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Tracking All Health Workers in Botswana

Sarah Dwyer, IntraHealth International



Kabelo Bitsang works at the Botswana Ministry of Health. His job is to help the Ministry know enough about the country's health workers so it can plan effectively for recruitment, training, and retention.

Without current data on health workers, countries can't ensure that the right provider is in the right place with the right skills. As Bitsang recalls, there was no centralized information system for all health workers across the public and private sectors, and various departments used different databases.

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With Bitsang's help, the Ministry of Health implemented [iHRIS Manage](#), CapacityPlus's free, Open Source software for maintaining information on health worker deployment and attrition. "We are using iHRIS to track all health workers in the country, what districts they work in, and what cadre they belong to," Bitsang says.

One benefit of the new system is the ability to manage health worker training. "Tracking the training will make it easier for the Ministry to identify the workers eligible for certain courses," Bitsang explains. "It will also be possible to see which workers are working in areas they are not trained for."

Customizing the system

The Ministry of Health guided customization of iHRIS Manage for its particular context. The [iHRIS Suite](#) of software is Open Source, which means that local developers can modify the code to suit their needs.

"We needed a way to track short courses that people have taken, so a module called Professional Development was created," Bitsang says. "We also made changes to the establishment module to create a better link with the public service HR system. The training module was customized to accommodate the needs of all departments in the Ministry."





Taking steps toward sustainability

[CapacityPlus](#) is strengthening Botswana’s ability to manage and use health worker information. Bitsang has been learning quickly. “I started on the project as an intern, working with one of the developers,” he says. He’s now the Ministry of Health’s iHRIS administrator.

“We just hired four officers who I will be training as administrators of the system,” he adds. “This is to ensure that there is continuity in case I leave and also helps to spread the workload.” The new officers will take [CapacityPlus’s eLearning course for iHRIS administrators](#). “We have also trained most of the administrators in the Ministry in basic use of the system, focusing on report generation.”

Making use of health worker data

“We are currently using iHRIS data to build an HR profile for Botswana with the help of the WHO,” Bitsang notes. “We send out monthly HR reports to all stakeholders to give them a situational analysis of HR in the health sector. We get regular requests from Parliament to answer questions on health workers. iHRIS data has also been used to make estimates for health HR financing.”

Bitsang is also synching iHRIS Manage with the payroll system. “The main advantage of synching the two systems is that it gives everyone more of an incentive to have up-to-date data in iHRIS,” he points out. “If that information is going to be used to pay people, then it needs to be accurate and timely. The other benefit is that we can get salary grade information straight out of the payroll system where we know it is accurate, instead of going on data collection exercises.”

Looking ahead

“Our next big step will be rolling iHRIS out to the districts,” Bitsang says. Ideally, iHRIS Manage will also be integrated into Botswana’s larger health information system.

“I have learned a lot working on this project,” says Bitsang, “and believe that it will make a huge difference in my country.”

Special thanks to Kabelo Bitsang, and to Carl Leitner for interviewing him in Botswana.

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