

Samwel Ogillo Interview
December 2011

Barbara O'Hanlon: Good morning. My name is Barbara O'Hanlon, and welcome to Network for Africa's Interview Series. Network for Africa is a community of practice composed of African public sector leaders in health and private health sector champions. The purpose of Network for Africa is to bring together these two sectors and to discuss how they can better work together to address many of the pressing health challenges confronting their countries.

The Interview Series is an opportunity for Network for Africa members to share their experience in key areas linked to private sector engagement. We're starting the series with a discussion of innovative methods to organize a diverse range of private health sector actors. So today I have the pleasure of introducing and speaking with Dr. Samwel Ogillo, who's the Director of the Association of Private Health Facilities in Tanzania. Good morning, Samwel, how are you?

Samwel Ogillo: Oh, good morning, Barbara.

BOH: And actually, I should be saying good afternoon in Tanzania; correct?

SO: Yes.

BOH: So thank you for joining us this afternoon, and I'd like to start by asking you why was APHFTA created in the first place and to serve what purpose?

SO: APHFTA was created in 1994 by owners of private health facilities in Tanzania, and the aim was to have a platform for networking, advocacy and for supporting the Tanzanian government in promoting public health goods through the private health sector.

BOH: So can you describe who the APHFTA members are, and why are they even motivated to join APHFTA?

SO: APHFTA members are all those who provide health care in Tanzania, and these include the small health facilities, dispensaries, clinics that have got two to three clinicians or nurses working in them; to big hospitals that have got hundreds of health-care providers working in them...they are all members of APHFTA, the whole spectrum of health-care providers in Tanzania. And they are motivated to work and to join and to be members of APHFTA because APHFTA is a platform where they can come together with a common voice and where they can put ideas together and work together to support health care in Tanzania.

BOH: So about how many members do you have now?

SO: APHFTA has got close to 500 members today.

BOH: Quite a large organization. Can you describe some of the key activities of APHFTA?

SO: Yes. APHFTA has got so many activities; these are products for its members, that are supposed to improve the services of the members and also some other products are those that are supposed to improve the health care of Tanzanians as a whole and supporting the government of Tanzania towards achieving the millennium development goals.

Now the products that APHFTA offers for its members-- these include quality improvement programs, accreditation programs, and also loans to improve the quality of care that they provide, and also providing a platform for continuous medical education that they get through regular journals and also meeting together for CMEs. But at the same time, also, APHFTA supports the members to support public health initiatives in the country. These include vaccination programs, maternal child health programs, HIV programs, noncommunicable disease programs, and all these are offered through the private health sector as per government regulations, and in most cases, free for the population that needs the services most.

BOH: Okay. So you've been able to achieve quite a lot in the 20-some-odd years that you've been in existence.

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SO: Yes. A lot has been achieved, and we can see the outcome now.

BOH: So can you tell me, what is one of your proudest achievements through APHFTA?

SO: Well, one of our proudest achievements is that we have managed to bring the private health sector together to act as one group with a common vision to support the country towards achieving the millennium development goals, and at the same time, also by improving, at least, improving public/private partnerships in health in Tanzania, a country that is supported by the private health sector by delivering about 40 percent of primary health care services.

BOH: So in addition to the achievements, what would you say are one or two of your biggest challenges as an organization representing the private health sector in Tanzania?

SO: Yes. We have several challenges, but to just mention a few; one is how is the public acceptance, especially the public sector to accept the private health sector as a partner in health-care delivery and achieving millennium development goals, bearing in mind our political/social, political background from a socialist country in the past. And number two is working with the private sector to raise the standards of service delivery, which was a challenge because of lack of financing, but we are now working towards that to achieve financing for the private health sector. So these have been big challenges that we have faced, but we are slowly finding solutions to these challenges.

BOH: Terrific. So in closing, I'd like to ask you if there was one thing, one lesson learned in managing or establishing APHFTA. What would you say to other Network for Africa members if they were interested in establishing a similar organization? What would be that key lessons learned, either positive or negative?

SO: Yes. One positive thing that we have learned, we need to form a platform. We need to form an association where we can come together, because until 1994, we had real problems of presenting ourselves and having a platform to dialogue with our government and with other partners. And only six years ago, when the secretariat at APHFTA was formed, we have realized all these milestones by achieving all these just in the past six years, after propping up the association's secretariat and working together towards improving health care in Tanzania with the ministry of health as partners.

BOH: So, indeed, it sounds like your experience is very similar to what we heard with Louis Nortey last week from Ghana, where you need a secretariat, you need a formal platform, and having those two organizational structures in place can help you achieve, particularly improving a relationship with the public sector.

SO: Yes. That is very, very much true; you cannot just take it alone individually. As individuals, you can never improve. By coming together, having a strategic plan, the first thing we did was having a strategic plan, which we really work to. Now we are working on our third strategic plan, and by working on the strategic plan, sharing it with partners and with the government, then we can have a common goal and we can achieve it.

BOH: Terrific. So, Dr. Samwel Ogillo, I want to thank you again for your time this afternoon and for sharing your experiences with other Network for Africa members. And I would like to encourage Network for Africa members to look for the next interview on this topic. As I mentioned, we've already spoken with Louis Nortey of PHSAG in Ghana. Our next interview will be with Mr. Walter Ookok, who is the chairman of the Kenyan Health Federation.

Also, if there are topics of interest for you, please feel free to suggest them to the Network for Africa managers via the website, which is listed on the closing page. I'm Barbara O'Hanlon, technical director and manager of Network for Africa, signing off and encouraging you to stay in touch by visiting the Network for Africa website frequently for news on what's happening in the private health sector in Africa.