

THE KEY ROLE OF FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS IN STRENGTHENING HUMAN RESOURCES FOR HEALTH

A VITAL SOURCE OF WORKFORCE PRODUCTION AND SERVICE DELIVERY

In many African countries facing severe shortages and poor distribution of health workers, faith-based organizations (FBOs) provide between 30%-70% of health care services. Moreover, FBO facilities often serve remote and rural areas where governments have the greatest difficulty in attracting and retaining health workers. Yet FBO health workers frequently remain under-recognized for their contributions and uncouned in national statistics.

Members of FBO networks also provide a significant amount of preservice education and in-service health worker training in African countries. In Malawi and Uganda, for example, FBOs provide 70% of nursing and midwifery training; in Tanzania and Zambia they provide between 30% and 55% of such training. FBO schools have a history of management flexibility and innovation and an excellent track record of training health workers that serve in rural areas.

While FBOs are an important source of health worker production and promising practices to address human resources for health (HRH) challenges, they typically have minimal resources allocated to the development of strong HRH management skills, policies, procedures, and systems. This leads to staff attrition, increases training and deployment costs, and reduces the level of access to care available to clients of FBO facilities.

BETTER UNDERSTANDING AND INCREASING FBO CONTRIBUTIONS

The following areas merit particular attention for strengthening the role of FBOs in addressing the global health workforce shortage and improving their own HRH capacities:

Addressing donor misconceptions. FBOs have not been a major focus of many of the large international donors, and some donors continue to categorize FBOs as members of the private sector. By further acknowledging, supporting, and elevating indigenous FBO networks, donors can help to dispel continuing misconceptions and ensure that FBOs are seen as an important source for HRH solutions.

Integrating FBOs into ministry of health policies and programs. Most Christian Health Associations (CHAs) and other FBO networks are still not well integrated into national health systems, leading to redundancies and gaps. For a reasonable cost, governments can better leverage the FBO sector, including it in HRH planning, information systems, resource allocation, training, and support. This will reduce overall service and system burdens, give countries a truer picture of their health workforce, and improve health care access for the population.

Elevating HR positions in FBOs. As with most government health systems, further advocacy and resource support are needed to promote the role of professional HR managers to better support FBO health workers and reduce attrition.

Strengthening FBO documentation and reports. Many FBOs do not routinely prepare and share publications highlighting their accomplishments, results, and lessons learned. Better documentation going forward will make an important contribution to global HRH knowledge and promising practices.

Scaling-up preservice education through FBO institutions. To be able to scale-up production of health workers to meet growing demand, many of the FBO institutions need strategic investments to overcome bottlenecks such as inadequate numbers of faculty, lack of classroom space, and the need for clinical practicum sites.

WHAT CAPACITYPLUS IS DOING

Building on the achievements of its predecessor, the Capacity Project—which assisted in increasing the number of CHAs committed to focusing on HRH and HR management—CapacityPlus is helping to strengthen and support the Africa Christian Health Associations Platform (ACHAP) and its members. Established in 2007, ACHAP is an umbrella network linking CHAs in sub-Saharan Africa. Activities include:

- Providing HR technical assistance, support, mentoring, and professional development to the ACHAP community through a full-time regional HR specialist
- Improving FBO collaboration with government and nongovernmental agencies and employers on HRH and HR management challenges
- Strengthening ACHAP’s capacity to document and disseminate HRH information among its constituents
- Working with ACHAP, global organizations, and national-level health professional institutions to promote investments in FBO preservice education to significantly increase the number of graduating students.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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