

## Health sector transformation case study:

### Supporting faith-based health services, Ghana

In many parts of Africa faith-based organisations are responsible for delivering essential health services to large proportions of the population. Ghana is one country in which this is the case. Here, the Christian Health Association of Ghana (CHAG), which comprises a number of member institutions, caters for the health care needs of an estimated 35 to 40 per cent of the population.

Established in 1967, CHAG has evolved over the last 40 years to become a major player in Ghana's health sector. Its accomplishments to date mean that it is widely viewed within Sub-Saharan Africa as being the best-performing organisation in the faith-based health sector.

### Adapting in a changing environment of health reforms

Every organisation needs to develop and evolve in line with changes in the external environment, and CHAG is no exception. In Ghana CHAG is operating within a context of health reform, where health priorities are shifting and the funding environment is becoming more complex, where a multitude of new operational challenges face health care providers, and where partnerships with other key players in the sector are becoming increasingly important. Like many other faith-based umbrella organisations, CHAG is facing the challenge of how to improve its efficiency, effectiveness and contributions to health equity, while retaining the key values and characteristics that have historically made its health services different and special.

### Support by Health Partners International to CHAG

Health Partners International has been heavily involved in supporting CHAG to reposition itself in the changing policy and operational environment in Ghana, through:

- Helping to facilitate the compilation of CHAG's first five year strategic plan, and reviewing performance in delivering the plan's key outputs
- Supporting the introduction of an organisation-wide review and planning process known as Peer and Participatory Rapid Health Appraisal for Action (PPRHAA)
- Facilitating a process of defining key strategic medium-term objectives for the organisation in the light of the findings from the PPRHAA review.

Since 2003, CHAG has organised three annual cycles of PPRHAA for its hospital member institutions. Conducted in

a supportive yet objective environment, this process allows staff to review performance and identify gaps in a number of areas, including patient care management, general and financial management, relationships with clients and communities, and to agree plans for improving performance.

CHAG facility managers and staff have indicated that they find PPRHAA to be of direct and practical assistance in many aspects of their work. As a result, significant effort has been made to institutionalise the process, and to reduce reliance on external funding. By 2006, the annual appraisal process involved all 58 CHAG hospitals. This is believed to be the largest and most comprehensive national appraisal of church hospitals ever conducted in Africa.

### Objectives and challenges

Among the challenging objectives of CHAG's first five year strategic plan, instigated in 2003, were strengthening the management of member health facilities and programmes; improving the quality of these services; ensuring they are accessible and affordable; and strengthening the performance of the CHAG Secretariat.

A performance review undertaken in March 2007 found that CHAG had made progress in all three areas, but that significant challenges relating to organisational governance, clarity of roles and functions, system strengthening, and compatibility with government health policy remained. The review recommendations focused on the need to:

- Clarify the respective roles and functions of the different institutions comprising CHAG – the Secretariat, the Board, the health coordinating units within the different churches, and the member institutions (the health facilities) themselves
- Increase the capacity of the CHAG Secretariat so that it is better placed to play a proactive policy development and advocacy role, and to raise CHAG's public profile as a key player in the health sector
- Ensure that governance arrangements within CHAG promote the voices of member institutions, the primary beneficiaries of CHAG health services, and the Ministry of Health
- Fast-track capacity-building support to CHAG health facilities to ensure that the key systems underpinning health service delivery, especially financial management and human resource management and development systems, are robust
- Re-focus organisational objectives around a public health

agenda and around meeting the health-related needs of the poor and other vulnerable groups

- Position the organisation to operate more effectively at regional and district levels within a decentralised health system.

Based on CHAG's past performance it is well placed to address these challenges. However, it is vital that the international donor community continues to recognise the very significant contributions that are being made by the faith-based sector in Africa towards achievement of the health-related Millennium Development Goals, and that it finds ways to support the sector in a context where funding is increasingly being channelled into direct budget support.