

## CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT FOR STRENGTHENING THE RESPONSE TO HUMAN RESOURCES FOR HEALTH (HRH)

Managing Human Resources for Health (HRH) is primarily a function of government, but Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have been known to play a supportive role in improving the functioning and outreach of public health systems in general, and helping strengthen HRH more specifically. This is achieved by providing development services and humanitarian relief, innovating with existing models of service delivery through HR interventions, building local capacity and holding up the rights of communities and people built on the established reach to communities.

Civil society initiatives to support the strengthening of India's health workforce are evidently an effective and sustainable way forward. Critical contributions towards shaping HRH policy, in conducting analysis, supporting the system and providing evidence of practical applications – are some dimensions of this engagement.

**There are several civil society interventions and lessons that can be aggregated, synthesised, replicated and scaled up. Best practices can be drawn out and scaled as solutions to the HRH challenges. The health system can gain new ideas, perspectives, strategies and tools for application with respect to HR management within diverse settings.**

CSOs can contribute effectively to community mobilisation, information dissemination, community-based monitoring of health services and capacity building of community-based organisations and workers. They can energize community-level interventions and enhance popular participation in health governance and oversight. In a field as fraught with challenges as the HRH conundrum, where exacting decisions need to be taken continuously, it is evident that CSOs, networks and partnerships can help improve HRH. This is reflected in multiple ways:

- ◎ **Strategic support and expert inputs:** Task Forces/Expert Committees constituted by the Government of India at central and state level and the Planning Commission are institutional approaches to seek inputs and expert advice from civil society groups on policy and programme decision-making. Sustainable improvements in health are achievable and measurable when CSOs align their strategic intent with government policy and governments integrate CSOs into all facets of the health system, together focusing on key measures of success. More specifically, an HR Expert Group can be set up at state level to offer long-term support to an HR cell.
- ◎ **Public Private Partnerships (PPP)** as a model for the integration of civil society organizations and the private sector to support implementation of government programmes/schemes. There are CSOs that have provided services and are good examples of what the health system can deliver.
- ◎ **Strengthening Grass Roots Leadership** to drive change by developing a greater consciousness and responsibility towards public health service delivery and the rights of the user/patient. CSOs have also engaged with the need to enhance the profile, involvement and



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effectiveness of the Village Health and Sanitation Committee (VHSCs) for decentralized health planning, thereby ensuring community ownership in Project Implementation Plans. Planning at the grass roots, with Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) being supported and sensitised to take leadership with the same, can ensure the needs of people at village level are not forgotten or lost in translation.

- ◎ **Driving the Discourse through Advocacy and Campaigns** to aid a people-centered approach by influencing relevant policies and programmes, through sustained outreach with key stakeholders and decision-makers to facilitate dialogue and collaborative action by building alliances and networks.
- ◎ **Community-based Monitoring** of health services is a key strategy of the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) to ensure services reach those for whom they are meant, especially vulnerable and hard-to-reach communities. Communitisation is fast becoming an important approach in the nation's response to strengthen the management of HRH. Several states are making efforts to strengthen communitisation.
- ◎ **Supportive Legal Mechanisms** to catalyse transformative agendas for action are another effective form of civil society engagement when utilised constructively with the larger public good in mind. Using legal tools such as the Public Interest Litigation, reform can be fast-tracked through judicial intervention. One such instance in the area of improving HRH was the movement to ensure launch of the three-year Bachelor of Rural Medicine and Surgery course. Given the grave need for rural medical practitioners in India, such efforts are bound to produce positive results in the medium and long term.
- ◎ **District Health Planning and Management** can be significantly strengthened if there is effective engagement in the process by CSOs. Several civil society initiatives are currently focusing on improving capacity for such planning through short and long term training and skills-building efforts, supportive supervision mechanisms and other methods of adult learning. In fact the District Health Society could be leveraged as a platform for government and civil society engagement.

*CSOs have pioneered participatory processes that transform the views of ordinary people into indicators and measures, garnering the interest of key stakeholders. This may result in greater policy engagement for strengthening human resource for health thereby helping improve policy positions and make policy processes more accountable.*

The People for Health: Advancing Human Resources for Health in India initiative convened a two day national level civil society consultation on “Exploring Civil Society Initiatives in Strengthening Human Resources for Health” on May 17-18, 2012 in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh. This consultation, attended by 66 participants, majorly represented by the civil society organizations in addition to government, academia, private sector, bilateral organizations and the media, was convened to share civil society experiences of supporting human resource management in the public health system, getting acquainted to the methods used for mobilizing community action in recognizing health and demanding quality health care as a human right and for examining good practices adopted by civil society. This multi-stakeholder consultation underscored the importance of creating knowledge sharing platforms for disseminating evidence and towards mobilising a collective response to address emergent HRH issues.