

**MULTISECTORAL NUTRITION CAPACITY: A MUST FOR BUILDING HEALTHY  
GLOBAL FOOD SYSTEMS: Assuring the quality of nutrition workforce preparation**

**Minutes of the WPHNA Capacity Building Task Force meetings, 07/09/2014, Keble  
College, Oxford.**

Members of the task force initially met together for joint discussions of an overall nature before splitting into two groups to discuss the two previously prepared discussion papers, as per the agenda and participant list in Annex 1 (attached).

The initial joint discussions concerned ground already covered in previous meetings, including reaching agreement on the competencies of a Public Health Nutritionist (PHN) as well as various aspects of an overall background paper on capacity development shared with participants prior to the meeting. The first group then discussed a proposal for creating an accreditation system for university PHN degree programs, and the second group discussed how to ensure the quality of capacity development for scaling up nutrition interventions in Low and Middle Income Countries (LMICs) in particular. The reason for the two separate discussions being that while graduate courses in Europe for example would be two to three years of residential study at a university, the demands for “scaling-up-nutrition” efforts in most LMICs couldn’t wait three years, with large numbers of public health nutritionists (hundreds per region) needed now, and the option had to be “on the job training”. The minutes of these two sub-group meetings are shown below.

**Sub group 1: The WPHNA Accreditation System**

The first sub-group was chaired by Roger Hughes (Australia) as outgoing WPHNA Secretary (Professional Affairs) and focused on considering the feasibility and utility of a university program accreditation system targeting specialist training for public health nutritionists. This discussion was informed by a previously circulated background paper that described the proposed system.<sup>1</sup>

The group participants agreed that in principal the idea of an international professional quality assurance system based on University level programs training public health nutrition specialists had merit but their remained a number of conceptual and logistics issues that need to be addressed. Some of this discussion included:

- The need to clarify what level of the PHN workforce program accreditation would focus. It was generally agreed that the focus of program accreditation of specialist PHNs would be at Master’s degree level, but that this was not prescriptive and the emphasis on competency standard attainment was the priority.
- The need to ensure the global accreditation system had additional utility, and did not compete with, existing national accreditation systems. It was pointed out that few

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<sup>1</sup> A quality assurance system for Public Health Nutrition workforce preparation and development: The WPHNA Accreditation System. Background paper prepared by: Roger Hughes, Roger Shrimpton and Barrie Margetts. Available online at: <http://bit.ly/1o0Q8p5>

countries other than the UK had anything looking like a PHN program accreditation system.

- The logistics of WPHNA providing suitably qualified and experienced external accreditation reviewers in-country and the resulting cost
- The cost of accreditation remained a significant point for discussion, with a number of participants suggesting that if too expensive, the accreditation system would have little uptake by University's, particularly in LMICs.

It was suggested that further work was required on the logistics of implementation of the proposed system. Roger Hughes agreed to work directly on this with Liv Elin Torheim (Oslo and Akershus University, Norway), Rina Swart (University of Western Cape, South Africa), Lisanne Du Plessis (Stellenbosch University, South Africa) and Dianne Reidlinger (Bond University, Australia) using their respective PHN programs as pilot sites for the accreditation system over the next 12 months. This process will trial and refine the process before progressing to broader WPHNA Executive Committee endorsement and institutionalisation.

As a post-workshop outcome following discussions with the WPHNA President Barrie Margetts, Roger Hughes agreed to continue to develop the accreditation system as Interim Registrar in collaboration with the working group and the incoming WPHNA Secretary (Professional Affairs).

### **Sub group2: National and regional systems for ensuring quality capacity development for Scaling-Up-Nutrition.**

Roger Shrimpton chaired the second group's deliberations, with the overall objective to work towards defining the characteristics of a capacity building system for ensuring the quality of scaling up of nutrition efforts in LMICS as described in a background paper<sup>2</sup> shared with participants prior to the meeting. The specific objectives proposed for the group were twofold: 1) To provide institutions involved in scaling up nutrition (such as government, educational establishment and development agencies) an independent and authoritative professional guidance and quality framework for PHN workforce preparation as well as a system for diffusion of innovation worldwide re PHN workforce preparation; 2) To further enhance and elevate the profile of WPHNA as an authoritative global professional body that can assist and inform capacity building efforts worldwide by setting standards for on-the-job training of specialist public health nutritionists as well as in-service training of other members of the PHN workforce.

On the job training of PHN specialists was the main focus of discussion and was a far ranging one. Although the group had been asked to consider eight aspects of on the job training, the results of the discussion can be summarized into four broad areas:

1) "*Job description templates*" were discussed first and at great length, largely serving to get all of the group "on the same page". The word "job" was considered a problem by some, as this could be inferred to mean creating "more government posts" which would be the end of any such discussion in many quarters. It was agreed to use the words "skill mix" to circumvent this potential allergy. Some considered the first priority should be given to creating high level (national)

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<sup>2</sup> National and regional systems for ensuring quality capacity development for Scaling-Up-Nutrition. Background paper prepared by: Roger Shrimpton, Roger Hughes and Barrie Margetts. Available online at: <http://bit.ly/1vSUzDj>

advocates, otherwise nothing would get created at lower levels, and if it were then it wouldn't get supported and protected. All eventually agreed that "advocates" were needed at all levels, although the sort of advocacy would vary. It was also agreed that these various dimensions of the "skill mix" needed are already described in Table 4 of the background paper for the competency framework (although many said they had not seen this before so its source is included here<sup>3</sup>). The pyramidal workforce contained in the background paper shared prior to the meeting should be modified to differentiate the role of the PHN specialist from other nutritionists and dietitians as shown in the Figure 1 below. Furthermore all agreed the basic skill mixes required of the PHN specialist are the same regardless which sector they operate in. It was finally agreed that such templates could not be done in a vacuum, as it will not only depend on the level at which the person is to operate (national vs district for example) but also to the sector in which they have to operate. The group agreed that such templates could be developed for specific situations, and agreed that WPHNA should support such efforts were the opportunity to arise.

2) "*Curriculum guides*" it was agreed could and should be developed by the group. The best way to do this was considered to be by collecting the curriculum of those already existing PHN specialist courses (there are no more than 10 globally it was thought) and collating/examining them in order to compare them with skill mix needed for the agreed PHN competencies. BSc and MSc courses need to be considered separately. Steve Atwood and Sonia Blaney agreed to take on the task of pulling together the curriculum of existing graduate courses and perform such an analysis before sharing with the group.

3) "*Course teaching methods*" were discussed in detail, and encompassed the topics of "*pedagogic teaching methods*", "*technology for instruction and mentoring*", and "*websites and interactive mechanisms*" that participants had been asked to consider prior to the meeting. Nkosi Mbuya shared with the group the tentative plans being developed by the World Bank together with Mahidol University in Thailand for a two week course for "nutrition programme managers" from countries in East Asia. Participants would come to Bangkok and take the course before returning to their jobs in their country, with the possibility of returning for another two week course at Mahidol six months later. The costs of such a course were high however, mostly due to the travel and lodging in Bangkok. Furthermore the numbers that could be trained in this way would be very small compared to the need in the region, and alternative ways of training program managers are obviously needed. *Distance learning* is increasingly seen as the preferred option in this regard, and David Sanders described how this has been done for Public Health in Sub-Saharan Africa from his University in Cape Town. The courses to be taken could be provided either by internet or by CD Rom (many LMICs still don't have good access to the WWW), and students could take these at their leisure in their homes and/or on the job. The IUNS is committed to supporting the provision of distance learning and it was agreed that WPHNA should seek ways to ensure these efforts were supportive and complementary. The importance of *mentoring* was agreed and ways to do this considered. Instead of converging on the central university hub (e.g. Mahidol) every six months students could converge on a local university site and be met by "roving mentors". Such "face to face" contacts could be supplemented with "chat rooms" and local networks established through social media.

4) *Faculty, professional exchanges and certification* are all areas that require development and are best done in practice rather than in a vacuum. In theory the group agreed that it would be

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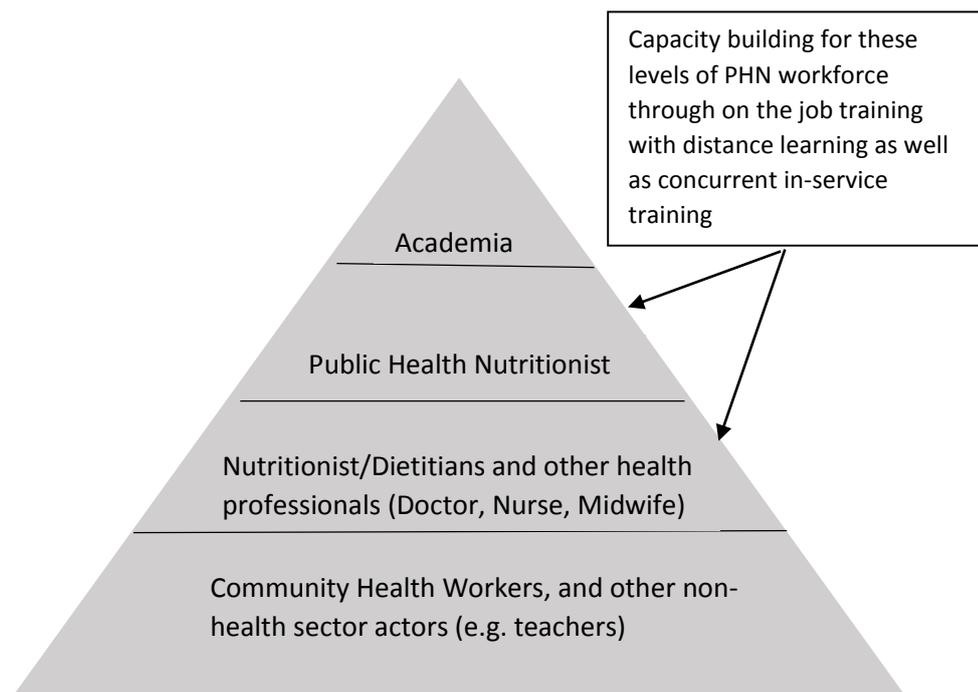
<sup>3</sup> <http://www.wphna.org/htdocs/downloadsapr2012/12-03%20WPHNA%20Draft%20competency%20standards%20report.pdf>

possible to create a “virtual faculty” in a region (e.g. Sub-Saharan Africa or East Asia) as long as funding existed to support such an effort. Funding was not considered an impossible barrier, and if there were proposals available then agencies in specific regions might well be able to fund. In this regard the group agreed that such an effort could/should be developed for a specific regional setting and this could be either East Asia and/or Sub-Saharan Africa. This could and should be linked to the curriculum development work already agreed in item 2 above. With regard to certification of courses, the possibility of developing a regional credit system was agreed. However the certification of the courses provided to the individual was considered best done by the local institution.

In service training of other non-specialist nutrition workforce was hardly discussed at all largely due to lack of time. Again it felt that it would be possible and useful to collect whatever material is already out there and this is something that Steve Atwood and Sonia Blaney said they would do as part of the inventory of existing capacity building material for scaling up nutrition in LMICs especially. The priority of the group initially however should be with on the job training of PHN specialist.

Final considerations were given to the importance of advocacy by the group and by WPHNA for the dire situation of PHN capacity globally and the urgent need for action in this regard. Although there is enormous political support for nutrition globally due to efforts such as the SUN movement, it was felt that the window of opportunity that this present will only stay open for another year or two, and unless some successes are soon available then interest would wane again. It was agreed that the overall background paper prepared for the event should be published and those wishing to add/comment on it would be encouraged to do so and provided the opportunity of becoming co-authors. In addition it was agreed that a shorter letter or “commentary” should also be published in somewhere like the WHO Bulletin.

**Figure 1 The Multi-layered PHN workforce development**



**ANNEX 1**

**MULTISECTORAL NUTRITION CAPACITY: A MUST FOR BUILDING HEALTHY GLOBAL FOOD SYSTEMS.**

**Assuring the quality of nutrition workforce preparation**

WPHNA Capacity Building Task Force Workshop

Oxford 7 September 2014

| <b>Agenda:</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                         |
|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>Time</b>    | <b>Topic</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <b>Chair/presenter</b>  |
| 1400-1445      | Introduction and discussion of the agenda, objectives and meeting process                                                                                                                                                                 | B Margetts              |
|                | The challenge: dimensions of the problem and workforce capacity                                                                                                                                                                           | R Shrimpton             |
|                | Overview of required competencies                                                                                                                                                                                                         | R Hughes                |
| 1445-1500      | Coffee break                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                         |
| 1500-1700      | Group work <u>in parallel streams</u> discussing background papers:<br>1: A global system for accreditation of PHN specialist workforce preparation.<br>2. National/Regional systems for ensuring quality “scaled up” nutrition capacity. | R Hughes<br>R Shrimpton |
|                | 1700-1900                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Supper Break            |
| 1900-2030      | Reporting back summarizing group conclusions and plans                                                                                                                                                                                    | B Margetts              |
| 2030           | Close                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                         |

**Location:** The University Club, 11 Mansfield Road, Oxford OX1 3SZ. United Kingdom

| Accreditation             |                                          | Scaling up                 |                                             |
|---------------------------|------------------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Roger Hughes*             | Bond University, Australia               | Roger Shrimpton*           | Tulane University, USA                      |
| Liv Elin Torheim*         | Oslo and Akershus University, Norway     | Steve Atwood*              | Thammasat University, Thailand              |
| Rina Swart*               | University of Western Cape, South Africa | David Sanders*             | University of Western Cape, South Africa    |
| Bryndís Eva Birgisdóttir* | University of Iceland, Iceland           | Elisabetta Recine*         | University of Brasilia, Brazil              |
| Karen Charlton*           | University of Wollongong, Australia      | Barrie Margetts*           | University of Southampton, UK               |
| Boyd Swinburn*            | Deakin University, Australia.            | Hélène Delisle*            | University of Montreal, Canada              |
| Celeste Naude*            | Stellenbosch University, South Africa    | Sonia Blaney*              | Monkton University Canada                   |
| Claudia Afonso            | University of Porto, Portugal            | Saba Mebrahtu*             | UNICEF Nepal                                |
| J.P. Landman-Bogues       | Southampton University UK                | Nkosi Mbuya*               | World Bank, Washington, USA                 |
|                           |                                          | Chalida Mae Svastisalee    | Metropolitan University College, Denmark.   |
|                           |                                          | Edelweiss Wentzel-Viljoen* | North-West University, South Africa         |
|                           |                                          | Lisanne M du Plessis*      | Stellenbosch University, South Africa       |
|                           |                                          | Anna Larty                 | International Union of Nutritional Sciences |
| Key:                      |                                          |                            |                                             |
| *                         | WPHNA member                             |                            |                                             |

**Participants grouped by area of focus**