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Liberian Board for Nursing and Midwifery Launches New Policies and Strengthens Capacity through HRSA-funded RRHO Project Partner Engagement

Background & Goals

Funded by the United States Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) in 2017 and implemented by JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc. (JSI), the Resilient and Responsive Health Organizations (RRHO) project builds the capacity of diverse institutions or “impact partners” that include schools of medicine, midwifery and nursing, professional associations, and government ministries that contribute to improving the quality of health professional education in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Throughout the five-year project period, RRHO supports and complements HRSA’s Resilient and Responsive Health Systems (RRHS) initiative implemented by Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Liberia, and ICAP at Columbia University in Sierra Leone and the DRC. Jointly both projects strengthen the ability of impact partners to become self-learning organizations that are interdependent and can promote and capacitate South-South engagement with the goal of contributing to PEPFAR’s human resources for health strategy.

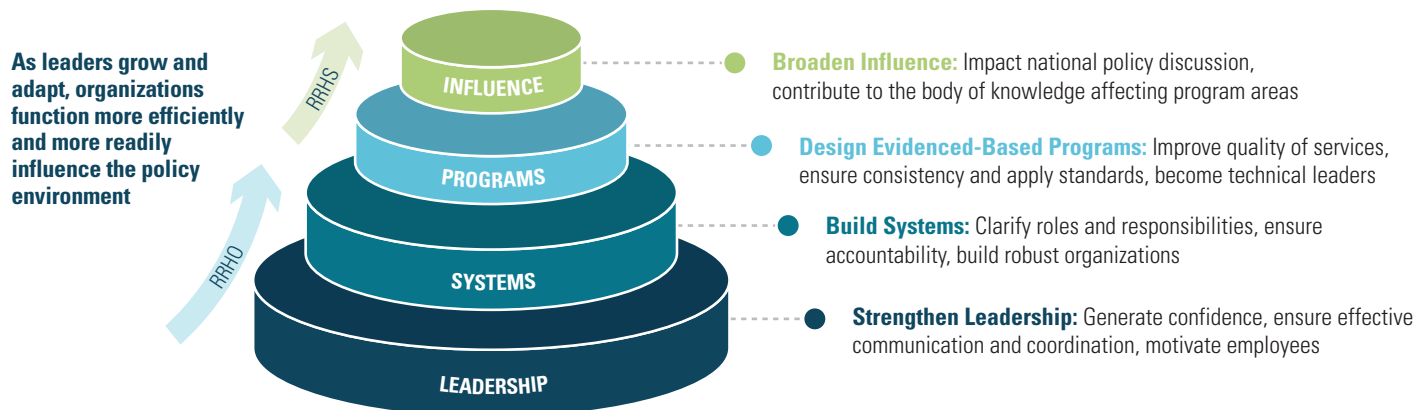
Through this unique and flexible HRSA mechanism, RRHO works directly with local partners on all aspects of their programs to address their specific needs, provide hands-on technical assistance across all of the capacity development building blocks depicted on the next page, and directly influence how they carry out their mission, mandate, and programs.



RRHO’s goals include:

- **Ensure local ownership through effective partnerships**
- **Assess organizational capacity of partners**
- **Facilitate collaboration, information sharing, peer-to-peer exchanges**
- **Strengthen organizational capacity of partners**
- **Support implementation of national strategies and plans**
- **Develop strong leadership and governance.**

JSI's Building Blocks of Capacity Development



RRHO and RRHS are complementary in that RRHO focuses primarily on the bottom blocks of the pyramid (organizational systems, strengthened communication and leadership within organizations) supporting the actual systems and national policy development, while RRHS targets the programs and influencers affecting program design and uptake.

RRHO's Capacity Development Approach

RRHO recognizes that high quality education, skills, and organizational capacity are paramount to building strong health systems. Strengthening institutional capacity can be further complicated in fragile states still recovering from civil war, the 2014-2015 Ebola epidemic, and the 2020-2021 COVID-19 pandemic. With a keen focus on leadership and governance, evaluation and monitoring, financial and administrative management, and program and personnel management, RRHO conducts Organizational Capacity Assessments (OCAs) as a facilitated self-assessment of the organizational capacity of impact partners. This OCA tool provides organizations with a set of criteria to assess their current management capacity to implement quality programs, and identify key areas that need strengthening.

Although many capacity assessments exist, the structure and process of this tool distinguishes it from others. Multi-level and multi-department involvement fosters team building and organizational learning. Inclusion of management, compliance, and program components ensure a holistic understanding of the organization's strengths and challenges. The guided self-assessment and approach by skilled facilitators instills ownership on the part of the organization for its action and improvement plans. In addition to the capacity development action items identified as a result of the OCA process, the facilitated self-assessment process in implementing the OCA is a form of capacity development itself.

Accessible Resources for Capacity Building and Learning

To facilitate information sharing for capacity building, RRHO launched a website, resilientinstitutionsafrica.org. Impact partners are able to view and download national policies and guidelines that are often difficult to find online in one central location. Resources on strategies and plans to respond to emerging epidemics, and the prevention, management, and control of HIV are also accessible. The RRHO resource library also brings together hundreds of organizational capacity building resources, including organizational, facility, and guidance tools. For the first two years of the project and embedded in the website, an online community of practice provided an environment for learning and knowledge exchange. However, due to a pivot in PEPFAR priorities, it was phased out of the website in 2020.



Strengthening the Liberian Board for Nursing and Midwifery

Established in 1949, the Liberian Board for Nursing and Midwifery (LBNM) is the legal power and authority in regulating and monitoring the nursing and midwifery profession in Liberia and ensures professional excellence in nursing and midwifery education and practices. Committed to the Nursing and Midwifery Act, Code of Ethics and with Ministry of Health oversight, LBNM strives to ensure that all schools and programs meet minimum standards, all nursing/midwifery schools and programs are accredited and validated to strengthen quality, and nurses and midwives earn and maintain their licenses. As of January 2021, LBNM currently has 19 fully accredited nursing and midwifery schools with three additional schools denied accreditation, and two more having let their accreditation lapse. As the force behind the largest health workforce in Liberia, LBNM develops curricula, ensures adherence and continuing competency, and determines disciplinary actions for violations of professional standards.

In 2017, RRHO conducted an OCA with LBNM and identified seven domains to focus on including: (1) governance, (2) leadership, (3) strategic management, (4) administration, (5) human resources management, (6) financial management, and (7) strategic information. Based in these domains, LBNM crafted an action plan with the following goals:

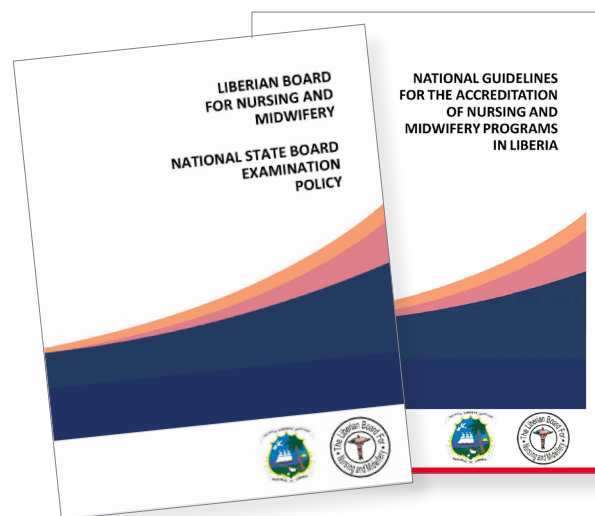
1. Strengthen accreditation process
2. Update strategic plan
3. Strengthen accounting system
4. Develop conflict of interest policy
5. Develop fraud management policy
6. Provide guidance and support in proposal writing
7. Develop resource mobilization plan
8. Develop external communication strategy

Under HRSA's leadership, RRHO was in a unique position to directly influence and shape LBNM's action plan to strengthen how LBNM could carry out its mission and mandate, improve its systems, and build an organizational structure to support the functions and operations of the Secretariat. To do this, RRHO concentrated on four areas:

1. Developing and operationalizing organizational systems, structures, and policies
2. Streamlining the accreditation process for nursing and midwifery training institutions and the national board exam process
3. Building capacity for data analysis and use
4. Developing and implementing a communications strategy.

RRHO supported LBNM in making progress toward achieving all of their action plan goals. Specifically, the project team supported the development of their Strategic Plan for 2018-2023, drove the

creation of the *National Guidelines for the Accreditation of Nursing and Midwifery Programs in Liberia*, supported the development of the *National State Board Examination Guidelines*, and established effective systems, processes, policies, and an organizational structure. Accompanied by new software applications with hands-on training and technical assistance, RRHO was able to strengthen LBNM's ability as an organization to function more seamlessly and achieve its mandate.



Hands-on Training, Capacity Building, and Results Helps LBNM Achieve Action Plan Goals

In addition to RRHO providing remote support from the US with some travel to Liberia, HRSA supported RRHO embedding a Capacity Development Officer (CDO) within the LBNM Secretariat (from November 2018 to mid-May 2019). The CDO was positioned for ready access and on-the-ground hands-on technical assistance to build LBNM's capacity and close gaps related to financial management, strategic information, and governance. The CDO worked with the Secretariat on implementing and digitizing the new accreditation and board exam processes, Board committee mobilization, and data use needs—supporting the achievement of items in the action plan. The CDO was also able to train and engage more than 20 LBNM staff and Board members to use the RRHO website and join the online community of practice to access capacity building tools and resources, and share information.

The placement of the CDO was instrumental in training LBNM leadership, including the finance director, M&E director, and other staff members on software, analysis processes, and systems. RRHO strengthened the financial systems of LBNM by conducting an accounting system pre-assessment; running accounting software training (SAGE) and roll-out; and providing accounting and financial systems support and hands-on training for the finance director and staff.

RRHO also provided support to develop LBNM's fraud management policy and conflict of interest policy. Workshops and trainings were conducted on strategic planning, resource mobilization, external communications, and proposal writing, and resource mobilization tool development was underway. In addition, RRHO worked closely with the RRHO Secretariat to redesign the LBNM brochure.

In just two years (from 2017 to 2019) and as a result of the RRHO capacity development efforts, LBNM strengthened and digitized many processes within their core mandate. LBNM staff learned how to efficiently use Excel to conduct staff evaluations; design effective approaches for data collection and analysis, monitoring and evaluation; and run accreditation and ongoing quality assurance assessments of training institutions. Staff were trained on using the School and Facility Assessment Tools as they were transitioned to Excel so LBNM could digitally analyze assessment and accreditation scores that led to insights on improving accreditation, school performance, and subject matter strengths and weaknesses in nursing and midwifery curricula. In addition, RRHO accompanied LBNM on six training school accreditation visits using the new Excel-based tool and presented results for the 2018 assessments at the National Accreditation Meeting.

During RRHO's project year three, JSI implemented HRSA recommendations intended to better align RRHO with PEPFAR pivot priorities. As such, the project consolidated its geographical scope and local impact partners were changed. RRHO closed out its capacity building activities with LBNM in order to work with more HIV-facing organizations. Organizational capacity strengthening objectives were expanded to include a focus on data use and supply chain strengthening, and the web-based community of practice was taken offline. RRHO re-engaged with LBNM in 2020 to focus on the only remaining action plan goal left to achieve--the external communication strategy.

RRHO worked closely with the LBNM Secretariat to finalize an external communications strategy, which will be presented and reviewed by the Board in February 2021. This strategy is geared to raise awareness of LBNM's legal power, authority and mandate to regulate and monitor all nursing and midwifery practices. Targeted communication activities are intended to assist LBNM to enforce, inform, and remind students, the health workforce, hospitals, and the general public receiving healthcare in Liberia, that all nurses and midwives must be registered and licensed by LBNM, and have graduated from an LBNM-accredited training institution.

To support this outreach campaign, RRHO is currently working with LBNM to create posters, flyers, brochures, and design billboards, public service announcements, and digital and social media plans to elevate and amplify LBNM's role and mandate to protect the public's health and safety, and ensure that qualified nurses and midwives provide safe and high quality health services across Liberia.



LBNM Poster Campaign for Licensure

LBNM Launches National Guidelines for the Accreditation of Nursing and Midwifery Programs in Liberia & National State Board Examination Guidelines

The accreditation of nursing and midwifery education programs accounts for a large part of LBNM's mandate. Until 2018, the Board carried out this function without written, agreed upon guidance or standards. RRHO led activities to help LBNM conceptualize, draft, and review *National Guidelines for the Accreditation of Nursing and Midwifery Programs in Liberia* and the *National State Board Examination Policy*. This created transparency between LBNM and the public, and the two new policies increased the Board's ability to efficiently meet its national mandate.

With funding and strategic leadership from HRSA, RRHO worked with the LBNM Registrar to identify current stages of the accreditation and state board exam processes, and integrate global best practices into their processes to improve outcomes. After drafting the policy documents, RRHO facilitated small-group reviews with the Secretariat and Board members to ensure the policies were relevant to the Liberian context, and could be implemented by the Board and its stakeholders and lead the practice of nursing and midwifery towards meeting the nation's goals. In 2019, the policies were presented to the LBNM legal counsel and Board for review, validation, and approval. To support LBNM's national dissemination meeting and efforts, RRHO printed 100 copies of the *National Guidelines for the Accreditation of Nursing and Midwifery Programs* and the *National State Board Examination Policy* for distribution across 15 counties. These two new policy documents are a significant achievement for LBNM and a direct result of the sound technical assistance, partnership, and leadership efforts of RRHO and HRSA.