

The Framework for NHS Involvement in International Development



“The National Health Service (NHS) provides high quality health services to patients every day. International demand for knowledge, skills and services developed in the NHS is growing. Clinicians and managers can gain a great deal from opportunities to work and train overseas – it can be professionally and personally rewarding.

The NHS can also learn from good practice and new ways of working that we can benefit from. Through this work, we can play our part in improving health globally while developing leadership and other skills in the NHS and further building and sustaining our international networks.”

Sir David Nicholson KCB CBE
NHS Chief Executive

The Framework for NHS Involvement in International Development has been developed to provide greater clarity on how NHS agencies and individuals can best maximise their potential to contribute in a sustainable and appropriate way to capacity building in developing countries. The framework covers five areas. They are:

- the UK policy context;
- the key principles for effective involvement in international development;
- the benefits of NHS involvement in international development;
- the architecture for NHS activity to support developing countries; and
- good practice for organisations, individuals and employers.

Key principles

The NHS must ensure that it is contributing to the delivery of effective international development assistance. This means ensuring that any aid that it provides is:

- led and driven by the needs of developing countries, not by the enthusiasm and interests of UK participants (**the principle of ownership**);
- aligned with the government in question's health plans as well as those at district and hospital level (**the principle of alignment**);
- adequately co-ordinated – with initiatives from other development partners (UK and others) working as one (**the principle of harmonisation**);
- **evidence based** and subject to proper monitoring and evaluation;
- **sustainable**. This means that initiatives must be 'owned' and led by developing country partners, and supported by long-term commitment by all parties; and
- **mutually accountable**. This means that responsibility for the project or programme is shared.



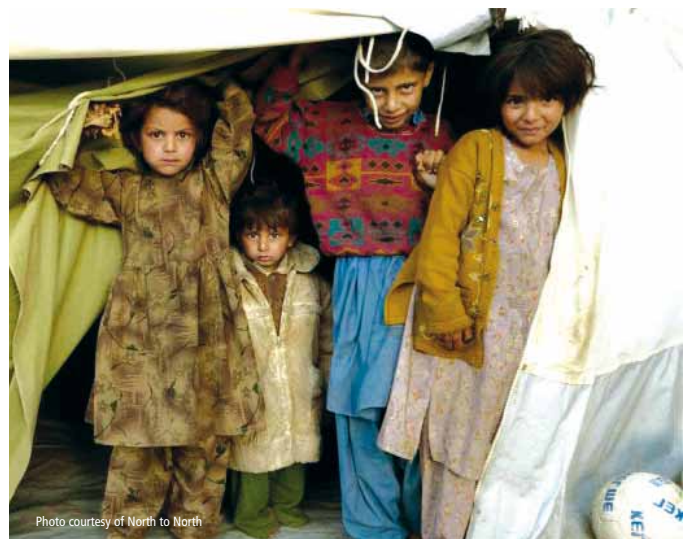
Needs

“The most pressing needs in developing countries are for balanced and integrated health systems with a particular emphasis on public health and primary care, not hospitals and tertiary care, although these have their place.”

Dr Luis Sambo, World Health Organization
Regional Director for Africa

Developing countries have highlighted that they would be keen to work with UK health professionals and organisations focusing around three main areas. These are:

- **recruitment, retention, education and training** for health workers, managers and administrators;
- **strengthening public health, health systems and institutions** – covering all aspects of health from public health to health services, including their operational management and delivery; and
- making **knowledge, research evidence and best practice** accessible to health workers, policy makers and the public alike.



Benefits

The framework highlights the benefits from NHS involvement in international development for NHS organisations and their communities, NHS staff and overseas healthcare systems.

“NHS employees are characterised by a powerful sense of vocation and a desire to improve the health and wellbeing of communities. The opportunity to provide support to healthcare systems and communities in developing countries helps reinforce these values and offers rich scope for professional development and the satisfaction of a meaningful personal contribution. The NHS employer usually welcomes back a highly motivated member of staff who has grown personally and professionally, to deliver better services for patients in the UK. In this sense, there is a strong business case for NHS employers.”

NHS Confederation

For organisations benefits include:

- **better return on investment in training;**
- **enhanced leadership and professional skills;**
- **enhanced organisational reputation;**
- **improved retention and productivity;**
- **improved patient experience;**
- **education and research;**
- **greater understanding of social and ethnic diversity; and**
- **understanding of global health issues.**

For individuals, working in complicated and challenging environments allows healthcare professionals to consolidate and develop clinical, managerial, leadership, cultural and educational skills, all of which are beneficial to and transferable to the NHS.

In terms of overseas healthcare systems, there is an increasing body of knowledge and experience which demonstrates that appropriate and well-executed activities carried out by competent individuals aligned within a wider strategic context set by developing countries themselves can add value to healthcare in developing countries.

Support

Links between NHS organisations and developing country partners can be initiated by either partner and there are two government-supported mechanisms in place to support their development:

- the International Health Links Centre; and
- the International Health Links Funding Scheme.

The opportunities for individuals to play a part are highlighted in the framework and include:

- volunteering;
- emergency relief;
- secondments to the World Health Organization and other global health organisations; and
- training, development and research.

Good practice

The framework highlights good practice for organisations, individuals and employers with signposts to guidelines on:

- funding;
- managing participating staff; and
- governance, including business case preparation.

Links and resources

The framework includes a wealth of links to organisations and resources that support NHS involvement in international development. Some impressive case studies of existing NHS links and volunteers are included to illustrate effective NHS involvement in a wide range of developing countries.

The framework is a 'living' web-based document, updated as new policies or guidance come into effect. It can be viewed on the website of the International Health Links Centre at www.ihlc.org.uk