

Occupational Health, Safety and Environment in the Health Sector in WAHSUN Member Countries

By

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Structure of Presentation

- ❑ Background Information on WAHSUN
- ❑ Aims and Objectives of WAHSUN
- ❑ Activities of WAHSUN
- ❑ Importance of OSHE
- ❑ WAHSUN OSHE Achievements
- ❑ WAHSUN OSHE Challenges
- ❑ Recommendations

Background information on WAHSUN

The West Africa Health Sector Union Network (WAHSUN) was established on **9th November, 2007** at **IBRO Hotel, Abuja, Nigeria**, by 6 health sector unions in 4 West Africa Countries namely Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia and Sierra Leone. These unions collectively representing over Two Hundred Thousand (230,000) health workers in the Sub-Region. A communiqué was issued to confirm the formation of WAHSUN.

PSI Regional Office in Lome through the Sub-Regional Secretary for English Speaking East and West Africa created the platform for the establishment of this “**Sub-Regional Network**” of the health sector Unions in the English Speaking West African countries.

Background information on WAHSUN

WAHSUN was founded on the following principles:

- ❖ Promotion of Quality Public Services
- ❖ Promotion of international working class solidarity
- ❖ Building of Alliances
- ❖ Work towards establishment of a Pan-African Network of all Health Sector Unions on the continent of Africa

Background information on WAHSUN

Currently, the six (6) National Unions involved in the Sub-Regional Network are :

1. Medical and Health Workers' Union of Nigeria ((MHWUN);
2. Health Services Workers' Union (HSWU) of Ghana TUC ;
3. Sierra Leone Health Services Workers' Union (SLHSWU);
4. National Private Health Sector Workers' Union of Liberia (NPHSWUL);
5. National Association of Nigeria Nurses and Midwives (NANNM) and
6. Ghana Registered Nurses Association (GRNA).

Aims and Objectives of WAHSUN

1. Work as a Sub-Regional Network of all health sector Unions in the English-Speaking (East & West) African Sub-Region;
2. Advocate for quality public health for all and increased spending for quality health service and human resource for the health sector in the Sub-Region;
3. Work towards the promotion of improved remuneration and other working conditions as well as safe work environment for members and clients;
4. Protect and deal with migration challenges faced by the various countries in the Sub-Region;
5. Develop and adopt declarations, communiqués and resolutions on health sector reforms in the Region;

Aims and Objectives of WAHSUN

6. Create a joint West African Health Systems Database through submission of information on health issues within each member country;
7. Participate in education programmes of sister Unions, encourage social dialogue among union Leaders, Employers, Governments and other International Agencies such as ECOWAS
8. Mainstream gender and youth in leadership through capacity building and committee activities;
9. Initiate relevant research activities to inform policy at both Union and Governmental levels
10. Work towards the strengthening of international working class solidarity.

Activities of WAHSUN

- The Network usually meets on rotational basis. Its meetings are held **once every six (6) month** to undertake review of its previous activities and then plan for future activities.
- Since the establishment the Network, it has held eight (8) Sub-Regional Plenary Sessions in all the member countries.
- The Sub-Regional Office in Lome, Togo acts as a coordinating point for the Network's activities and meetings.

Activities of WAHSUN

Solidarity Assistance

- Since the Network was established, HSWU of Ghana TUC has been sponsoring members of the HSWU of Sierra Leone whilst the MHWU of Nigeria is assisting members of the NPHSWU of Liberia to enable them participate in the network's activities.
- Apart from this, the two Unions have been offering assistance to the NPHSWU of Liberia and HSWU of Sierra Leone in terms of **furniture and office equipments such as desk top computers and lap top computers** to enhance the performance of work

Activities of WAHSUN

Advocacy, Lobby and Engagement

Committed to the promotion of universal quality public services and the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Sub-Regional Network will continue to endeavour to advocate, lobby and engage our Governments and Employers in privatization and outsourcing, health workers migration, decent work, i.e improved remuneration, other working conditions and employment security, fair distribution of qualified health care workers and adequate health care financing among other issues.

Activities of WAHSUN

Education and Training

The Network is committed to introducing educational programmes aimed at intensifying education and training for members in the areas of union based education and training programmes, exchange of other programmes, research, printing of journals and bulletins, Occupational Health, Safety and Environment, HIV and AIDS and specific campaigns.

Activities of WAHSUN

Organizing and Recruitment

Recognizing that Union membership for workers is no longer automatic and observing that new entrants to the labour market are professional individuals (contract versus collective bargaining, concept of job for life is changing) the Network has stepped up **organizing** and **recruitment** as a strategy to increase membership its membership.

Activities of WAHSUN

- **Publication of Journals and Bulletins**

The HSWU of Ghana TUC and MHWU of Nigeria have been publishing journals and bulletins periodically. These bulletins and journals are being published in line with the objectives of the Network.

They provide a platform for information sharing among members, Labour Unions and the general public on the activities of the Network and the Unions. They also provide health updates and serve as an educational tool for the Unions.

Activities of WAHSUN

- **Establishment of Solidarity Fund**

The Network has endorsed the institution of a solidarity fund for the Network to enable it become self-reliant and also to cater for its needs and to be able to offer solidarity support to weak Unions of the Network.

Importance of OSHE

- ✓ Contribute positively to productivity, quality of products and services.
- ✓ Contribute to work motivation and job satisfaction.
- ✓ Contribute to quality of life of individual workers and the society at large.

Importance of OSHE

- OSHE issues are of important concern for WAHSUN and their national centres.
- Its importance is demonstrated as follows:
 - ❖ Policy formulation and development.
 - ❖ Education and training programmes (Seminars and Workshops).
 - ❖ Advocacy for ratification of International Instruments (eg. ILO Conventions on safety and health) and its legislation.
 - ❖ Encouraging unions adoption of safety and health standards in Collective Agreements through Negotiation and Collective Bargaining

WAHSUN OSHE Achievements

Committed to the promotion of OSHE issues at the various Health Facilities within the West Africa Sub-Region, WAHSUN has been engaging our Health Sectors policy makers.

The achievements so far made include the following:

- Health Sector OHSE Policy and Guidelines.
 - System for hazard identification, assessment and control.
 - WAHSUN has been able to establish 50 joint OSHE Committees at Health Institutions.
 - On the average, WAHSUN has trained 250 Trainer of Trainers (TOT) on OSHE).
 - OHSE issues are negotiated in Collective Agreements.
 - Advocated for the use of retractable syringes and needles in the hospitals within the West African Sub-Region.
 - Advocated for health workers vaccination against hepatitis, Pre & post exposure prophylaxis.

WAHSUN OSHE Achievements

- ❑ Government is concerned with the provision of minimum standards of protection in the workplace in relation to safety and health.
- ❑ Ghana has ratified many ILO Conventions related to OSHE. These include Conventions Number 1, 16, 30, 45, 81, 103, 115, 119, 120, 150 and 182.
- ❑ National Laws give support to the enforcement of safety and health standards as provided by the above international instruments (eg. Factories, Offices and Shops Act of 1970. (Act 328), Labour Act of 2003 (Act 651), Environmental Protection Agency Law of 1994 (Act 490) and the Workmen's Compensation Law of 1987 (PNDCL 187).

WAHSUN OSHE Achievements

- ❑ Enforcement is carried out by administrative institutions (such as Ministry of Employment and Social Welfare, Environmental Protection Agency Department of Factory Inspectorate, Labour Department, Ministry of Health and Municipal/Metropolitan/District Assemblies

WAHSUN OSHE Challenges

- ❑ Workers suffer various degrees of disabilities while at work.
- ❑ Some workers develop occupational diseases that eventually kill them.
- ❑ The situation has socio-economic implications for government, employers, workers and their families in our sub-region
- ❑ overcoming the hazards, risks and possibilities of work related or industrial accidents demand the provision of measures and standards.

WAHSUN OSHE Challenges

- ❑ Pre and Post Exposure Prophylaxis exists but not known to workers.
- ❑ There is the need for appointment of regional and district focal persons for purpose of overseeing to implementation of safety and health measures and protection.
- ❑ Penalties are limited to employers and not employees.
- ❑ There are insufficient human and material resources available for enforcing the laws and inspecting workplaces.

WAHSUN OSHE Challenges

- ❑ Current legislation is outdated and does not address the socio-economic and technological changes that have taken place.
- ❑ Unions need to advocate/lobby for appointment of full time OSHE focal person to handle OSHE matters.
- ❑ There is delay in compensating victims of OSHE accidents who suffer occupational disease or injury.

WAHSUN OSHE Challenges

- ❑ Challenges faced by workers in measures and enforcement of health and safety protection.
- ❑ Most of the legislation deal with industrial safety and not much of occupational health.
- ❑ The occupational, safety and health laws in WAHSUN Countries for the Health Sector do not provide workers with adequate protection.

Recommendations

It is recommended that for sound OSHE measures and protection. It is incumbent on Government, Employers, Trade unions and Workers, working collectively to ensure that:

- ✓ There is sufficient human and material resources for enforcement of laws and inspection of workplaces.
- ✓ Current legislation is updated to address the socio-economic, and technological changes that had taken place.

Recommendations

- ✓ There is the need for sensitization (through educational workshops and symposia for workers to be aware of the existence of Pre and Post Exposure Prophylaxis.
- ✓ Compensation to victims of occupational injury or disease should not be delayed to cause economic erosion of such financial awards.
- ✓ OSHE laws in WAHSUN Countries for the Health Sector should be made to provide workers with adequate protection.

Recommendations

- ✓ It behoves on employers and workers working through trade unions and governments to collectively deal with safety and health measures and enforcement to achieve sound OSHE protection.
- ✓ Legislation should deal adequately with occupational health as much as with industrial safety.

Recommendations

We would like to encourage member countries to Ratify relevant ILO Conventions on OSHE and enact domestic legislation to support their application.

The inspectorate divisions in member countries should be strengthened to ensure that there is adequate provisions for sufficient workplace inspections for compliance with safety and health regulations.

Recommendations

Employers should be made to comply with regulations that are more protective than existing minimum standards. Furthermore, legislations in the sub-region should provides for strong penalties for those who break safety and health regulations.

Conclusions

It is our hope that structure to promote social dialogue among social partners in our sub-region will strengthened to play its role very well. WAHSUN is positioning itself to engage Health Sector Ministers in our sub-region on a regular basis to ensure we influence health sector policies in our respective countries.

Conclusions

We believe that WAHSUN is very important in helping to build strong trade unions that can position itself to defend and protect the rights of its members. For us to do this effectively we need to be able to intervene in policy formulation and implementation right from continental level, through sub-regional and national levels.

Conclusions

It is our hope that after we have been able to mobilize all health sector unions on the continent of Africa, we shall be looking forward to collaboration with health sector unions in other parts of the world. All this is to ensure Quality Public Services

- ❖ Long Live Health Sector Workers
- ❖ Long Live African Workers
- ❖ Long Live PSI

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

