

THE
PROFESSIONAL
ASSOCIATION
STRENGTHENING
PROJECT

MODULE 9

The Health, Growth, and Development of a Professional Association

survive  ***thrive***

professional associations, private sector and global health scholars
saving mothers, newborns and children

Acknowledgments

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Where to find the complete the Professional Association Strengthening manual:

The complete set of Professional Association Strengthening modules can be downloaded for no fee at: www.StrongProfAssoc.org.

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The Health, Growth, and Development of a Professional Association

All the modules in this series are geared towards the development and nurturing of a vibrant, effective professional association (PA). This module is about moving forward, i.e., the ability of the association to continue growing, fulfilling its objectives, being creative, and representing its members. Moving forward also means that the PA is able to sustain itself and to continue despite changes in the country and the profession.

Objectives

- To describe a well- functioning (healthy) PA.
- To identify some diagnostic signs and symptoms of an unhealthy PA.
- To describe approaches to identify the state of health of a PA.
- To suggest remedies for some of the most common causes of association dysfunction.

Characteristics of a Healthy Professional Association

A PA that is vibrant and well-functioning

- Has the ability to maintain the visibility of the profession.
- Has the ability to fulfil objectives; the PA is creative and represents its members well.
- Serves as the go-to organization for information related to the professional field.
- Is goal driven, well led and managed, and produces results that are recognized by the target population and policy makers.

- Establishes a niche that can only be filled by itself and the members of the profession. What is done and accomplished by the PA would not be done and accomplished without it.
- Establishes professional unity, identity, and a sense of belonging among members.
- Produces evidence and contributes to the provision of quality care.
- Is considered a worthwhile partner and is sought out by other organizations, including other health care PAs.
- Is invited to contribute to decision and policy making circles and its opinion is valued.
- Contributes to the achievement of national health care provision strategies.
- Serves as a gatekeeper for quality of care

The absence of some of the above characteristics indicates an unhealthy PA.

Characteristics of an Unhealthy Professional Association

A PA that is not functioning well is characterised by

- Lack of a sense of identity and belonging among members.
- Bickering and fighting for leadership positions.
- No results that can be attributed to the profession.
- No representation of the profession in decision making circles.
- Weak leadership.
- No common goal for the members.
- No sense of commitment or ownership of the association or its activities. Individuals are concerned about themselves rather than the greater professional good because they do not identify with the profession.

- Membership is low and sometimes those who are members are disgruntled. There is no visible benefit to be a member of the PA.
- Policy makers, the community, and the population served are not aware of the contributions of the association or its members.

Diagnostic Approaches

A number of tools can be used to diagnose the causes of association dysfunction. A few are described briefly below.

Member Association Capacity Assessment Tool (MACAT; International Confederation of Midwives)

The MACAT enables professionals to diagnose and pinpoint the problem area(s). It consists of a series of questions framed to determine the presence or absence of a required aspect of the organization. Its major advantage is that it is easy to administer, and results are easy to read. It can be self-administered or administered with the aid of an outside consultant to enhance the objectivity of the responses. It does not require extensive resources, and it can be used by beginners to determine what needs to be in place to make a PA strong.

Its shortcoming is that it informs the PA of what is or is not in place, but it does not describe how to address identified gaps. The tool and related guidelines are provided in Module 2 of this manual, and they are also available (in English or French) on the ICM website.¹

This MACAT has been used in 76 countries in high and in low resource settings to date. All users have claimed that it is easy to use, to understand, to interpret, and to repeat after a few years. In Afghanistan, the midwives association uses the MACAT to measure progress every 3 years and uses the results to address identified gaps.

Standards-Based Management and Recognition (SBM-R; Johns Hopkins Program for International Education in Gynecology and Obstetrics [Jhpiego Corporation])

The SBM-R is used to inform the PA of how well it is performing in given areas. It provides required standards of performance and is used to measure how well those standards are being met by the organisation.² The main advantage of the SBM-R is that it is a proactive, practical management methodology that does not focus on lengthy examination of the problems; instead it focuses on the streamlined standardization and implementation of best practices.

Organizational Capacity Assessment Tool (OCAT; United States Agency for International Development [USAID])

The OCAT is used to evaluate the effectiveness of not-for-profit, non-governmental organizations supported by the USAID.³ The goal of this tool is to assist organisations in assessing the critical elements of effective organisational management and in identifying areas that need strengthening or further development. The tool is detailed, assesses the functionality of all aspects of the association, and focuses on practices and processes. The OCAT assessment also determines the professional age of the organisation: nascent, emerging, expanding, or mature.

Organizational Maturity Model (OMM; International Public Management Association Assessment Council)

A few tools have emerged in the field of organizational development that can be adapted by PAs that want to strengthen their associations. The OMM is used to conduct an inventory of capabilities, and the results are used to identify gaps and develop needed interventions.⁴ This approach functions in much the same way as the OCAT described above.

Capacity Building of Health Professional Associations (International Federation of Gynaecology and Obstetrics [FIGO])

FIGO developed a step-by-step diagnostic tool to help a PA identify problems and develop interventions to solve those problems.⁵ A user friendly document with clear instructions on how to take the process forward is provided online.

How to Use the Results of Diagnostic Approaches

The results of an organizational capacity assessment process are useful for the following:

- **Development of interventions and resource mobilization.** Despite the slight differences in the approaches used, the assessment of capacity provides information to assist the association to develop interventions to fill in gaps. A PA can do this internally or by soliciting external technical support. The identification of gaps and needed solutions enables the PA to mobilize funds and other support as required.

In Yemen, a MACAT was administered in 2014, and results indicated the need for regulation of the practice of midwifery in the country. The midwifery association used results to convince policy makers to develop a Midwifery Council. The government did not have adequate resources for this purpose, so the association used the results to request support from development partners. The United Nations Population Fund offered financial support for this purpose. Work was slated to begin in the first quarter of 2015, but unfortunately it did not happen because of civil unrest in the country.

- **Strategic planning and prioritization of activities.** The results from the assessment inform the strategic planning process of the association. Activities can be prioritized to create a logical structure to strengthen the association.

In Georgia Central Asia, there was no midwives association. HERAXXI, a development organization, needed support to create this association, including guidance on what structures to put in place and how each structure would function. With support from MATRA, an organization funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and technical expertise from ICM, the MACAT was used as a reference to describe clearly how to create an association. After 18 months, the Midwives Association of Georgia was established with all 7 components of a well-functioning PA.

- **Insight on what to expect.** The assessment process provides an opportunity for members and leaders to understand the organization better. It provides insights into what needs to be in place, what is functioning well, and what is in place but not functioning. Leaders develop a deeper understanding of the functionality of the processes in place. That knowledge can enhance ownership and a sense of responsibility to ensure that processes work well.
- **Bonding effect.** All the tools referred to above depend on the participation of members and key stakeholders. Participatory involvement can create a bonding effect among members and leaders and also engender a sense of belonging and ownership. The function and output of the PA are better appreciated by members.

Moving Forward

These learning materials are focused on the development of a vibrant PA. To move forward, effective leadership is needed (see Module 6), and an association should sustain itself and achieve its objectives in a manner that is appreciated by the public and policy makers. It should be visible. To move forward, the members need to recognize that strengthening the PA is not a one-time event. It is important to keep a finger on the pulse of the organization to ensure that issues are addressed before they become problems. It is important to regularly, perhaps every 3-5 years, administer an assessment to confirm the functionality and effectiveness of the organization. This can help avert problems and it also acts as a motivator when things are going well.

Effective Collaboration

One association meets with the Ministry of Health each quarter to inform them about the activities of the association. When there is nothing special to report, the association pays a courtesy visit to the Ministry. The result is that no maternal, newborn, child health activity takes place without an invitation to the association. These activities include decision making and celebrations.

Tips to Ensure Continuous Growth of the PA

Effective Collaboration and Networking

- Host activities of interest for members, the public, and other health care PAs.
- Stay active in government organized activities in order to retain a seat at the policy making table.
- Develop a regular schedule of visits to policy makers. Do not wait to be invited. This keeps the PA on the policy making radar.
- Maintain an active social media presence on social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter.
- Develop relationships such as twinning with other professional associations that are doing well.

Two associations started off with grants of €3,000. The following year one received an additional grant of €5,000 because of good results. In 2015, the association received a grant of €300,000. It is reasonable to believe this association will be in existence for a while!

Strategic Activity Planning and Fund Raising

- Develop programmes that are self-perpetuating and if possible that also generate funds. One example is a continuing professional development programme that fulfills members' needs for re-licensure.
- Identify current issues in which the potential for project funding is high.
- Scan for donors who are willing to fund small projects in the Professional field. Financial support from a well-known donor raises the profile of the association and increases potential for long term sustainability.

One association conducts continuing professional development activities for a fee. Members receive a 20% discount. This has encouraged non-members to join.

Continuous Membership Drive

- Develop member-only activities and resources to entice non-members to join.
- Establish clear member benefits.
- Visit professional education schools to inform prospective graduates about the association and inform them about member benefits and benefits to the country.

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