# A Vision for a Health OER Network in Africa

## The Rationale

There is growing interest in development and sharing of Open Educational Resources (OER) around the world, with increasing numbers of Faculties and Colleges of Health Sciences either making plans to harness and deploy OER or actively using and sharing OER in their programmes. However, for the full effect of this to be felt, it is essential that there be efforts to coordinate these activities, as well as to use OER to leverage the large quantities of government and donor spending undertaken annually to achieve larger impact.

In an African context, this broader need can be expressed in terms of the following specific requirements:

1) There is a need to scale up training of national health workforces. Good materials are an essential requirement, but are often expensive to procure or develop from scratch, leading to significant duplication in materials development or absence of resources.
2) There is a wealth of good, available content within institutions (most of which generates no commercial revenue), but this is hard to find as it is not shared through a common, central source and is often not online.
3) It is essential to put mechanisms in place to build capacity to replace ageing academic populations, and OER can play a significant role in supporting this.
4) As interest in OER grows amongst universities, donors, and governments, it is important to ensure that OER processes in health are driven from Africa, rather than imported to Africa, and see Africans as contributors to OER Networks not passive beneficiaries

## A Vision for the Network

The African Health OER Network seeks to enable participants to develop, adapt, and share health education resources to augment limited human and other resources in the health sector and impact positively on overall health provision in Africa and beyond. It will aim to strengthen the intellectual and policy infrastructure within and between African institutions in order to grow a vibrant Health OER network.

Our objective is to systematically draw in more African and, eventually, global participants to create, adapt, share, and use OER to the benefit of health education in Africa, while developing models of collaboration and sustainability that can be replicated in other regions of the world.

The Network has the following specific functions:
- Aggregate the results of multiple initiatives by collecting, classifying, tagging, and then actively sharing Africa-initiated resources with the global health community;
- Facilitate discussion of how those resources can best be used;
- Share exemplars of best practice;
- Work through institutions and associations to advocate the principles of openness and sharing of educational materials.

## Guiding Principles

The Network is underpinned by the following operational principles:
- It is not owned by any single entity, but rather by all participants.
- Network participants will drive processes based on their needs.
- Health OER Network activities should not generate additional workload for those involved, but rather help people to manage their current workloads more effectively.
- A Code of Conduct will be established and continually updated through ongoing consultation to set rules of 'engagement' between members.
- An Advisory Board will be established to oversee adherence to Code of Conduct by all participants.
- There is strong African commitment to link and work with other emerging Regional Health OER Networks where they are initiated, as well as seeking to align activities to enable global integration between networks

The Network does NOT:
- Hold funds for disbursement to Network participants;
- Perform centralized quality control functions on behalf of participants (although it will create spaces for participants to do this work themselves);
- Seek to control membership, which will be open;
- Develop content itself, as this will only take place through participants' individual and collaborative activities.

## Audience(s)

Participation in the African Health OER Network is open. There are no conditions for joining. The primary target is African health academics and faculties, first focusing on those whose language of operation is English, but with openness to growing to accommodate other languages if suitable partners indicate willingness to drive processes in other languages.

The Network includes individuals, health faculties, NGOs, project teams, associations, consortia, and government departments, amongst others. There is no obligation to sign anything to join the Network, but all individuals and institutions will be encouraged to add their electronic signatures to a joint Statement of Commitment.

Likewise, there are no policy implications for institutions joining, but it is likely that participation in the Network will lead institutions to review key policies (for example, IPR, rewards/incentives, and so on).

Learners may become a secondary beneficiary, but the Network operates on the assumption that primary responsibility for communication with learners resides with academics and institutions. Thus, there will be no attempts to include additional technologies – for example, print-on-demand, audio/video streaming, or mobile technology – to get materials to learners.

## Sharing Resources

The African Health OER Network does not seek, in any form, to replace existing or emerging institutional repositories of educational content. Instead its primary objective will be to aggregate content housed in those repositories through a Health OER Network online platform, using a common meta-data framework. In addition, however, the Health OER Network will provide a vehicle for individuals or organizations to publish their Health OER online where they do not have access to an existing institutional OER Repository.

The African Health OER Network will build relationships to enable it to 'push' content aggregated into Health OER into key OER repositories globally (for example, OER Commons, the OCW Repository, Merlot, and the GLOBE Initiative). The Network will also use XML feeds to seek to automate version control for shared content and RSS feeds to provide notifications of new content.

## Quality Assurance

The African Health OER Network will not perform any quality assurance function itself. It is thus expected that Quality Assurance will happen at the margins of the Network in the following ways:
1) Institutions/individuals are encouraged to ensure they only submit work they consider to be of high quality;
2) Institutions/individuals will be expected to perform quality assurance work when deciding what content to incorporate into their programmes;
3) The Network's online platform will enable rating of content, views of the number of downloads, and addition of comments to facilitate Network participants doing community-driven quality assurance; and
4) Institutions/individuals will be encouraged to do reviews of content online to make comments on content accessible to all in Network.

# A Draft Statement of Commitment

1) WHEREAS the African Health OER Network seeks to enable participants to develop, adapt, and share health education resources to augment limited human and other resources in the health sector and impact positively on overall health provision in Africa and beyond; and

2) SHARING a common commitment to:
   a) Aggregate the results of multiple initiatives by collecting, classifying, tagging, and then actively sharing Africa-initiated resources with the global health community, as we believe that this will confer significant educational and economic advantages to Network participants over time;
   b) Facilitate discussion of how those resources can best be used;
   c) Share exemplars of best practice;
   d) Work through institutions and associations to advocate the principles of openness and sharing of educational materials; and

3) NOTING THAT:
   a) Participation in the African Health OER Network is a voluntary activity and imposes no legal commitment on participants;
   b) Participants retain full control over deciding what Health Open Educational Resources (OER) they wish to share with the Network;
   c) The African Health OER Network will not seek to mobilize funding on behalf of participants, but will actively encourage all participants to mobilize financial and other resources to advance the objectives of the Network;

4) THEREFORE, as a participant in the African Health OER Network, we hereby commit to:
   a) Releasing all content that we wish to share with the Network under some Creative Commons or equivalent licence (but understand that we have no obligation to use one specific licence or to release all content that we have available);
   b) Ensuring that all content that we release for sharing through the Network does not breach other copyrights;
   c) Branding any content we wish to share properly for attribution purposes A culture of constant improvement of curriculum and learning and teaching resources
   d) Recruiting new participants to join and contribute to the Network;
   e) Accepting custodianship of the Network's functions to grow the contributions of all involved;
   f) Adhering to the Network's Code of Conduct.

# Draft Code of Conduct

Participants in the African Health OER Network are expected to adhere to the following simple Code of Conduct when engaging in Network activities:

1) You will not send or otherwise post unauthorized commercial communications (such as spam) via the Network.
2) You will not upload viruses or other malicious code.
3) You will not solicit login information or access an account belonging to someone else.
4) You will not bully, intimidate, or harass any other participant.
5) You will seek to be respectful of others, especially when disagreeing with them.
6) You will not post content that is hateful, threatening, pornographic, or that contains graphic or gratuitous violence.
7) You will not use the Network to do anything unlawful, misleading, malicious, or discriminatory.
8) You will not post content or take any action that infringes or violates someone else's rights or otherwise violates the law, including violations of copyright.
9) You understand that the African Health OER Network is an open community and that content you post can be viewed by anyone participating in the Network.
10) Where the Advisory Board is required to make a ruling concerning disputes between participants, you agree to adhere to the results of its ruling.
11) Please report any problems you encounter within the Network so we can rectify them.[1]

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[1] With acknowledgement to Facebook community for several of the clauses – see
http://www.facebook.com/home.php#/terms.php?ref=pf

# The Background

In 2009, the University of Michigan, OER Africa, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, the University of Ghana, the University of Cape Town, and the University of the Western Cape used a Hewlett Foundation grant to develop a scalable OER programme to support health education (for details, see http://www.oerafrica.org/healthoer).

A key aspect of the success of the University of Michigan/OER Africa project has been initiation of an African Health OER Network. This occurred both by building on the relationships established with the four participating African universities and by generating additional interest through parallel projects (for example, work that OER Africa is doing with the Universities of Malawi and Botswana) and links with associations (for example, a workshop on OER run on behalf of the South African Association of Health Educators).

We successfully launched the African Health OER Network, as an integrated part of the broader OER Africa website at a meeting in Cape Town in July, 2009. Participants in the Network currently include people, amongst others, from:
• OER Africa;
• University of Michigan;
• Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology;
• University of Ghana;
• University of Cape Town;
• University of the Western Cape;
• University of Malawi's Kamuzu College of Nursing;
• University of Botswana;
• Health Education and Training in Africa (HEAT) Project of the Open University, United Kingdom; and
• University of Nairobi.

The Vision Statement above is a product of this meeting.