

Contribution from PHM Uganda for the manual Building a movement for health

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Author

This document is authored by Denis Bukenya and Danny Grotto PHM-coordinator and PHM-Uganda fundraiser respectively. It fully represents the PHM Members voice in Uganda chapter. Prior to its write-up, a questionnaire sent out through the google group email to all members. A total of 27 (active members) responded with their opinions of PHM-Uganda and their contributions were recorded in this document as appropriated.

Background

The People's Health Movement Uganda Chapter is a loose coalition with broad composition of individual persons and organizations who subscribe to the "Right to Health for All charter". It was founded in 2009 by a group of people who had completed the IPHU training. It is led by a Chairperson, a Vice Chairperson and Secretary/Minute-taker. Leadership is upon election by members and is done every 3 years. Any other roles are assigned depending on experience, skill and availability. Communication is done using a Google group (phm-uganda@googlegroups.com) managed by the Focal Person. After the meeting held in October 2013, members agreed to a few amendments on the structure which saw the change of the Focal Point Person, to Coordinator who serves as the Movement leader and also oversees all activities of the Movement. The meeting also saw the establishment of the position of the Communication Person to guide all communications and a Fundraiser for resource mobilization. The current steering team was dually elected and is serving their last term due to end in October 2016.

Context

The Movement in Uganda is facing recurrent challenges of absence of funds for its activities, and weak internal structures partly caused by the fact that PHM is a loose coalition. These two challenges hamper the ability to organize and engage, and compounded by a seriously volatile political atmosphere pertaining in Uganda. Although a good number of Ugandans have participated in the IPHU trainings, the movement is unable to effectively bring every member on board. Notable also is the absence of a strategic plan to guide the movement operations and then also the limited networking connections with African and global PHM chapters.

Key challenges include:

- The concerns the movement handles are political in nature and the fact that Uganda has just come out of a scandalous election makes it a bigger challenge. The environment is a little charged especially from government which is currently intolerant to dissenting views from the public especially those that look political. The movement is using the opportunity of social media especially Facebook and Whatsup platforms which of recent have become so instrumental in challenging the status quo and advancing the cause for the Right to Health

by all. A few members are connected together on a whatsapp group and regularly share relevant information on topical health issues in Uganda. Currently the agenda is on the plight of cancer patients in Uganda given the fact that the old radiotherapy machine in the country broke down beyond repair. Members are bringing out the voices of those affected by cancer to demand for improved investment in Healthcare especially in the rural areas.

- The government has enacted a Law “Public order Management Act, 2013”. This prohibits gatherings of any kind without permission from the commissioner of police after approval of what one wants to share with the people. This has intimidated some of our members who wouldn’t like to confront a repressive government which is in power at the moment.
- Tapping into the IPHU members especially those that have completed training over the years is still a challenge.
- Strategic direction (strategic agenda) of the Movement is not yet clear to members due to the fact that there is no strategic plan that is clearly defined and agreed upon by all members. This is needed urgently so that members can embrace the direction of the movement.
- There is still limited PHM coordination and networking within the region and Africa at large. PHM Kenya used to be so vocal and we were forging a promising partnership that has since died out as regards other circles in Uganda. There is need to continue learning from other country captures especially on how to confront the bottlenecks hindering the growth of the movement.

Description of the Experience

On a positive note though, towards the end of the third month of 2014, PHM Uganda was fortunate to take part in a PHM-UK symposium where which helped with networking and sharing best practices. This was through the assistance of Linda Gibson a PHM-UK activist.

PHM Uganda also managed to launch the global Health Watch 3 Report in 2015 in partnership with Pro Biodiversity Conservation Uganda (PROBICOU).

Also some of PHM Uganda members took part in the Movement’s preparation of the GHW4 report.

After the symposium, the Uganda circle greatly benefited from taking part in a meeting in Sweden at the, ‘The Nordic Africa Institute (Sweden, Uppsala) attended by the Coordinator and presented a paper on “Renewed popular mobilization and urban protests in a regional perspective in relation to different rights” showcasing the work done by PHM-Uganda at the community level and its effect on the regional level. Finally, the Uganda circle has also seen participation by one of its officers in the Price Mahidol Conference, 2015 show casing the activities of PHM Uganda mainly in the area of community participation with participatory action research (partnership with Human Rights Research Documentation Centre (HURIC))

Towards the end of 2013, PHM Uganda was fortunate to host the PHM East African Sub – regional gathering. This gathering helped to identify issues of focus from the country to regional level based on country inputs, familiarize participants with PHM programmes and avenues to get involved and finally developed a strategic direction and actions for strengthening PHM East Africa. The IPOL

(The People's Health Movement University Online) is another programme from the secretariat that benefited the Uganda circle.

PHM Uganda has been involved in the joint initiative with South Africa and Zimbabwe on the Go4Health project organized by CEHURD. The secretariat has initiated links between PHM Uganda.

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