A vision for transformative capacity building for Africa's health

An African-led consensus on health development measures is coming together. Francis Omaswa reports

The previous discussion topic on creating synergies and building capacity for Africa's health has generated a vibrant debate and positive actions, both of which continue up to now. So let us carry on. Genuine dialogue has taken place over four recent meetings that were the catalyst for an extra meeting in Nairobi convened by the Global Health Workforce Alliance (GHWA) and the African Platform on Human Resources for Health (APHRH). A synthesis document on the collective outcome of the meetings was circulated in Tunis in early July at the conference of African Health and Finance Ministers. What a fantastic achievement! Congratulations are due to Ashgovnet (the African Health Systems Governance Network) members and development partners for demonstrating such cooperation.

There has also been a positive result on the initiative to establish networks that was discussed in the same May 2012 topic. A meeting was held in Bellagio, Italy during the third week of June, 2012 where African representatives of some existing networks met and agreed to establish a Network of Networks on health systems. This is expected to serve as a resource and repository of knowledge and evidence from which African political leaders can draw a continuing source of expertise. The African Union Commission, Regional Economic Health Communities and WHO Afro were present alongside African Health Economics Association, Ashgovnet, APHRH and Health Policy Research bodies, universities, and civil society. Again this network of networks, if it works as expected, will fill an African capacity gap in our quest for a locally available and relevant source of knowledge. It should also provide a forum for advocating knowledge translation and routine use. So what next?

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The transformation that we seek will see an Africa with an entrenched culture that insists on the routine use of locally relevant and available evidence to inform policy and that also ensures that those policies are implemented to scale in all and not just some African countries. How can we create these capacities in all countries for this vision to become reality? The *Strong Ministries for Strong Health Systems* study report proposes a partnership between governments and Health Partner Resource Institutions (HRPIs) inside the countries. These among others include universities, professional associations, media, parliament, think tanks, academies, research centres, and civil society advocacy groups, etc. ACHEST has mapped these HRPIs in five African countries and found that they actually exist with resident expertise and talent and that their respective governments are willing to work together with the HRPIs. Ideally HRPIs are country chapters of the continental networks, thus enabling cross-country learning and capacity development and there will be linkages with global counterparts. If countries, regional and international networks, and development partners collaborate to build the capacity of HRPIs in each country and their respective continental networks, I am confident that the transformation that we seek will come very quickly as these will ensure the visibility of the country health agenda through well informed local champions. The performance of health systems should improve resulting in better country health outcomes and the achievement of globally agreed goals.

The genuine and positive dialogue that is taking place on this topic within and beyond Ashgovnet is timely and encouraging. I am aware that a number of development partners are part of this network and are already implementing this proposed approach and many of them subscribe to these debates. I welcome their insights. As for the African subscribers does this make sense? And together, how can we improve this vision?