

Health workforce alive and kicking!

Francis Omaswa is heartened that health workforce debate and discussion remains strong, even if long-term solutions remain elusive



The 4th Global forum on Human Resources for Health (HRH) took place in Dublin, Ireland 13-17 November, 2017 and was attended by over 1,000 delegates from over 70 countries, representing government leaders, civil society, academia, employers, foundations, health-care professional associations and unions, youth and the private sector. Previous meetings were held in Kampala, Bangkok, and Recife in Brazil.

I organised the first Global HRH Forum in Kampala in 2008 as the Executive Director of the Global Health Workforce Alliance at the time and have attended all these Forums. I was thrilled to witness in Dublin how the HRH movement remains alive and vibrant ten years down the road.

The following were in my view the most significant outcomes of the Dublin Forum.

First is the renewal and rejuvenation of the global HRH movement representing champions committed to pursuing the call to provide a skilled, supported and motivated health worker for every person in every village everywhere and the Kampala call for 'Health Workers for All and All for Health Workers'. The achievement of this aspiration is central to the achievement of SDG 3 including Universal Health Coverage. It is this movement that will ensure that access to essential health services is not left to market forces alone which would leave many unable basic health services. Supporting this movement included the discussions around the governance of the Global Health Workforce Network (GHWN) that will bring together the stakeholders and is hosted within WHO Geneva as a successor to GHWA. GHWN activities will be implemented by Hubs in various fields, including education and training, leadership and governance, labour markets and civil society. A new Civil Society Coalition on HRH was launched in Dublin.

The participation of Africans at this Forum was strong from all parts of Africa. The African Platform on HRH held a side event which adopted a Business plan and elected a new governing board. The new Board was empowered to update the Constitution and to convene the 6th African HRH Platform Forum.

Another significant outcome was the start of the implementation of the UN Secretary General's High-Level Commission of Health Employment and Economic Growth that demonstrated that the health sector and employment in health is not just a cost but

a significant contributor to economic growth and employment of women. The GDP of developed countries all enjoy significant contributions from the health sector. A new international fund named 'Working for Health Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF)' will help countries expand and transform their health workforce. The MPTF will enable development partners to pool funding to be used by pathfinder countries on innovative ways to build a fit for purpose health workforce. Countries struggling to provide access to health care and where the threat of emerging epidemics is greatest are also expected to benefit. The fund is part of collaboration between the International Labour Organisation, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development and the World Health Organization (WHO). The Government of Norway announced its commitment to the MPTF and urged other donors to invest in the programme.

Another outcome was the launch of the International Platform on Health Worker Mobility to maximise mutual benefits and mitigate adverse effects from the increasing rate and complexity of health labour mobility, through strengthened evidence, analysis, knowledge exchange and policy action, including strengthening the WHO Global Code of Practice on International Recruitment of Health Personnel and its implementation.

A special feature not seen at previous fora was a Youth Forum which recognises that attracting and retaining young health workers is critical to averting the shortfall of 18 million health workers, and for transforming the health and social workforce. The Youth Forum agreed on their own call for action.

The Forum also committed to improving the safety and security of health workers by upholding international humanitarian law, strongly condemning violence, attacks and threats directed against medical personnel and facilities. Such attacks have long-term consequences for the civilian populations and health-care systems of the countries concerned, as well as for the neighbouring regions.

Finally, one of the most powerful take away messages for me is that this Forum was taking place during a Doctors strike in Uganda; and last year in Kenya there was a similar strike. The Forum was told by several speakers that in rich countries money is chasing health workers, yet in most African countries, it is health workers that are chasing money. Unless action is taken to address the imbalance between the rich and poor countries, Africa will end up a donor of health workers to the rich countries.

Francis Omaswa, CEO, African Centre for Global Health and Social Transformation (based from Kampala); Founding Executive Director of the Global Health Workforce Alliance.

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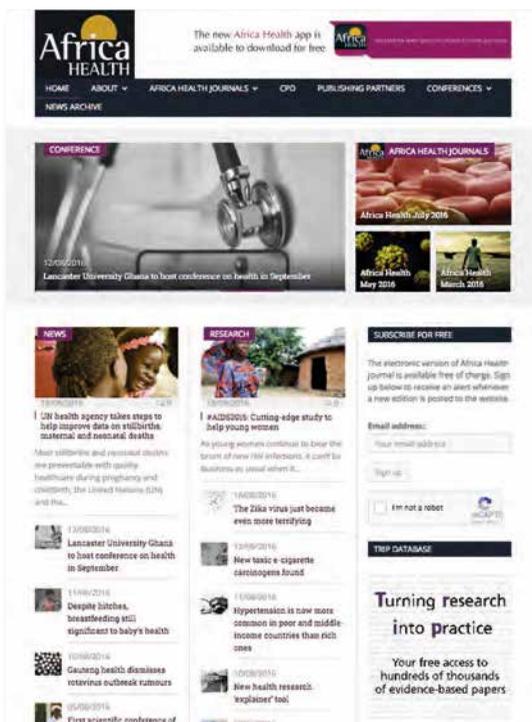
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