

Human Relations: Building Leadership in Southern Sudan's Health Sector

Aquilino Michael Oduma is especially friendly these days. Whenever he meets a security guard at the Ministry of Health, "I say, how are you, how are your children? I have a pound here, you can go and have some tea." In the past, he admits, "I was harsh." Rushing to deal with his heavy workload, he would brush off lower-level staff: "No no no, you cannot talk with me!" But now, he says, "I have developed being good to people"—and this is turning out to make a big difference in his work.

Aquilino Michael Oduma



As a teenager, Aquilino had to flee to Uganda when war broke out. He did well in school and made his way to London to study medical demography. Equipped with a diploma and coursework from prestigious institutions, Aquilino returned to Southern Sudan permanently in 1983 and advanced to a high position at the state-level Ministry of Health in Eastern Equatoria. "Because of lack of manpower, I'm director of health planning and training, and I'm also director of human resources for health development *and* monitoring and evaluation."

But his strict upbringing informed his management style, and he was not as effective as he might have hoped. As a youth he often heard, "Do this, do that," and as a manager he used a similar approach. Yet this emphasis on rules and commands didn't improve his staff members' performance. How could he motivate them, he wondered?

In Southern Sudan, the Capacity Project is helping the Ministry of Health to strengthen its ability to plan for and manage the health workforce. A critical need is to develop the leadership and management capabilities of health managers. To jump-start the process, the Project involved Dr. Monywaair Arop Kuol, the Ministry's director of HR development and planning. The Project supported the development of his HR knowledge and leadership skills, including an intensive course at the University of New South Wales in Australia.

Dr. Monywaair led the process of creating Southern Sudan's first HR strategy and policies and went on to become the undersecretary of health. Next, he worked with the Capacity Project to transfer his knowledge to key managers at the national and state levels. In 2007, the Project began a series of leadership development programs that include skills workshops and follow-up coaching at participants' workplaces.

For Aquilino, the program was eye-opening. "Now I have both managerial skills and leadership skills—like focusing, aligning, inspiring. They are complementary." He describes how he applies what he learned. "One of the skills that I like in leadership is scanning. If I go to the ward, I can learn a lot. Don't rely on sitting in the office and hearing from people. Another thing is how to inspire. For example, you cannot talk of honesty if you yourself are corrupt. I have to be truthful. A means A,

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B means B, so that tomorrow when you talk they say 'Yes, he means what he says, because he is practicing it.' You cannot talk about latrines while you don't have a latrine in your house!"

To scale up the program, the Capacity Project selected several participants from the first course as facilitators-in-training. Aquilino was quick to volunteer. "The first facilitators were very competent—Monywiir and others—and we're infusing their style of facilitation."

Describing his approach, Aquilino focuses on "real examples and experiences. For example, you are a medical officer in a hospital: what are your problems? Leadership is a problem-solving type of activity. I want to pose the questions [but] I don't want to spoon-feed them. Another style I use is to tell of my experiences and then we compare. We want to brainstorm democratically, without fear."

Aquilino enthusiastically shows the materials and guides he received. "You have to have some references. Also I had a course of three weeks, training-of-trainers for administrators. So I have the theories and I have the practical part of it, because I served the government for so long, and I think the two must go together."

Reflecting on his new approach, he says, "From this training, I have been taught how to be friendly. 'Come in, sit down, how are you, can I help you?' and so on. Human relations. Very important! I know what words to use, body language. I'm more popular in the Ministry of Health now," he points out with a smile. "I talk with anybody! And I help."



The Capacity Project
 IntraHealth International, Inc.
 6340 Quadrangle Drive
 Suite 200
 Chapel Hill, NC 27517
 Tel. (919) 313-9100
 Fax (919) 313-9108
 info@capacityproject.org
 www.capacityproject.org



Dr. Monywiir Arop Kuol at a leadership development training



Ministry of Health

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