



World Health Assembly Side Event

Summary

Community Health Workers

Introduction

On Friday 26 May 2023, World Vision International; Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance; and the Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria convened a dialogue to address persistent challenges toward the effective management of community health worker (CHW) programmes. Over the course of three hours, three panels examined issues of programme financing, functionality, system requirements and ethics. Speakers represented the convening organizations, as well as UNICEF, WHO, the Ministry of Health of Niger, Women in Global Health, and the Community Health Impact Coalition. Over 90 participants attended the meeting in Geneva, plus over 105 online participants from 35 countries. The keynote speaker and guest of honour was Ms. Margaret Odera, a CHW from Kenya, who observed she was the sole CHW in attendance at WHA activities this year. This rich discussion highlighted many key messages for policy makers, including:

CHW Relevance

- Primary and Universal Health Care will not be achieved without CHWs.
- Investment in CHWs builds critical community resilience for times of crisis, mitigating crisis impacts.
- CHWs are key actors in helping governments navigate geographic, security and social challenges.
- CHWs represent a 10:1 return on investment.
- CHWs play an important role in addressing diverse health and social issues, including immunization, disease prevention, detection and treatment, essential nutrition actions, mental health and violence prevention.
- Without CHWs, the majority being women, the health system would collapse.



"The question is not whether we should pay CHWs, but how." – Laura Solia Shellaby, CHIC

"CHW cadres are not magic – they are not free."
– Dr. Eric Sarriot, Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance

"Health systems would collapse without these workers." – Dr. Poorvaprabha Patil, Women in Global Health

Health Systems

- CHWs are health workers, and should be afforded every normative workforce investment.
- CHW cadres are not "free" – they entail significant costs, which must be comprehensively planned and executed.
- CHWs should have contracts to improve government/donor accountability.
- National CHW initiatives should be harmonized within a national plan and standard.
- CHW programmes should be routinely monitored to evaluate and improve effectiveness.
- Fulfillment of standard health system requirements for CHW cadres is a contingency for their effectiveness.
- Enhancing the health workforce requires coordination and collaboration of multiple stakeholders.



"We need to put health and social protection together." – Dr. Ibrahim Souley, Niger MOH

"CHWs are health workers."
– Dr. Nicholas Oliphant, The Global Fund

*"Health workforce development is a team sport."
(or, "What is the value of human life?")*
– Catherine Kane, WHO

"CHWs are overworked right now."
– Michele Gaudrault, World Vision International

Ethical Considerations

- Sub-optimal management and investment in CHW cadres erodes public trust in the health system.
- CHWs require fair remuneration, as well as social protection.
- At the same time there is space for voluntary CHWs looking beyond the health system, representing a fundamental community-level social capital.
- Workload analysis is critical to ensure ethical and effective deployment of CHWs.
- Urgent need for gender assessment in CHW cadres to ensure equity and rights.
- Non-professionalization of CHW cadres is a social injustice.



"The CHW plays an incredibly important role in ensuring equity for the most vulnerable children." – Dana Buzducea, WVI

"Non-professionalization of CHWs is a corporate injustice against women." – Margaret Odera, Keynote speaker and CHW

"[CHWs are] a trusted bridge between their communities and the formal health system." – Marijke Wijnroks, Global Fund

"CHW programmes and every CHW will need to be salaried, supported, and skilled...in a polyvalent CHW environment." – Ephrem T. Lemango, UNICEF/Gavi

Recommendations

1. CHW cadres should be professionalized, urgently.
2. A standardized systems approach should be adopted to improve CHW planning, management and performance.
3. CHW cadre planning should be assessed through a gender lens, and comprehensive gender protections pro-actively invested.



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