Gap analysis as a tool for strengthening a country’s midwifery workforce

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Introduction

A strong midwifery profession rests on the quality of education, regulation and association (ERA). ICM has developed global standards for ERA, but countries wishing to strengthen the midwifery profession by implementing these global standards needed a method for highlighting specific areas of weakness and monitoring their progress towards addressing these. To this end, ICM developed an ERA ‘gap analysis’ process. Our hypothesis is that the implementation of this process contributes to the strengthening of the midwifery profession.

Method

The gap analysis tools are self-completion questionnaires, which assess how well a country’s midwifery profession adheres to accepted global standards for ERA. The results are owned by the country, leading to increased commitment and political will to address the identified gaps.

Results

Since 2010, ICM has supported 47 countries with a gap analysis. The results are shown here for the 22 countries who were supported in 2014-15*. These were mainly sub-Saharan African countries.

Education: In most of the 22 countries, those responsible for teaching the theoretical part of the curriculum have formal teaching preparation, and the curriculum has an appropriate balance of theory and practice. However, there are widespread shortages of human and teaching resources in midwifery schools, and a lack of formal teaching preparation for those teaching the practical elements of the course.

Regulation: Only 11 out of the 22 countries have a government-approved regulatory body and only 9 have one which is specifically for midwifery. Regulators tend to define the scope of practice; they rarely contribute to workforce planning/research or demand continuous professional development.

Association: Professional midwifery associations tend to have a clear vision, policies and procedures, but several are lacking office space, clear strategic plans and mechanisms to identify members’ needs. Only 9 out of 22 have an annual budget and just 2 have a sustainable funding base.

Conclusions

The gap analysis gives clear areas of focus for ICM. In education, ICM should focus on supporting the countries to advocate for adequate human resources and preparation of both clinical and classroom faculty, while in regulation, the focus should be on creation of midwifery regulatory bodies. Professional associations need support to prepare strategic plans and especially to mobilize resources for sustainability.

For further details
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