

Communique issued by African National Nursing Associations following the International Council of Nurses ODENNA Training programme in Kigali, Rwanda from 11-15 March 2024

PREAMBLE

Leaders from nineteen (19) National Nursing Associations (NNAs) met in Kigali, Rwanda to participate in the International Council of Nurses (ICN) Organizational Development for National Nursing Associations Programme (ODENNA programme) from 11-15 March 2024.

The ODENNA programme is designed as a next-level assessment, leadership and mentorship programme for NNAs to increase their influence, sustainability and advocacy to meet escalating nursing and midwifery workforce issues.

The opening session of the programme, which was hosted by ICN and the Rwandan Nurses and Midwives Union (RNMU), was attended by ICN Chief Executive Officer Howard Catton, the ICN Board's Africa Regional representative Andre Gitembagara, ICN staff and facilitators responsible for the ODENNA programme.

The leadership of the African NNAs present at the programme, having considered all the issues discussed and concerns raised by representatives of the 19 countries present, state the following:

GLOBAL SHORTAGE OF NURSES AND MIGRATION

The global shortage of nurses in Europe, the United States and other parts of the world, especially in high income countries, and the resultant recruitment of nurses from Africa are causing a huge drain on the health systems on the African continent. This is by far the greatest challenge faced by NNAs on the African continent.

The African NNA leadership therefore calls for investment in nursing education by all countries to increase the global nursing workforce. In 2020, the first State of the World's Nursing (SOWN) report, published by the World Health Organization (WHO), revealed the global nursing workforce was at 27.9 million and estimated there was a global shortfall of 5.9 million nurses.

It is worthy to note that nurses in Africa account for only 3% of the global nursing workforce of 29 million and has the lowest nurse per capita population in the world. At the same time, international recruitment of nurses from Africa is at its highest, with nurses from all African countries leaving the continent in search of better remuneration and other enhanced conditions of service. The WHO Ethical Recruitment Guidelines must continue to serve as the guiding principle for all high-income countries, taking note that the depletion of the nursing workforce in Africa has dire consequences for the attainment of Universal Health Coverage and the health-related Sustainable Development Goals on the continent.

DATA ON THE NURSING WORKFORCE IN AFRICA AND THE SECOND STATE OF THE WORLD'S NURSING REPORT

With the process of the data collection for the second SOWN report underway, we are calling on all African governments to involve their ICN-affiliated NNAs in the process to ensure that the data produced represents the reality on the ground and has the collective endorsement of all parties.

SCOPE OF PRACTICE OF NURSES

Nurses continue to be the most trusted health professionals across the globe. Patients and the nurses who care for them will only be safe when there are sufficient nurses in the global nursing workforce to provide for the growing health care needs of populations. The ability of nurses to practice within their full scope is crucial in the achievement of health for all by 2030.

Nursing is at the heart of disease prevention and the promotion of health, and these functions are being eroded and replaced by medical orders and complicated technologies with no support for most nursing professionals.

There is an urgent need to increase the competencies of nurses and support their specialisation to build the capacity necessary to deal with ever-increasing demands, including the growing incidence of noncommunicable diseases and aging populations.

The African NNAs' leadership calls on governments, through their Ministries of Health, to establish health system policies that support nurses to perform their curative, preventive, health promotion, administrative and managerial roles without hindrance, and to provide the necessary support for specialization and advanced nursing practice to improve patient outcomes.

NURSING EDUCATION

The African NNAs' leadership is concerned with the increased training of auxiliary nurses across the African continent. Reducing the competencies of nursing by shortening the length of their training by hours or even years is not the solution to strengthening the health system of any country.

There is concerning evidence that the substitution of registered nurses by less qualified health care workers is associated with increased patient risk and reduced effectiveness. There will always be a need for an effective and well-integrated multi-disciplinary team in health care, but any skill mix change must be driven by the intention to increase access and improve care, not as a lower priced stopgap measure to fill vacancies at all costs.

The title "Nurse" should be a reserved title for those who have gone through a nursing training program that is internationally recognized as such. Leaving patients with the impression that they are being cared for by nurses while in fact the contrary is the case is an infringement on the reserved title that can damage the image of nurses.

UNEMPLOYED TRAINED NURSES AND MIDWIVES

Representatives of African NNAs at the ODENNA programme meetings reported high nurse-patient ratios and high nurse unemployment, which is causing nurses to lose their skills because they are not able to practice.

There is a need to have major improvements in staffing levels of nurses and midwives across the continent of Africa and this will only be facilitated through gathering evidence related to patient safety and tracking and measuring that data.

The leadership of the African NNAs attending the ODENNA programme calls on governments of Africa to take up the responsibility and work in conjunction with their NNAs to understand the existing gaps in health care to inform the workforce needs within health systems. Investing in registered nurses and the nursing profession as a whole is proven to increase the quality of care, reduce errors and lead to better outcomes for patients.

CONDITIONS OF SERVICE OF NURSES AND MIDWIVES

Ensuring the well-being of nurses is crucial for any healthcare system that prioritizes population health and patient safety. Regrettably, nurses are increasingly encountering challenges, such as lack of respect for their rights and rising incidents of violence and aggression, which significantly affects their mental health and, ultimately, patient outcomes. The conditions of service of nursing professionals on the continent are not the best with minimum monthly earning hovering around USD86. The nursing workforce is challenged with a cluster of critical aspects of patient care, unsafe workload, unsafe working hours, unsafe working environment and unsafe general working conditions. With the current nursing shortage, which is as a result of the migration of professionals and the lack of commensurate employment of nurses and motivation of nursing staff, nurses are experiencing burnout and feeling demoralized, which has negative implications for patient outcomes.

Therefore, it is vital to prioritize psychological safety and foster a "safety culture" within healthcare organizations. What is needed are human-centered policy solutions that are targeted at the causes of problems and that provide hope that there will be sustained improvements. The necessary policy response should not only focus on bolstering individual nurse resilience: it should primarily emphasize that all employing organizations should fulfil their duty to ensure nurses' full support and safe working conditions for effective patient care. Accountability mechanisms must be implemented and monitored for the effectiveness of any such interventions.

Governments across Africa must also put in place systems that allow nurses and protect their rights to participate in wage negotiations and industrial actions of their NNAs. Restriction of essential and justified rights in line with global standards is unacceptable.

CONCLUSION

Africa is a great continent that has the capacity to develop many young people to become nurses and midwives. The solutions for the challenges faced by the nursing workforce in the continent are not beyond the capacity of governments in Africa. Their immediate responses should include improved retention of nurses through mandated nurse-patient ratios, participation in decision making, fair pay, clear career structures, and access to relevant training and education. All of this can be augmented and supported by appropriate use of new technologies and working conditions. The ICN's publication [Charter for Change](#) (2023), which sets out the need for everyone to value, protect, respect and invest in nurses for a sustainable future for nursing and health care, is more relevant now than ever before.

Signed by:

LEADERS OF THE 19 NNAs WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE ODENNA PROGRAMME

DATED: 18TH MARCH 2024

- Botswana Nurses Union
- Democratic Nursing Organization of South Africa (DENOSA)
- Ethiopian Nurses Association
- Ghana Registered Nurses Association
- Liberia Nurses Association

- Namibian Nurses Association
- National Association of Gambia Nurses & Midwives
- National Association of Nigeria Nurses and Midwives
- National Nurses Association of Kenya
- National Organisation of Nurses and Midwives of Malawi
- Nurses Association of the Republic of Seychelles
- Rwanda Nurses and Midwives Union
- Somaliland Nursing and Midwifery Association
- South Sudan Nurses and Midwives Association
- Swaziland Nursing Association
- Tanzania National Nurses' Association
- Uganda Nurses & Midwives Union
- Zambia Union of Nurses Organization
- Zimbabwe Nurses Association