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"I Can Now Speak Boldly": Using Quality Data for Health Workforce Planning in Uganda

Rita Matte

"When I started working at the Uganda Nurses and Midwives Council in 2000," recalls former registrar Rita Matte, "data management was a nightmare! Documents in the form of papers, registers, forms were everywhere." Margaret Lutalo, the council's senior nursing officer, confesses, "I used to feel guilty when requested to talk about the total number of qualified nurses and midwives in the country because I knew that we did not have accurate data."

To help build the health workforce in Uganda, the Capacity Project is assisting the Ministry of Health to strengthen its human resources management and ability to gather and use accurate data for strategic planning. With key partners, the Project formed a Health Workforce Advisory Board to guide the process. The board is "a forum where important knowledge, experiences and views on HR have been exchanged among members," says Benjamin Udongo, registrar for the Allied Health Professionals Council. Board members represent the Ministry of Health, Uganda's four health professional councils, training institutions and nongovernmental organizations.

Drawing on key policy questions developed by the Health Workforce Advisory Board, the Capacity Project installed a certification and licensing information system at the four health professional councils and a human resources management system at the Ministry of Health. Data in these systems identify training, registration and deployment information about health workers by demographic variables, districts, positions and categories of health workers.

"We have moved from the traditional paper database to the modern and efficient methods," Udongo remarks. "This is a great contribution towards the planning and management of HR for the Ministry of Health and the council."

Rita Matte agrees. "We can now forward accurate data, which is important for planning," she emphasizes. "The computerized data management will go a long way in supporting not only the Ministry of Health, but all other stakeholders and ministries, to carry out realistic planning for health services."

"The computerized system can now effectively monitor the renewals of practicing licenses among nurses across the whole country," comments John Wakida, acting registrar of the Nurses and Midwives Council.

Launch event for new system at Nurses and Midwives Council

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Paper-based systems previously in use

The data revealed a significant gap between the number of nurses and midwives who are trained and those who receive licensure. For example, the data show that 21,888 nurses and midwives entered training between 1980 and 2003 but only 14,637 of them completed their education and became registered with the council, and just 7,022 have a current license. These results are influencing funding for pre-service education and workforce projections.

The new system "can update qualifications acquired after initial registration," Wakida points out, "which were not captured before. These data will also assist the Health Service Commission and districts in the recruitment process." The Ministry of Health is using the new systems to hire health workers strategically and ensure that they are in good standing with their regulatory authority.

"The council has not only benefited from the improvement of data collection, but the staff has also received enormous training in data management and computer skills," Wakida continues. Margaret Lutalo adds with satisfaction, "I can now speak boldly because of the more accurate data."

[To learn how this initiative got started, read *Building HR Information Systems: Leading the Way Together in Uganda* (Voices from the Capacity Project no. 4), available on the Capacity Project website.]

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