

West Africa Health Sector Union Network
(WAHSUN) on inter-union solidarity and
cooperation on Occupational Health and Safety

By

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The Structure of the Presentation

- Formation of the Network
- Aims and objectives of the Network
- Information on the Network's
- Participation in OHS at Country and Sub regional levels
- Achievements and Challenges
- Recommendations

The Beginning of the Journey

- The idea to inform the Network was first conceived in Accra, Ghana in 2006 During a Workshop on HIV/AIDS organised by the then Deputy General Secretary of PSI, Comrade Alan Leather. That Workshop was the first of its Kind to bring the Health Workers together from the West Africa Sub region
- One of the Special Guests then was also The General Secretary of the Ghana TUC Brother Kwasi Adu-Amankwah who in the course of his address to the meeting shared his experience when he travelled to Nigeria from Ghana by road and faced lots of challenges
- Kwasi Adu-Amankwah is now the Secretary General of ITUC Africa
- After this advice the Leaders who were at the Workshop then agreed to meet in Abuja to come with a Network

Platform for the Establishment of the Network

- The Sub Regional office of the PSI then created a platform for all the Leaders to meet during the Constitutional conference of MHWUN in Abuja on the 9th November 2007
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- The meeting was attended by Nigeria ,Ghana, Liberia and Sierra Leone with my humble self in attendance
- At the end of the Abuja Meeting a Declaration known as Abuja Declaration was signed by all the Countries I attendance and a communique issued to inform the world about the formation of the Network known as WAHSUN

Principles of the Network

- 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

Membership of the Network

Currently, there are Six (6) Unions as and Associations that are members of the Network though from time to time we invite Unions from East Africa or the French Speaking countries to attend the meetings .The Unions 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 the Network

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

Aims and Objectives of the Network

- 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 the Network

- 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 the Network

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

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 the Network

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.

Organising 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 its membership.

Activities of the Network

- **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.

- **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.

WAHSUN and OHS issues

Having noticed the growing interest of the Health Sector Unions in the Sub Region. The PSI Head Office saw the need to organise to organise a TO training for the Education officers in Nairobi, Kenya in 2010. Many Countries were in attendance:- South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana and Sierra Leone. The training was facilitated by the WHO

There were also conditions laid down for the Unions in order to get their commitments;-

- Unions to co-sponsor their participants by paying their tickets
- Unions to replicate the TOT in their Unions and country level
- Unions to fund the TOT in their respective countries so that we do not rely on any support or project in the future

With this conditions accepted by the affiliates in our Sub region the focus became clear for the TOT to be embarked upon and the need to report back to the apex body to convince them that the TOT was worthwhile

Generating Interest on OHS issues

- The WAHSUN meeting in Koforidua Ghana was attended by PSI and all the meetings to :-
- Consider reports from the TOT in Nairobi
- To demonstrate what the Education Officers learnt and how they intend to use their knowledge to train Others
- To silently Justify the need for the Unions to commit more resources in the TOT and Development of workplace policies, advocate for legislations, for a while move away from bread and butter issues to address issues that affect both the workers, patients and the larger society
- Re-direct the Unions attention to policy interventions and advocacy work for the Domestication of ILO Conventions

A Step Further on OHS

At the end of this meeting specific tasks were given to the Education Officers/TOT experts to:-

- Develop a training module to train the Unions Top Leadership who negotiate with employers and needed to be properly empowered with the necessary tools to argue on the need to make OHS a CBA issue
- To develop a simplified version for the training of other members of the Unions
- To get prepared to train both Union and Government Officials in Lagos as a Union contribution to show case that Unions are not just about demands and strikes but can also use their resources to train even Government officials
- To ensure the realisation of:-
- Deepening the understanding of the Leaders on Occupational Health and Safety
- Assist in Identifying the underlying factors that leads to injuries and illnesses at work
- To identify tools that Union leaders can use in the workplace on Occupational Health and safety

A Step Further on OHS and intended Impact

- To prioritise Health and Safety hazards and understand the hierarchy of possible solutions
- To identify and evaluate different methods for reducing or eliminating hazards
- To develop campaign materials for use at the Workplaces

Few intended achievements of the TOT/Workshops:-

Campaign materials were produced to send signals to both members and management to encourage the formation of OHS Committee(s) to address OHS issues such as the design of job tasks and procedures, work environment, safety measures, system for reporting problems, common mistakes and how they are managed to prevent persistent occurrences.

OHS Guarantees our rights

The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates indicate that each year, about 2.3 million men and women die from workplace related accidents and diseases. Because, many employers avoid their responsibilities. As workers, formal or informal, we have the right to:

- Work under satisfactory, safe and healthy conditions;
- Safe and healthy working environment;
- Safety and absence of risks to health
- Refuse dangerous work without victimization
- Safety appliances and protective equipment,
- Form workplace safety committees;
- Information and training;
- Representation and participation

Ratified ILO Conventions related to OHS

The following are the list of ratified ILO Conventions related to OHS by countries in the Sub region:-

Ghana

Conventions Number 1, 16, 30, 45, 81, 103, 115, 119, 120, 150 and 182.

Liberia

Conventions Number 81, 150, 182,

Nigeria

Conventions Number 16, 45, 81, 182

Sierra Leone

Conventions Number 16, 45, 81, 182

This table above shows that we have a lot of work to do and wish to inform you that our strategy now are as follows:-

Expansion of the Network and Strategy

- Expand the activities of the Network to other sub regions in Africa
- Coopt other French speaking countries in West Africa
- Next meeting of the Network is being taken to Rwanda in East Africa where all Countries in east Africa will be able to participate
- Have approached Sub Regional Organisations for collaboration such as West Africa Health Organisation (WAHO), Organisation of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU), ITUC-Africa
- All have agreed to Partner and work with us
- Ambition to get observer status at both WAHO, ECOWAS and AU

Recommendations

Our experiences over the years have shown that leaders that are focused can make a lot of changes in the Trade Union movement but they needed to be guided and shown the way as exhibited by PSI Head Office and the Regions/Sub regions

- WAHSUN has now led to the establishment of many Networks in the Sub region like the AMALGUN in the municipal Sector and very soon in the Educational, Utilities and Civil Service. If other Sub regions can emulate this our work can be made a lot easier

- To emulate WAHSUN in reducing over dependence on funding from projects that might no be the priority of the Donors/Sponsors.

Recommendations

- PSI in collaboration with other organisations should assist the WAHSUN member countries to advocate for proper policies/legislation on OHS and ratify relevant ILO conventions
- A panel discussion or meeting should be held at the PSI congress towards establishing closer ties with other Networks in the Health sector and also to share experiences

Thank you for your attention