W4H
WOMEN FOR HEALTH

IMPROVING GOVERNANCE IN HEALTH TRAINING INSTITUTIONS

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Support for good governance at the Health Training Institutions plays a crucial role in achieving Women for Health target objectives and increasse overall impact and value for money of the programme.

The Challenge

A survey conducted at the start of Women for Health (W4H) programme revealed weak management and poor governance of the Health Training Intsitutions (HTIs) in the programme states. This was partly a result of the limited capacity and ability of the management team of the HTIs to undertake planning, budgeting, Human Resources for Health management, financial management, reporting and performance monitoring/review.

The Response

One of the many mandates of W4H programme was to strengthen the management teams of HTIs through structured capacity building efforts by strengthening general management and improved financial systems. The issue of poor governance was also addressed, but this required longer term input and a range of different strategies which are outlined below:

a. General Management Training to Improve Governance

To improve governance of the institutions, management strengthening was devoted to covering issues like team building, effective meetings, transparency and accountability, equity and gender sensitivity, performance management and mentoring. The management style adopted by principals in most of the HTIs in the programme states was non-inclusive and did not encourage teamwork. As a result, there was limited commitment from many HTI staff as they felt ignored in the administration or management of the schools and students. The principals were reported to have surrounded themselves with a select few supporters, not necessarily based on merit, leaving the majority of the tutors feeling alienated and not bound by the corporate goals of the institution.

b. Bi-Annual Meetings for Heads of the HTIs

Bi-annual Meetings (BAM) are sponsored by the programme. They provide a platform for experience-sharing among heads of HTIs and for peer review.

During BAMS, principals present their achievements, the challenges they have encountered and strategies they have adopted to overcome them. Inevitably, by sharing lessons learned, schools encountering similar challenges could either adapt, or apply similar strategies as a solution to their own problems. The principals are also encouraged to bring to the floor 'teething problems' so that they are discussed and solutions proffered.

During each BAM, experts are invited to deliver papers on topical issues. Topics for discussions at each subsequent BAM (apart from the first held) are usually suggested and agreed by majority of the participants during each meeting.

The BAM promotes openness, accountability and the spirit of stewardship among the heads of the HTIs. At the inception of the meetings, schools from Kano state were reluctant to present a report of their activities using the façade of needing clearance from the State Ministry of Health. The real reason bordered on closed system of administrations. Through the platform of BAM, the schools in question opened up during subsequent BAM meetings and comfortably presented their reports and solicited advice on how to surmount challenges.

The BAM also became an avenue not only for peer review but for putting 'peer pressure' on the participants to act on critical issues. For example, principals of HTIs that did not have perimeter fences around their hostels, especially for the female students, were pressured by their colleagues and advised on how to get the state government to build the fences.

In the words of one of the Principals who attended the BAM since inception: *"BAM helps to put us on our toes. Each time the meeting is approaching, we go over our performance sheet and it spurs us to try and catch up on areas we are wanting".*

c. Appointment of Mentors

W4H appointed mentors comprised mostly of retired HTI principals, experienced bureaucrats/technocrats and administrators. The mentors are assigned to support HTI principals in the states. The mentors deploy their wealth of experience in problem solving to help the incumbents in running an all-inclusive administration while promoting the principles of accountability and transparency, for example:

• In some HTIs in Katsina state, the mentor arranged a meeting between principals, their deputies and heads of departments. During these meetings it was discovered that a communication gap between the principal and the rest of staff was impeding effective administration.

• At the School of Health Technology in Nguru, Yobe state, the principal was grappling with the issue of relocating the Institution to a new site, the mentor assigned to the state counseled him on the political-economy involved and how to go about it.

d. Setting up Committees Approved by the Regulatory Bodies

W4H encouraged and supported the schools to set-up, at least, the basic committees approved by the regulatory bodies. The committees had Terms of Reference drawn up for them. In some states, W4H supported with funds for the committees to hold initial meetings and keep record of the minutes of the meetings. In some states, invitations were extended to W4H state offices to attend some of the meetings as an 'observer' but solely with the aim of providing guidance on making the meetings effective. The establishment and effective functioning of committees is an accreditation requirement of the regulatory body, but such decentralization of power is also an essential component of good governance. With the added understanding of the importance of committees, the 5th BAM was devoted to the discussions on establishing functional committees in the HTIs. Examples of the types of committee established with support from W4H are as follows:

- The reactivation of Accreditation Committee in all HTIs across the programme states – facilitators were engaged and officials of the State Ministry of Health invited to attend the workshop organized for the purpose. The reactivated committee was to spearhead all issues concerning accreditation.
- W4H strengthened the Guidance & Counseling Committees in HTIs in the programme states which has greatly helped to increase understanding/communication between students and management of HTI s.
- W4H supported HTIs to revive student union mechanisms, ensure that female students are well represented on union committees, and strengthen student voice and students' capacity for effective representation. In 2016 management capacity will be strengthened to better manage the change in balance of power between management and students and to develop effective negotiation skills. Schools have also been supported to develop student charters and are currently working on gender and social inclusion statements for inclusion in HTI documents.

On the whole, W4H engagement has resulted in reinvigorating the various committees by making them active and effective. A principal of one of the HTIs in Katsina state was quoted as saying "*without the support of W4H, we would not have been able to achieve all these*" – referring to the school curriculum and other vital documents reviewed.

e. Support for Females to Occupy Management Positions

Prior to the advent of W4H, few females occupied management positions in the HTIs in the programme states, or were involved in any decision-making in the institutions. Barriers such as culture, political patronage and tradition stood in the way of women ascending to management positions. There was also the erroneous notion that leadership and management positions are the 'exclusive preserve of men'. W4H was able to get women appointed to management positions in the HTIs through a range of strategies. The main strategy employed was to work with HTI management to develop gender management plans and complete an annual gender institutional assessment, in which the principles had to assess the extent to which their institution promoted females into management positions. The process of developing gender management plans including strengthening managements understanding of gender-responsiveness and transformation. Other approaches included engagement with stakeholders comprising policy makers, leaders (political, opinion, religious

etc) and management of HTIs, intense negotiations and high level advocacy. Currently, there are 8 females (Principals of SoM Gusau, Damaturu, Malumfashi, Birnin Kudu, Madobi,SHT Kankia and a Porovost at Katsina) at the helm of affairs in their respective schools.

Having women in management positions has made a world of difference in the management of the the HTIs. A female principal in one of the HTIs when asked about her view of females in management position retorted 'women understand each other easily and empathize with a fellow female with a problem'. Women in management positions provide role models for other female members of staff and for students; they mediate the male-dominated culture in the institutions and parents and husbands are likely to be more comfortable sending their daughters or wives to institutions with more females at the helm.

f. Improved Financial Systems

Weak financial systems in the HTIs lacked transparency and accountability. The situation was compounded by the low or lack of competency of HTI Accountants in financial management and computer literacy. Consequently, the HTIs had little in the way of financial planning and reporting systems, documentation or budgeting expertise.

W4H interventions included:

- **Training of Accountants:** To build-up the capacity of the HTI Accountants, a structured training programme was organized for them. The training centered on receipt, management and reporting on funds disbursed to the HTIs. Essentials of a good and complete report were also covered. Hitherto, the functions of the HTI Accountants' was 'seasonal' (they are mostly active when admission forms are out on sale) and the culture of retiring/liquidating funds was alien to them. These issues and many more were tackled at the training. During monitoring visits conducted by the Grants Manager, on the job training was provided and learning reinforced. Customised Financial and Grants manuals were also developed for use on the programme.
- **Computerized Accounting and Reporting:** Due to the inherent benefits (accuracy, speed, timeliness etc) to be derived from a computerized system, W4H introduced an electronic accounting and reporting template for use at HTIs, where previously the operations had been mostly manual. When W4H initially suggested computerizing the accounting and reporting systems in the HTIs, being unfamiliar many staff demonstrated a 'phobia' of computers. The initial task was to address the phobia the HTI Accountants had for computers, this was achieved through a computer-based training where a hands-on approach was employed. Gradually, through training and encouragement, the HTI Accountants overcame this fear. In the words of one of the HTI Accountants *"I was initially scared of even touching computers but look at me today, I don't only own a personal compute [but] I even have an e-mail address "*. W4H followed up by procuring and supplying desk-top computers to all the HTIs. With the computers at the disposal of the accountants, the speed of assimilation and transition was magical.
- **Involvement in Budgeting**: A deliberate approach was employed to encourage HTI management personnel involved in the budgeting and budgetary process of their Institutions. This was achieved by building their skills in developing costed operational plans. These are then converted to budgets which get incorporated into the larger budget of the line ministry and the

health sector budget for the states. By virtue of the new skills, the management teams of HTIs attend budget defense sessions where they are called upon to defend estimates (especially for capital projects) contained in the budget they submitted. This was a complete departure from the past where they are not involved in budget preparations.

- **Human Resource Information System/ Student Information Management System:** In order to improve HTI management decisions in the area of human resources and students management, W4H supported the development and deployment of Human Resource Information system (HRIS) and Students Information Management System (SIMS) in all the HTIs in the programme states. Focal persons/operatives identified by the management of the HTIs were trained on the use of the database program and its application. Reports generated by the two systems are analysed and facilitates human resource planning and accurate student data.

Conclusion

With support from the W4H programme, the HTIs have made significant strides towards improving transparency, accountability and good governance in general, but further support is required in order to sufficiently sustain the gains made and embed good governance within the culture and systems of the institutions.

Tags: Governance, Health Training Institutions, financial management, transparency, accountability, capacity building, human resource information system, student information management system, HRIS, SIMS, management training,