

Planning, Developing and Supporting the Faith-Based Health Workforce

*African Christian Health Associations' Human Resources for Health Mini-Forum
February 27 – March 1, 2006, Nairobi, Kenya*

Background

Faith-based organizations (FBOs) play a major role in the provision of health services throughout Africa. In many countries, Christian Health Associations (CHAs) coordinate national networks of Christian health institutions, which deliver as much as 30% to 50% of a nation's health services. One of the most challenging issues CHAs face is human resources for health (HRH). At stake is the survival of many Christian health institutions, such as mission hospitals, that help people underserved by other providers. To help confront this challenge, CHA representatives conceptualized the need for an African CHA Human Resource Working Group during a meeting in Malawi in November 2004. The Capacity Project and Medicus Mundi International (an international health development umbrella organization based in Brussels) proposed to re-energize the working group concept by co-sponsoring this HRH Mini-Forum in Nairobi.

Workshop Description

The CHA HRH Mini-Forum had four primary objectives:

- Expand the HRH knowledge base
- Help develop a critical mass of faith-based HRH advocates
- Clarify the Working Group's "Terms of Reference" and plan for sustainability and next steps
- Generate action plans for HRH practices and identify technical assistance needs.

Participants and Agenda

Thirty-four participants from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia took part in highly participatory discussions to promote sharing of all participants' viewpoints and experiences. This approach strengthened relationships among the CHAs and led to the creation of a new inter-CHA network (African CHAs Technical Working Group on Human Resources for Health) to address future HRH challenges.

Major components of the agenda included:

- Facilitators set the context for the Mini-Forum by leading discussion of the HRH situation and challenges facing each CHA and promising practices and future areas of interest in HRH.
- Substantive working group discussions on five critical topics covered 1) human resources strategic planning, 2) provider performance improvement and management, 3) human resources financing, 4) retention policies and practices and 5) strengthening partnerships between FBOs and governments.
- A presentation covered FBO involvement with worldwide health information assets "mapping" or data collection as a critical tool for HRH decision-making. Participants discussed the value of health data collection, making information available publicly on websites and using data in HRH decision-making by linking it with national databases and human resources information systems (HRIS). The Christian Health Association of Sudan presented Capacity Project-sponsored mapping activities and highlighted the critical value of these new data and the data collection process as a capacity-building tool.
- CHA presentations outlined how networks support HRH at the facility level and their roles in national HRH policy.
- Presentations on HR assessments (Sudan, Mozambique, Uganda) and a presentation on salary top-ups by the Christian Health Association of Malawi highlighted different challenges in each country and emphasized the importance of FBO health sector work and the need to address critical issues of HRH in Africa.
- Participants suggested improvements to the draft HRH Framework produced by global partners in HRH during a consultation in December 2005 in Washington, DC. (The framework is included in the *World Health Report 2006: Working Together for Health*.)



Dr. Sam Orach from Uganda presents a report.



Colleagues from Tanzania discussing a point during tea time.



Enthusiastic dialogue and debate.



Small group discussions.



Group session.



Participants from Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda.

- CHA country groups developed HRH action plans identifying priority areas for work, next steps, projected dates, technical assistance needed and point persons.
- Working visits to the Christian Health Association of Kenya and the Kenyan Episcopal Conference focused on practical solutions to HRH challenges faced by these institutions.

Initial Workshop Outcomes

Endorsement of the African CHAs Technical Working Group for HRH: The most valuable product of the Mini-Forum has been the endorsement of this working group, the documentation of which includes Terms of Reference for the group and the focal person to be designated from each CHA. The principal objectives of the Technical Working Group will be to strengthen partnerships and relationships of the CHAs with government and other partners, increase retention of health personnel within CHA networks, advance human resources management systems of CHA secretariats and their institutions and improve human resources financing and training opportunities and practices.

Advocacy and knowledge sharing: Cross-cutting objectives call for the Technical Working Group to fill an advisory and advocacy role and work on knowledge sharing—documenting and sharing information on FBO best practices in HRH with other FBO networks and via web-based outlets such as the Capacity Project's HRH Global Resource Center.

Summary of key HRH issues facing CHAs:

The first plenary presentation of working group discussions highlighted key HRH issues among the CHAs. These included examples of progress (e.g., coordination with Ministries of Health in planning and budgeting, cost-sharing with governments on health worker salaries, health insurance schemes, retention strategies, free drug supply from central stores, opportunities presented by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria), challenges (e.g., charity mentality vs. professionalism, salary equivalency with government, retention issues, health information collection and management) and future areas of interest (e.g., sending staff to rural areas, training, easing qualifications and certification, signing memorandums of understanding with governments).

Short working group reports on the five critical topics:

The reports spell out issues within participants' networks, approaches being tried, what appears to be working and what does not. These reports offer guidance for CHAs and governments in Africa and for those internationally who are looking for specific actions that could be supported by donors or technical cooperation.

Action plans: Each CHA group shared their action plans with all other participants. In most cases, these plans match Mini-Forum objectives concerning critical HRH issues such as retention, collaboration with host governments, information sharing and implementation of promising practices.



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