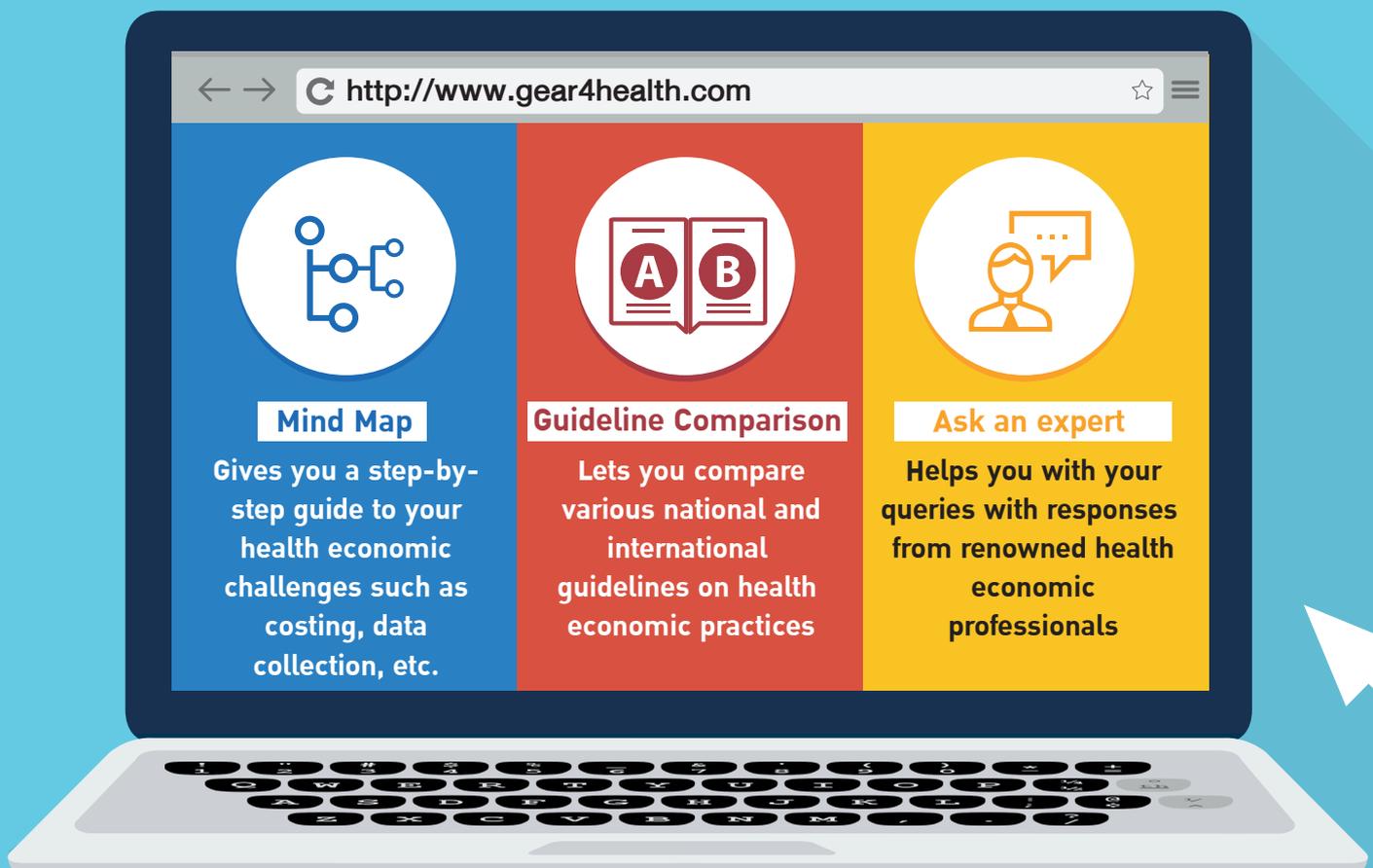


# POLICY BRIEF

## Your Friendly, Neighborhood GEAR Guide!

- ⚙ In 2015, a HITAP International Unit (HIU) survey identified the major challenges (both contextual and technical) to the conduct of rigorous economic evaluations for policymakers' use in healthcare decision making.
- ⚙ From this study, HITAP created an online platform called the Guide to health Economic Analysis and Research (GEAR) Resource – also referred to as the GEAR Guide or GEAR – that aims to respond to the short- and long-term needs of economic evaluation researchers in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).
- ⚙ The GEAR Guide provides visual mapping of solutions to the challenges that LMIC researchers face based on current economic evaluations methods, national and international guidelines, a gateway to contact experts and other researchers in the field as well as possible research questions that respond to these challenges.
- ⚙ The GEAR Guide's reach should spread to create a sustainable, growing platform that will continuously address LMIC researchers' needs with up-to-date information.



## About GEAR

Increasingly, countries are implementing universal health coverage, which means that governments are facing the challenge of allocating scarce resources to meet the demand for healthcare. Hence, more and more policy-makers are adopting economic evaluations to inform their decision making. Although economic evaluation methods have been around for years, there are often barriers to its use, especially in LMICs. In 2017, the HIU launched the GEAR Resource, an online tool that compiles resources and resolves gaps to solve challenges in the conduct and use of economic evaluations. The GEAR Resource addresses issues outlined in the working paper “Identifying Priority Methodological Issues in Economic

Evaluation in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: Finding the Holy Grail,” a study conducted by the HIU through the international Decision Support Initiative (iDSI) under the theme “Generating and Using Evidence.” GEAR is a public good that aims to assist researchers with immediate solutions. It also responds to these issues in the long-term through research questions that address methodological difficulties. The website also collaborates and links with other initiatives such as the Global Health Cost Consortium (GHCC: <https://ghcosting.org/>) to connect members of the GEAR family to networks and partnerships that would benefit their work.

## Background of GEAR

The working paper drew on a literature review and survey that identified issues for conducting economic evaluations. The study received responses from all regions covered (Southeast Asia, Africa, Americas, Europe, East Mediterranean, and West Pacific). Results from this survey were outlined as prioritized gaps based on the highest ranked challenges (the top five for technical difficulties and top three for context-specific issues). These were discussed in a face-to-face consultation

meeting with policymakers and HTA practitioners working in LMIC settings, and the idea of an online resource that provides freely available information to conquer these challenges was born. The top five technical difficulties formed the basis for the first visual maps on the website. A team of health economists and HTA experts researched and developed the content of GEAR, which provides guidance on how to address the identified difficulties.

### Technical (methodological) difficulties

Lack of robust local clinical data

Poor reporting on economic evaluations

Lack of data on costing

Paucity of commonly accepted guidelines for economic evaluations in LMICs

Lack of local data for estimating QALYs or DALYs (in cost-utility analysis)

### Context specific difficulties

Economic evaluations are not formally linked to the healthcare decision-making process

Limited local research capacity

Lack of funding for the necessary research

Misunderstandings and communications weaknesses between researchers, academia, and end-users of the evidence

Limited number of published local journals with a standard review process

**Dan** is a researcher from a Low-Middle Income Country facing a range of challenges in conducting economic evaluations.



# Features of GEAR

## GEAR's core function lies in its three main features:

- **Mind Mapping:** Mind maps break down the top technical issues that researchers face in economic evaluation research. These maps outline possible solutions as well as the steps towards accomplishing them. Each node and item on the map explains the terminologies, theories, and steps to do various research strategies such as meta-analysis or quality-adjusted life years (QALY) estimations. The mind maps also outline research questions that may address these technical issues more efficiently.
- **Guideline Comparison:** The guideline page can be used to understand the recommendations on economic evaluation issues based on different country settings or methodologies. It includes guides and references from countries all over the globe. Frequently-used and/or quality guidelines such as the World Health Organization (WHO) guideline on economic evaluations and the iDSI Reference Case (<http://www.idsihealth.org/resource-items/idsi-reference-case-for-economic-evaluation/>) can also be referenced to help researchers choose the most suitable option for their work.
- **"Ask an Expert":** Researchers may also connect with experts in different areas of economic evaluations, namely on costing, utility measures, modelling, clinical outcome measures, and health policy. The expert's responses will be posted on the website in a discussion board, to which the researcher – as well as other members of the GEAR community – can respond. Thus, researchers can connect directly with experts as well as with others in the field to explore various global issues and research.

## GEAR's Goal

### The ultimate goals of this project are:

- To develop a growing, up-to-date database of issues, solutions, and possible research questions to fill the gaps;
- To provide a unique and trustworthy platform for HTA practitioners to overcome methodological challenges that can address queries in a timely manner with up-to-date, immediate information;
- To offer neutral and best available advice to practitioners without advocating any method;
- To function as a global public good, to which the global community can collectively contribute.

The underlying hope is that capacities in economic evaluation, both to generate and use evidence, will improve the more that this database is utilized. Despite this, global initiatives such as GEAR can have an impact only if local governments continue to invest in research and incorporate the results into the policy process.



