

PERFORM

IMPROVING HEALTH WORKFORCE PERFORMANCE

The PERFORM approach:

Strengthening management using action research to improve health workforce performance in Ghana, Tanzania and Uganda



In 2014 the Global Symposium on Health Systems Research launched its statement on people centred health systems. A call to action and a roadmap for change – this document outlined the ways in which health systems could be oriented so that they provide better outcomes and are responsive and accountable to the people who use them and work in them. In particular, the statement notes:

"Health systems serve people but are also made up of people, who need effective environments in which to work. Supportive supervision and high quality, continuing training for health care workers emerged as crucial needs across settings. Supportive and effective working environments for health workers are important, which should include appropriate financial and non-financial incentives."

We know that health systems in Africa do not meet their full potential due to a lack of health care workers and other health-related staff. The health worker deficit has become the focus of international campaigns and spawned hashtags that abound on social media. It is true that more needs to be done to train and retain staff on the continent. But what about the workforce that dutifully tends to the health of communities – often in sub-optimal conditions with limited support? Are there cost-effective and sustainable ways that researchers can support changes in performance management within the health system? This is the question that PERFORM researchers in Ghana, Tanzania and Uganda set out to explore.

What's the problem?

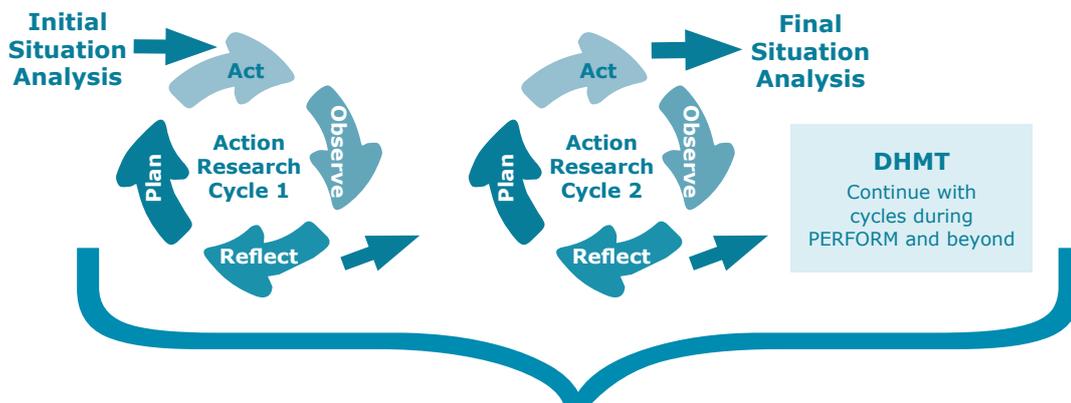
"It is not all about numbers: the goal of universal health coverage requires a paradigm shift, going beyond a discourse on shortages but rather focusing more explicitly on the accessibility, acceptability, quality and productivity of the health workforce, placing equity at the centre of the agenda."

Marie-Paule Kieny Assistant Director-General World Health Organization

In addition to insufficient numbers of health workers mal-distribution of staff, inappropriate task allocations and a poor working environment hinder the effectiveness of the health workforce that we already have. Engaging with national decision makers to overcome these challenges is key. But in many settings in sub-Saharan Africa planning and management of the health system is decentralised. PERFORM set out to explore how management strengthening at the district level can improve workforce performance.

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OVERALL EVALUATION

- Reflect on the action research change process
- Compare data from situation analyses
- Identify which intervention worked well for improved performance

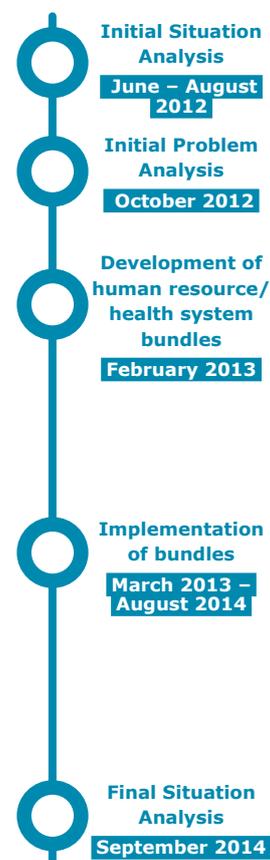
What did we do?

From 2012 to 2015 we undertook a process of action research within which District Health Management Teams were co-researchers' and partners in achieving the objectives of the study.

PERFORM supported district health management teams (DHMT) who, through a series of workshops and review meetings used Action Research (plan, act, observe and reflect) to develop and then test context-specific strategies focused on improving workforce performance. The DHMTs identified areas of health workforce performance to be improved, planned their own human resource and health systems strategies feasible within the existing context to improve health workforce performance, acted to implement these strategies, and observed the impact of the strategies they have developed on health workforce performance. They then reflected on how well their plans have been achieved and if necessary, revised the plans or addressed new challenges thus beginning to embed the process within their districts. Reflection was facilitated through the use of diaries, dialogue with research teams and inter-district meetings.

What you can learn:

Results from the PERFORM project enhance our understanding of how, and under what conditions, a management strengthening intervention can improve health systems at the district level. It offers lessons for the study countries and beyond. Being part of PERFORM has enabled health managers to develop and test interventions to improve human resource management furnishing them with new skills and competencies which they can continue to hone once the project is finished. We have gathered tools and learning about the action research process and these are available on our website.



Read more:

Browse the website
www.performconsortium.com

Can action research strengthen district health management and improve health workforce performance?

A research protocol.
<http://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/3/8/e003625.full>

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Footnotes

¹Cape Town Statement from the Third Global Symposium on Health Systems Research Cape Town, South Africa 3 October 2014
<http://healthsystemsglobal.org/Portals/0/files/Cape-Town-Statement.pdf>

²Campbell J, Dussault G, Buchan J, Pozo-Martin F, Guerra Arias M, Leone C, Siyam A, Cometto G. A universal truth: no health without a workforce. Forum Report, Third Global Forum on Human Resources for Health, Recife, Brazil. Geneva, Global Health Workforce Alliance and World Health Organization, 2013
http://www.who.int/workforcealliance/knowledge/resources/GHWA-a_universal_truth_report.pdf?ua=1