

## **Human resources for health in Sudan: Opportunity for revival**

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Health workforce is by far the most important pillar of the health system of any country. Health workers glue together the different parts of the health system to spearhead the production of health <sup>(1)</sup>. Investigations and studies are increasingly showing the centrality of human resources for health (HRH) to improving health care and population health. Following the infusion of finance- chronically incriminated for poor health performance- into developing countries through programs such as the Global Fund and GAVI, the critical role of health personnel has become more clearly appreciated. Recent studies have also demonstrated the link between staff numbers and the effectiveness of health interventions including those necessary to meet the health-related Millennium Development Goals-MDGs <sup>(2)</sup>.

Despite this absolute importance, the health workforce remains a Cinderella of health systems for a long time even during the era of health sector reform <sup>(3)</sup>. However, there is fortunately an increasing international focus on HRH issues brought about by the appearance of several global and regional initiatives during the past few years. The Joint Learning Initiative (JLI), the High Level Forum (HLF) and the Global Health Workforce Alliance (GHWA) were among the prominent efforts initiated in response to the crisis of HRH in developing countries, in particular the African continent. The WHO has boosted this focus on HRH by devoting the World Health Report 2006 to the health workforce issues.

At the heart of HRH revival movement is the focus on health workforce data and information. The lack of data on health workers numbers, characteristics

and distribution has been recognized as a major factor hampering human resource development in developing countries. The hallmark of the movement towards instituting HRH information systems is the creation of **human resources for health observatories**. HRH observatory is defined as a cooperative mechanism among relevant stakeholders aimed at producing information and knowledge in order to improve human resource policy decisions as well as contributing to human resource development within the health sector <sup>(4)</sup>. The HRH observatory in the Latin America and Caribbean Region is a leading initiative in this regards. The African and the Eastern Mediterranean regions of the WHO (AFRO and EMRO) are following the same footsteps to establish regional and national observatories.

Sudan, as one of the EMRO countries, has taken the initiative to establish a national HRH observatory. Motivated by the political commitment and supported by the interest of the Federal Ministry of Health, efforts are underway to fully operate the observatory. The commitment declared by the stakeholders during the first meeting of the observatory board (see the meeting report section in this journal) is really promising.

This country is known for its deep culture in medical education that resulted overtime into a talented diversified health workforce. Medical schools and health training institutions have expanded considerably during the past 15 years resulting in increasing numbers of graduates. On the other hand, Sudan is an extensive country still undergoing recovery with several challenges related to health workers skill mix, distribution, brain

drain, performance and other issues. Given this situation, the introduction of human resources for health observatory in Sudan represents both an opportunity and a challenge!

#### References

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