

**FACILITATOR'S NOTES ON:  
"Decentralisation and Human Resources Development"**

**1. Objectives of role play:**

By the end of the Role-Playing Exercise it is hoped that participants will achieve the following:

- Understand the importance of effective central government to a decentralisation programme.
- Understand that decentralisation is not just a once-off transfer of power but a process of continual development of a new system.
- Evaluate the appropriate roles and responsibilities of different levels of government in human resource development in the decentralised health sector.

**2. Key issues to cover before using case study:**

It is useful to cover a bit of background information on how decentralisation affects the roles and responsibilities of different levels of government. It may be particularly useful to highlight the fact that decentralisation initiatives often focus on developments in newly formed decentralised units, with very little attention paid to redefining the role of higher levels of government (which are having to give up some of their previous responsibilities to lower levels).

**3. Overview of role play:**

The role play takes about 1.5 - 2 hours to undertake. However, if reading of the background materials is to occur in the 'classroom' session, a further hour will be required. If possible, 6 groups should be created (with about 3-4 people per group). If the number of participants is too small to allow for this number of groups, 5 groups should be set up and the one role (that of the Treasury Team) should be omitted.

The roles that are used are:

- Ministry of Health - Director of Human Resources and the HRD team
- President's Office - Chief Executive Team to the President
- Public Service Commission - Director of Posts and Packages and colleagues
- Northern Province - Director HRD and colleagues
- Eastern Province - Director HRD and colleagues
- National Treasury – Deputy Secretary and colleagues

**4. Introduction to group work:**

This case study report is given to all participants. If possible, participants should be requested to read it before the session (e.g. overnight).

When initiating the group work, the facilitator should present the problem to the participants and reinforce the key issues contained in the summary paragraph of the background report (see page 2 of the role play).

The facilitator then discusses, briefly, the main teams of actors, before inviting people to say in which team they would like to be. Each team is then presented with an envelope containing their “confidential” briefings (included in this set of facilitator’s notes). The facilitator should stress that these briefings are confidential (i.e. only for the eye’s of the team to which they are given) as the notes contain some thoughts on strategy as well as gossip about other teams/actors. Each team should also be presented with a name card (which just helps people remember who’s who so that they can try to form alliances before the meeting).

Teams are given 45 minutes to read through their briefing, and to work out their strategies for the meeting. It is useful for the facilitator(s) to visit the different groups to help them strategise and to suggest other teams with which they may consider trying to form alliances.

It would be useful to have a short break (e.g. for tea) after groups have completed their discussions. This will allow different teams to attempt to form alliances.

The team from the President’s Office is responsible for opening, chairing and closing the meeting. It is likely to take 30-45 minutes for all teams to be able to put their viewpoints forward. If the meeting is dragging on too long (beyond 45 mins) the facilitator can intervene and put a time limit on the meeting (“the President has called an Emergency Cabinet meeting” or the like). The chair should formally close the meeting with a decision on the future human resource planning and development roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders.

Apart from this ‘timekeeper’ role, the facilitator should keep as much of a back seat as possible in the meeting itself. Instead, the facilitator should take notes on some of the issues that arise. In particular, it is worth noting the following issues:

- the agendas that are pushed (recentralisation vs. improved decentralisation etc.);
- the alliances that are formed;
- the lines of arguments that are developed, and
- the technical roles and responsibilities for different role-players that are suggested.

After the meeting has closed, it is worthwhile discussing some of these issues with the participants and getting their reactions. It is also interesting to see whether they think, from a technical perspective, the meeting reached the right decision. Key messages should be reinforced in the final summary (such as the importance of clearly defining roles and responsibilities of each level of government when decentralisation is implemented, as well as the need to not only focus on the new decentralised units but also to pay attention to redefining the role of more central levels who are expected to give up power and responsibility).

## **1. Director of Human Resources Development and HRD Team, Ministry of Health**

The central Ministry of Health (MOH) has recently appointed you as a new Director of Human Resources Development and you have wasted no time in hiring a team of hotshot planners to strengthen your weak Department. The previous Director was sacked after proving to be ineffectual in his position. He presided over health sector human resources while the country underwent decentralisation but was incapable of realising a new role for the MOH in human resources development. Indeed, it is widely thought that human resources are not being appropriately allocated under the decentralised system.

Belonging to the “old school” of centralised planning, your predecessor spent much of his time moaning about the loss of power of the Ministry and pouring scorn on the new system. As a result the MOH was sidelined in the decision making process and has had little impact on planning or management of human resources in the health sector ever since.

You and your team are aware that the MOH needs a much larger role in planning and training in human resources. Nevertheless, a return to central planning might not be the answer. What might be needed is for the MOH to be given an overall role of coordinator whilst providing help to those provinces which have limited capacity and resources. Nevertheless, you will have to get support from the others for this.

You have been moved from the Public Service Commission (PSC) to give some valued expertise to the MOH. You know the Public Service Commission well. They are not happy about your move and probably will see you as a turn-coat. You also know the Director of Posts and Packages from University. (S)he is a very ambitious person and you suspect (s)he will try and undermine your team at the meeting.

## **2. President's Office**

As Chief Executive Team to the President your job is to follow up with other Ministries on matters of technical concern to the President. Recently, decentralisation has been in the spot-light. Last Monday the Resident Representative (RR) of the World Development Bank visited the President for their monthly discussion of the state of the economy. The third item on the agenda was the progress of decentralisation and in particular the poor record of the human resource planning in the health sector. The President's attention was drawn to a recent evaluation. It is clear that there is no rational planning going on in the sector: many provinces do not seem capable of good planning, especially the poorer ones, and the MOH seems to have no coordinating role. The President was not pleased. The RR suggested that the problem needed to be solved quickly by sacking key people in the Ministry of Health and bringing effective human resource planning back into the process. If this does not happen, vital aid to the country might be less forthcoming in next month's negotiations with donors.

The President has put you on the task to "sort it out" and has asked you to convene a meeting of the key stakeholders. The agenda for the meeting is as follows:

1. Welcome and Introduction (**get each stakeholder to introduce themselves**)
2. Assess what action is needed to improve the planning and training of health sector human resources under decentralisation (**get everyone's opinion**)
3. Assign new roles and responsibilities (**this is the most important part of the meeting**)
4. Agree next steps

You are aware that, on the orders of the President, the former head of the Human Resources Division in the MOH has been sacked and a new Director has been posted (previously from the Public Service Commission). One of your tasks in the meeting will be to decide whether the new Director is up to the job. If (s)he is, then MOH could lead the coordination of rational planning of human resources in the system. If not then the responsibility needs to be given to the PSC.

Whatever happens the current ad-hoc system cannot remain in place and you will not take any nonsense from the Provincial Government Representatives about loss of control. There is clearly a need for informed planning of human resources at the central level.

### **3. Public Service Commission Team (PSC) - Director of Posts and Packages and colleagues**

You are responsible for overseeing the administration of the government bureaucracy. You are career bureaucrats and have not been very happy about the fact that you have lost some power to the provinces through decentralisation.

You have been summoned to a meeting to resolve the problems in human resource planning in the health sector. It is quite clear to you that the provinces have not been doing a good job of planning their personnel positions and training their staff. You, nevertheless, feel that the PSC can get on top of the problem. Indeed, there is no need for desperate action - a couple of health sector planners placed into the PSC could help coordinate the sector and resolve some of the present inefficiencies in allocating resources and training. Indeed, a quiet return to centralised planning and training is needed (though you would be wise not to trumpet this too loudly in the meeting) where resources can be distributed toward need and where the allocation of human resources is not hostage to local politics.

Indeed, you have drawn up some plans for a new "Health Posts Planning Unit" under your Ministry. This would only cost an extra US\$75,000 a year and even if the Ministry of Finance won't fund it, you have heard that the World Development Bank has some slush funds for important projects.

You know the new Director of Human Resource Development in the MOH, as (s)he was a former colleague of yours in the PSC. (S)he is a bit too clever for his/her own good. You have also heard that team of planners that (s)he has hired are known to be flashy opportunists. The Director of Posts and Packages went to University with the Director of HRD, MOH and can vouch that (s)he is just as irritating as ever. Actually you thought her/his predecessor wasn't all that bad.

#### **4. Provincial HRD Team: Northern Province**

Coming from the richest province in the country you have been quite happy with the decentralisation process. You believe that it has taken power away from a central conservative elite and helped transfer power to the people of the country who really matter. You are aware that there are moves afoot to transfer power back to the central ministries and you have heard rumours that the World Development Bank (the international donor agency) is behind a move to recentralise human resource planning.

You have developed good capacity at the local level for planning human resources in your province. Admittedly, this has taken time but you are now confident of the expertise of your staff. You have been able to hire good calibre personnel by paying 25% above the market rate. You have also expanded your staff at key facilities and this has greatly benefited the service provided to your customers. Indeed, in a recent survey, 74% of respondents in the Northern province thought that decentralisation in the health sector was a good thing. You have also been able to fund and organise an in-service training programme for medical personnel.

Decentralisation has given you a lot of gains and you are very reluctant to give up your powers. It is very important that you are allowed to conduct most of your own human resource planning and management with the minimum of central interference. Things must not be allowed to return to the bad old days. Nevertheless, you suspect it will be an uphill battle in the meeting and need to forge alliances with organisations who will preserve your power base.

You should hold out for local control over planning human resources, linked to local fund-raising ability. After all, you have some important tertiary facilities that provide for patients from other provinces. You need staffing to mirror your enhanced provincial role. Indeed, perhaps other provinces should be helping you provide such services!

## **5. Provincial HRD Team: Eastern Province**

The Eastern province is the poorest in the country. Although you liked the idea of decentralisation, in practice it has not been backed up by the necessary funds from the Ministry of Finance. The Province is simply not rich enough to hire skilled staff to conduct human resource planning at a local level. Furthermore, the central government has not helped develop capacity at the local level. This has been very frustrating and in protest you decided to stop the MOH using health facilities for training in your province. The Ministry of Health was livid and after several threats forced you to retract your move (see the evaluation report). Nevertheless, MOH has still not offered you any help in capacity development.

What makes you more angry is that other provinces who are rich enough to manage their own affairs have been doing well out of the decentralisation. The present system is clearly inequitable and unfair! Ideally, the Ministry of Health would need to allocate finances for health care human resources in line with need. It is clear that the Eastern Province has the greatest need and yet currently it is getting the least funds for human resources!

You have heard that there is a new Director of Human Resources Development in the MOH. (S)he is said to be more sympathetic than the previous one. It might be worth seeing if MOH or PSC are sympathetic to your concerns before the meeting.

## **6. Deputy Secretary To The Treasury And Team**

You have technical responsibility for coordinating the annual Budget. The next Budget cycle looks like being tougher than normal. The donors are giving negative signals that there might be less funding than anticipated in next month's vital aid negotiations. Decentralisation is being spot-lighted as an area where improvements must be made, particularly in terms of efficiency of the reforms and perceived equity of the results. A commitment from the government to redress the inefficiencies in the current planning of human resources in the health sector may well buy valuable credibility and aid.

Any fresh demands for resources from the provinces will not be considered, unless they are targeted solely at improving efficiency in HRD planning in the health sector. The total amount of Government money going into the decentralisation process cannot be allowed to rise further. (However, short term donor grants may be considered where the recurrent cost implications are minimal.)

You are a bit annoyed at having to attend this meeting. You have little respect for the Ministry of Health and are sick and tired of moaning provinces.

You would prefer a more centralised solution to the health sector problem. Compiling provincial plans and budgets has been a head-ache from start to finish. There is clearly not the capacity in the country, at the moment to decentralise as far as you are concerned. Having said this, as long as a solution is reached which is fiscally prudent you are probably not going to worry too much. You can then parade this to the donors and get on with the real business, preparing for next month's aid negotiations.