

REGIONAL CONSULTATIVE MEETING ON TAKING THE HRH AGENDA FORWARD AT COUNTRY  
LEVEL: 18-20 July 2005, BRAZZAVILLE, CONGO.

African Human Resources for Health Observatory working paper

***Background: challenges and issues***

Most African countries are challenged with the weak and inadequate health systems as evidenced by unsatisfactory health status indicators. Dilapidated health infrastructure, state; essential equipment, supplies and logistics are often lacking; and referral systems are rarely functional. Human resources for health is one, albeit the most critical, of the key components of health systems, is a critical obstacle in strengthening health systems given the current health workforce crisis which is present in one form or the other in all the countries. This is evidenced by the acknowledgement in recent years that unless something is done about the HRH crisis in African countries, the MDG health related targets may not be achieved.

With the growing interest and concern at global, regional and country level in terms of the HRH development agenda in countries of Africa, the requirement for data and information to make a case and act on some of the key issues such as international migration vis a vis international recruitments and trends, distribution imbalances, production of health workers, freeze on recruitment due to Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), impact of HIV/Aids on the health workforce, scaling up of priority interventions, motivation and retention challenges, among others, has provided the necessity for an observatory.

Countries have before and since then made efforts to develop HRH policies and plans within the context of health sector reforms with varied levels of success. However, it has been difficult to establish, in the absence of reliable and validated data and information, evidence based comparable analyses. In addition, the policy imperatives of these global and regional initiatives as well as other specific strategies to strengthen health systems in countries call for robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the extent to which countries are making progress or lagging behind.

Furthermore, despite the undoubted importance of human resources to the functioning of health systems, there is little consistency between countries as to how HRH strategies are monitored and evaluated. Overall, evidence-based decision-making would be facilitated by better use of HRH data sources

**Strategies and actions required (what needs to be done)**

The High Level Forum (HLF) on health related MDGs held in Abuja in December 2004 endorsed an avenue for action to avert the HRH crisis in Africa. One of the identified action areas is better intelligence for HRH calling for evidence base from which monitoring of country action, further research and mechanisms for capacity building need to put in place among others.

This was followed up by a consultative meeting in Oslo in February 2005 where the concept of an HRH observatory for Africa was adopted within the context of providing a mechanism for building and disseminating HRH evidence for both country, regional and international advocacy, policy and plan development and implementation. The HRH Observatory can be an entry point for the envisaged Health Systems Observatory with a gradual expansion in its magnitude in a phased and flexible mode using the health system components as well as provide a base for advocacy and implementation of HRH development in the region as well as contribute towards strengthening the country HRIS.

The Observatory of Health Human Resources for Africa is proposed as a cooperative network initiative among the countries and different partners of the Region promoted by AFRO, to produce information and knowledge necessary for improving human resources policy decisions, and sharing the country experiences

in order to improve human resource development in the health services. The name -Observatory- is used in the sense of the networking of the Governments, stakeholders (NGOs, civil society, regional bodies and institutions, etc.) and gathering partners around a strong evidence base.

The Observatory is envisaged as a network to comprise of national observatories (which brings together the stakeholders at country level) and a regional secretariat. The network will allow defining priorities and strategies through promoting to produce better information, consolidating databases, keeping track of progress and to promote action. This is also seen as a strong vehicle to share information and capacity building. The members of the national observatory will undertake studies to contribute to the process and policy-making.

In summary, the main phases of the observatory include start-up activities of defining the concept and context, mapping of and communicating with key stakeholders and partners, starting national observatories and active networking with regional coordination. The national and regional observatory networks will be initially started with a few countries who have interest and then will roll out accordingly. Ultimately, it is the intention to have the whole subscribe to the observatory by having national and inter country networks. Time frames will be rolled out as soon as consensus is reached on establishment of the Africa Observatory with the national networks.

#### **The process to be followed (how it should be done)**

The Observatory will be primarily based on functioning at country level where the bulk of the work will be done and the regional component of the observatory will focus on inter country and regional synthesis of the HRH information and data for dissemination to inform decisions and advocacy to maintain the HRH agenda at national, sub regional, regional and global fora.

The observatory will concentrate its efforts on using existing data, helping to disseminate them within countries and complementing the existing data by specific surveys/studies relevant to HRH development consistent within the health system context. Six main functions of the observatory are envisaged as follows:

National level efforts will build on existing partnerships and involve other constituencies, such as academia, NGOs, professional associations, other sectors stakeholders. They will be motivated to promote the HRH agenda through a national day and annual meetings as well as other means of communication. Sub national level capacity will also be built on the principle of improving their skills to not only collect data but also to utilise it for local decision making, policy, planning and implementation. International and bilateral agencies will also support national observatories.

The links among the national training institutions will be strengthened and their active involvement to the Observatory activities will be ensured. WHO Country offices will facilitate the linkage with the Regional Secretariat and support the national observatories.

*Engaging stakeholders:* All opportunities will be taken to communicate with partners and stakeholders to build partnerships, such as conferences, meetings. Means of communications will be initiated.

*Networking:* The networking efforts in the interested countries will be facilitated through national consultations to bring together the stakeholders. It is expected that these consultations will allow ensuring national partnership, identifying priorities for the national observatory and developing initial work plans.

*Developing the plans for technical content of the work* will be a rolling planning process. This will have three aspects, regional inter country activities, plans of national observatories, common work for national activities. Establishing a database, HRH country profiles can be initial focus of activities.

*Sharing and dissemination:* Already planned country, regional and international fora including the AU, WHO, sub regional economic groupings and others such a Conference on HRH and HIV/AIDS planned for the last quarter of 2005 and this is expected to contribute to building networks of Observatories.

### **Who should do it?**

The institutional arrangements for the HRH observatory are envisaged as a partnership based on networking. A partnership will be developed involving national institutions and multilateral and bilateral agencies. Regional coordination of the networks is planned, in order to facilitate their functioning. The HRH observatory in Africa implies functions at national and regional levels.

A national focal point will facilitate planning and coordinating the work of the national network. The national focal point can be based in the MoH or one of the member institutions of the network. The focal point will facilitate the work of the national observatory by identifying activity areas and responsible group members; ensuring dissemination of the results; organizing the national meetings and training activities; undertaking advocacy activities; and linking with the regional secretariat.

HRH expertise will also be developed in the countries. A network of selected experts will facilitate the work of the observatory. The intention is to create a critical mass in the countries and the region to move the HRH agenda forward.

There is a possibility of creating a board (could this be the role of the regional platform?) for the regional network involving countries and partners to provide advice and oversee the progress of Observatory. As the observatory seeks international as well as national cooperation and partnership, the board of the observatory can comprise of representatives from national observatories and partners. The board/regional platform can monitor the work of the observatory; identify policy directions and agree/advise on the priorities, annual plans and regional allocations; determine the inter country work, studies and capacity-building activities; oversee the work of the secretariat; participate in and support fund-raising.

### **What will observatory do? (The Functions)**

Functions of the observatory will be at different levels but primarily based on functioning at country level but will establish a regional HRH database with the following:

*Country monitoring and information:* Development and strengthening of HRH information systems, Development of country profiles with standard templates to allow for cross country comparisons; Inter country and regional monitoring and evaluation including comparative assessments.

*Research and analysis:* The research and analysis for both national and regional components; regional level the studies on common issues for all or selected countries in collaboration with the involvement of national observatories; and research priorities identified through Cape Town Meeting on HRH Research and the Mexico summit on Health Systems Research will guide the initial research and analysis agenda of the Observatory. These include addressing shortages and imbalances, generating a future workforce through education and training with focus on building primary health-care skills including creating new cadres and rapid scale up of existing programmes, matching demand and supply of health needs with evaluation of the impact macroeconomic and public reform policies on HRH, impact of globalisation and labour markets etc.

*Sharing and dissemination, engaging with policy maker:* Using among others annual regional and national meetings and other for a such as AU meetings, regional and sub regional bodies meetings. Regional secretariat as a clearing house for data, information, reports etc

*National and inter country networking:* Networking and communication between and among stakeholders including bilateral and multilateral partners; common platform and objectives including joint activities; Linking national observatories to the ones in other countries by sharing experience and joint cross country work through extensive use of electronic media-video conferences, electronic mail and well maintained websites

*Capacity building for HRH:* Contribution to national and individual capacity building through HRH activities in countries such as capacity for data collection, analysis, trend analysis equity analysis, monitoring, evaluation and research; Organised training programmes for different target groups including policy makers, technical, academic staff among others on different subjects such as macroeconomic and fiscal constraints, etc

### **Intended outcomes, targets and indicators (what benefits?)**

The overall objective of the Observatory is to contribute to the HRH development in the region for strengthening of the national health systems with the goal of supporting actions to address HRH challenges urgently through promoting, developing and sustaining a firm knowledge base for HRH information that is founded on solid and updated HR information, reliable analysis and effective utilisation at both sub national, national and regional levels.

At national level for instance, policy alternatives will be proposed on the basis of analysis of core indicators, trends and policy impact. Collecting these data will make it possible to identify strengths and weaknesses of established monitoring systems and give feedback on areas for improvement. The information can be used to inform policy debate, identify problem areas in HRD, and, if previous years' data are available, give an overall picture of trends in human resources stock and flows.

The national capacity for evaluation and monitoring of HRH situation and trends would be developed; Information and evidence for the formulation of HRH development policies, strategies and plans would be readily available and; a Forum for partnership, sharing of experience and advocacy in HRH development would be provided on a regular basis

### **Advocacy actions**

The main phases of the observatory include start-up activities of defining the concept and context, mapping of and communicating with key stakeholders and partners, starting national observatories and active networking with regional coordination.

The national and regional observatory networks will be initially started with a few countries who have interest and then will roll out accordingly.

Ultimately, it is the intention to have the whole subscribe to the observatory by having national and inter country networks.

Time frames will be rolled out as soon as consensus is reached on establishment of the Africa Observatory with the national networks.

### **Conclusions**

As the field of human resources in health involves multiples sectors (education, labour, civil service, etc..) and legitimate stakeholders (MoH, academia, professional associations, NGO's, regional institutions, etc..), the Observatory will acknowledge the relative importance and role of these stakeholders and promote their participation to ensure common understanding of issues consensus on priorities and cooperation on effective implementation.

As many forces that affect human resources in a national system are common to other countries or are international in nature, the HRH Observatory will recognize the impact of the globalization and economic and social integration process on the HRH development, to inform itself and influence the international initiatives and experience.

.The implementation strategy for the observatory is seen as a flexible, continuing and evolving process. The implementation process should also take into account the interest shown in HRH agenda, evidence of commitment and opportunities available, recognition of country specific situations and peculiarities such as linguistic and sub-regional considerations. Challenges in demand among others and would therefore promote close and continuous monitoring of progress, flexibility for adjustments to ensure success.