



EDITORIAL

Reforming Strategic Management of Human Resources for Health

Human Resource Management has developed internationally over the last 30 years to be considered a major function in all areas of employment but especially in Health. In 2006 WHO published the World Health Report “Working together for Health” and since this date majority of developing countries have introduced Human Resource functions within their Ministries. The main issues in the environment that affect HRM are, changing needs of the diverse workforce, the need to respond flexibly to current HR issues and problems, increased globalization of the economy, rapid expansion of the private sector, technological changes and environmental changes, increase in litigation related to HRM, and managerial non commitment.

In Sri Lanka the Government health sector has a workforce of 107,000. Staff categories number 290. Of these the major categories are Medical officers, Nursing Officers, Paramedical staff, Public Health Midwives, Public Health Inspectors etc.

Making available adequate staff of good quality in an equitable manner has been a constant challenge for the Ministry of Health which has a prime responsibility for recruitment, training and deployment of staff.

Several presidential task forces, special committees appointed in the past have given sound recommendations to take forward the agenda of Human Resources in Health. However a salient issue was how HR issues are coordinated at the central level. A Strategic plan for Human Resources was developed in 2009 for the period 2009 – 2019. This plan too refers to the need for a central coordination unit within the Ministry of Health that looks at the coordination of HRH policies, management and supply issues.

Prior to the development of the Strategic plan a situation analysis was carried out which revealed that HR functions were scattered in several locations within the Ministry of Health. The lack of long term staff projections, recruitment plans, training plans, deployment policies have complicated the work of the several departments that carry out HR functions as per different categories of staff.

Traditional strategic HR functions have often been limited to determining staffing norms without applying these to workforce projections. A critical gap seen in Strategic management is the lack of a policy dialogue that translates the actual need to staff projections that can be the basis of recruitment and training plans.

A decision has already been taken by the Ministry of Health to establish a central Human Resource Coordinating unit. The unit is expected to ensure coordination and proper guidance on HRD functions performed by different directorates that are assigned with HR functions. Such a HR Coordinating unit will need competent staff trained in different aspects of HRD. Manpower planning, management skills training and human resource development, HR policy and guidance to provincial development, HR information systems, employee relations are some of the key areas that need specialization.

The short term benefits of establishing such a unit could be: a Human Resource Plan for all cadres of staff, National Training Strategy and Training Plan for all cadres, Development of deployment plans that reflect health inequities and health access of vulnerable communities, Development of HR Policies to improve employee relations.

The establishment of such a central HR Coordinating unit will require some amount of organization adjustments within the ‘bureaucracy’ and clear terms of reference as to how the coordination takes place is vital. The Ministry of Health may need to think out of the box to create such specialist units and will need to invest in creating a competent group of specialists who can take this agenda forward.

The culture of wanting strategic actions, replacing the crisis driven decisions for recruitment, training and deployment is surely a need of the day. How we get to that requires a road map, organization restructure, specialists in the different aspects of HRD with other support staff and may be a helping hand to support the local group of specialists in the short term.