HUMAN RESOURCES IN THE HIV/AIDS PREVENTION AND CONTROL SYSTEM
and Supporting Needs for Improving Human Resource Management

Context

Human Resources for Health (HRH) is one of the most important components of HIV/AIDS service delivery to ensure service availability, service coverage, and quality of services in Viet Nam. Over the last decade, Viet Nam has received substantial support from donors to directly strengthen and expand human resource (HR) systems for HIV/AIDS related service delivery. The need to increase the efficiency of HR for an effective HIV response in the future, as donor support transitions to a technical assistance role, poses a challenge for Viet Nam's health sector. The Vietnamese Government has paid attention to the importance of development and maintenance of HR in general, and those for HIV/AIDS prevention and control in particular; and has issued decrees, circulars and guidelines to address this need.

The application of decrees and circulars in health facilities and preventive medicine facilities, including in the HIV/AIDS prevention and control system, however, has not resulted in identifying the number of staff to meet actual staffing need, which has led to challenges for many provinces to implement their HIV/AIDS prevention and control programs effectively. The Decree 41/2012/ND-CP (Decree 41) issued in 2012 stipulates regulations of work positions in civil service units and can help to partly address this challenge.

However, the Circular is not specific to the health sector; in particular for the HIV/AIDS prevention and control system. This is a key gap that deserves special attention by policy makers. Because of this, most public institutions, and health facilities in particular, have not been able to develop job descriptions because of the lack of specific guidelines; misunderstandings about the process; and lack of key skills such as job analysis, writing job descriptions, staff performance appraisals, and strategic planning for HR development.

Approach & Results

In the context of the above policy and reality, the Leadership, Management and Governance - Transition Support Project (LMG-TSP), funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and implemented by Management Sciences for Health (MSH), engaged Hanoi Medical University to carry out a study titled, “The current situation of human resources in the HIV/AIDS prevention and control system and supporting needs for improving human resource management.” The study focused on the following three objectives:

1. Explore the current policy of the government on HR systems and HR management (especially after Decree 41/2012 was issued) and the impact of policies on HIV prevention.
2. Analyze the current status of HR in the HIV system using a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) in the context Decree 41/2012 and reductions in foreign aid.
3. Suggest conditions, procedures, and processes for achieving an adequate number of human resources for effective HIV/AIDS prevention and control.

The research team used a cross-sectional design for the study that combines qualitative and quantitative approaches. Qualitative data collection consisted of three main techniques: in-depth interviews, focus group discussions with key informants, and a SWOT analysis to help identify current challenges in HR management and health policy implementation.

For the quantitative research, a semi-structured questionnaire was used to collect data on the research objectives. In addition, health policy reports and documents related to the proposed research areas were reviewed. The study was conducted at both central and provincial levels, with the Vietnam Administration of HIV/AIDS Control (VAAC) and Provincial AIDS Centers (PACs).

In total, 37 of the 63 PACs nationwide (59%) participated in the quantitative research (semi-structured questionnaire, including closed-ended questions) and provided information to address the second and third study objectives. To get richer, more in-depth data for the qualitative study, the research team conducted 19 in-depth interviews and four focus group discussions (with approximately 40 respondents) at the national level (Ministry of Health), and in four provinces (Dien Bien, Quang Binh, An Giang, and Can Tho).

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The results from the study provide information and recommendations that can be useful in supporting the improvement of the HR management system for HIV/AIDS prevention and control system. Several of the key findings include:

- In the nearly 20 years that have passed since the first case of HIV was identified in Viet Nam, the HIV/AIDS prevention and control system has been quite well structured. Over time, with a broad range of support nationally and internationally, the management experience and skills of the system, such as in planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation, have been enhanced to improve operations and to provide technical assistance to lower levels.

- Most of the policies address one particular issue and do not cover the development or use of HRH through technical management, technical supervision, and continuing medical education. Preventive medicine for HIV lacks sound provisions for HR, training, and incentives.

- Due to its recent implementation, Decree 41/Circular 14 has resulted in almost no major changes in the number of HR at health facilities because: (i) There is a lack of specific or clear guidance for PACs, making all stages of job position proposal development difficult; and (ii) For those PACs that tried to complete the proposals and submitted them by the deadlines, approval has not yet been provided by local authorities.

- Following the release of Decree 41/Circular 14, public entities needed to design job descriptions for work positions and competency frameworks for each officer. However, results from interviews show that leaders as well as officers are not fully aware of what a competency model is and what competencies their positions require. Moreover, there is no standard on competencies for each position, thus, it is difficult to have an accurate competency model.

- The thirty-seven PACs involved in the study identified a high level of need for support in HR management topics (86% in job analysis, 81% in writing job descriptions, 89% in writing job proposals, 84% on staff performance evaluation skills and 93% on HR strategic planning skills).

Conclusions

The challenges for HR management for HIV prevention in Viet Nam are multi-fold. The most challenging task is estimating the number of staff needed for each entity because in the HIV/AIDS prevention and control system, to date, the set of job positions is incomplete and a competency framework is not available.

Implications & Recommendations

- Create a clear and specific circular soon to guide the implementation of Decree 41 for public health entities.

- Re-adjust the staffing norms for public health facilities in the HIV/AIDS prevention and control system. Staffing norms should be based on five criteria: population size, size of the population at-risk, number of people living with HIV/AIDS, geographical characteristics, and socio-economic conditions.

- The WISN tool for estimating service personnel that has been applied in some countries and piloted in Hai Phong can be used to estimate the number of staff needed for each entity and help develop job position proposals.

- Pilot the WHO’s Workload Indicators of Staffing Need (WISN) tool for non-service positions in the HIV/AIDS prevention and control system, such as for administrative, organizational, and managerial positions.

- Provide training and technical assistance (through coaching or counseling) for PACs to complete the proposals required by Decree 41.

- The health sector in general, and VAAC in particular, should design basic competency frameworks for both service and non-service areas because this is one of the inputs for estimating the staffing norms for HIV/AIDS prevention and control facilities.

- Local (provincial) functional entities should take prompt action to review the PACs’ job position proposals, and inform them if their proposals are approved or need revision, so that PACs can plan to do the next steps.

- Due to the limited changes that have occurred within the short period of time since the release of Decree 41/Circular 14, it is recommended that the health sector in general, and the HIV/AIDS prevention and control system in particular, continue to assess the effect of Decree 41 following its implementation on the quality and allocation of personnel in the field of HIV in the long run.

- In terms of procedure and processes: 1) provide appropriate training for project staff for their work positions to address inadequate competencies; 2) train both leaders and staff on how to develop the job position proposal as required by Decree 41 and Circular 14; and 3) implement the recruitment process in line with legal documents of the country, including preparing and submitting the proposal for HR development (including project officers) to the Provincial People’s Committee for approval, facilities then making a notification about recruitment, and then implementing recruitment; and mobilize state budget, local budget, health service socialization or the community to cover the salaries.