

Ten years of building capacity and synergies for African health

Patrick Kadama considers the accomplishments of ACHEST's first decade

ACHEST is a 'Think-Do-Tank,' promoted by a network of African and international leaders in health and development, who have gained first-hand experience in planning and implementing health and development programs in Africa and at international level. ACHEST aims to promote social justice and equity through supporting evidence-based and technically sound policies and strategies that are owned and driven by African populations themselves. This builds upon a global phenomenon and trend worldwide, of renewed interest in activities aimed at promoting equity and social justice as well as addressing the gross disparities in the quality of life between human populations in the world by committing to move towards Universal Health Coverage (UHC).

ACHEST exists and functions to respond to the African challenges of slow and limited impact of health solutions. There is a growing body of evidence that past and current efforts at identifying and implementing health solutions are not sufficiently rooted in the history and culture of the African populations and make little application of indigenous knowledge systems. Solutions are handed down from outside the region and global level with inadequate participation of the recipient populations. As a result, there is lack of trust and ownership of intervention programs which compromise their effectiveness and sustainability. This is largely due to asymmetry in capacity for policy dialogue, during elaboration of health solutions for African populations.

Adding value

In this context, there is added value in the work of ACHEST to contribute to addressing the capacity gap in policy dialogue of partners from developing countries at global level and between upstream and downstream partners at country level. ACHEST strategically promotes and advocates the use of well-grounded knowledge and evidence to strengthen African professionals' and institutional capacity for articulation of health solutions for better health outcomes for Africa. ACHEST works with, and builds upon, the work of others to provide transformational leadership to communities, countries and world for Africa to move towards UHC.

Another aspect of value addition in the core work of ACHEST is the support for the development of a well-supported and skilled health workforce universally accessible by all African populations, a minimum requirement for countries to move towards UHC.

The work of ACHEST adds value to support better

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health outcomes by applying strategic communication for health and well-being. Other attributes of added value of the work of ACHEST include its contribution to building partnerships and networks for action – for example with the African Union Commission, regional economic health organisations, the WHO Regional Office for Africa, ministers and senior government officials. Also significant is its broad multi-disciplinary skill range and access to global networks of expertise in health systems strengthening and advocacy.

Claiming the future

The establishment of ACHEST was the result of wide consultations with health system and civic leaders in Africa and globally who encouraged and reaffirmed the relevance as well as timeliness of this idea. After a period of preparations beginning in 2005, technical operations at ACHEST office in Kampala Uganda begun in 2008 and have been sustained to-date.

To commemorate the growth in capacity and operations of ACHEST for its first ten years, ACHEST has committed to take forward work, in support of decisions reached in the Special Consultation on Health Governance and Health Workforce in Africa held in Kampala's Munyonyo Resort Conference Centre 16th to 18th July 2019. ACHEST has in addition committed to continue to host the secretariats of both the African Platform of Human Resources for Health (APHRH) and the African Health System Governance Network (Ashgovnet) for another term. ACHEST has published regularly and key works include 'African Health Leaders: Making Change and Claiming the Future'; the 'Handbook for Health Ministers in Africa'.

Ground-breaking work includes the support to African countries to adopt the WHO Code on recruitment of health professionals; the implementation of the Medical Education Partnership Initiative and establishment of AFREhealth and the current work to support countries on SDGs as well as building space for lobby, advocacy on Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights, all conducted with support from African countries, bilateral and multilateral institutions.

ACHEST applies internationally accepted governance principles in its governance. The management organs include a multidisciplinary Board of Directors; an international advisory committee; panels of experts; multi-country faculty associate staff and networks of academic as well as civil society organisation to support a Secretariat in Kampala, Uganda. The emerging success is a result of strong leadership, working with a committed professional team with a focused strategy.