

# Online Networking and Capacity Building Workshops

## Summary Report

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## Workshop Background

A total of eight workshops were conducted across five locations in Ethiopia – Bahir Dar, Addis Ababa, Hawassa, Jimma and Mekelle. A total of 148 management, IT and development professionals representing federal and regional governments, local and international civil society and higher teaching institutions participated in the workshops. The goal of the workshops was to increase PHE Ethiopia Consortium members' and partners' usage and benefits from internet resources.

Specific objectives were:

- Increase knowledge of online networking tools
  - Role in capacity development - professionally and/or personally
- Increase knowledge and use of online capacity building tools
  - PHE Ethiopia Consortium website
- Gather feedback on additional online information and/or tools around PHE

Topics covered included:

- Online networking concept and resources;
- Online capacity building resources;
- Networking and PHE Ethiopia Consortium;
- PHE Ethiopia Consortium website and online resources; and
- Discussion and feedback gathering on the way forward.

In addition, the workshop collected data on the workshop objectives in the form of a semi-structured and short pre and post test. Accordingly, a total of 106 and 113 pre and post-test questionnaires, respectively, were collected and entered into SPSS for simple descriptive analysis. The findings from the questionnaires along with the inputs gathered from discussion in the workshop are compiled as highlights in the section below.

This report also contains a detailed reflection on the workshop and the way forward based on discussion points and inputs gathered from workshop participants, PHE Ethiopia Consortium and external partners. In the process, key issues that are relevant to program intervention, resource mobilization, and sustainability are articulated and reflected upon. However, details of issues and recommendation that came out during the workshop and in subsequent communications are incorporated in the online resource sustainability plan of PHE Ethiopia Consortium.

## Workshops Highlight

The workshops allowed for a closer interaction between PHE Ethiopia Consortium and members and partners. The workshops had a bi-directional engagement and learning process. In the process, it was possible to gather significant level of information and findings that need to be highlighted. These highlights are critical and provide insight into the overall situation and opportunities for future engagements.

For example, there exists a relatively high-level of usage and benefit from internet resources. However, e-mail and non-targeted search for resources using Google and other search engines is the primary mechanism to access resources. As for online networking resources, participants had limited familiarity and utilized them very rarely. The only exception was Facebook, which many used for personal networking. On the other hand, there were only a few organizations that have a Facebook or other networking resources and are mostly international NGOs. However, many expressed their desire to strengthen their online networking capacities through the use of introduced professional and social networking tools such as LinkedIn and Facebook.

In addition, many indicated the limited capacity of their IT infrastructure (i.e. organizational) and poor quality of service on the part of the Ethiopian Telecommunication Corporation (ETC). Many participants appear to lack the motivation and commitment to use the internet and online resources to facilitate and enhance their effectiveness at work and reach using the internet and online resources beyond e-mail. The resistance are a result of various factors including misguided perception on work effectiveness, misguided perception on the level of investment required and misguided assumption on staff and student motivation (i.e. entertainment focused) for internet usage.

On other hand, the workshop served as a platform for accomplishing the stated objectives and beyond, particularly in addressing the above-mentioned misguided perceptions and assumption. For example, the workshop enabled participants to be aware of online opportunities and resources on the Consortium, PHE approach and networking opportunities for both personal (i.e. professional) and organizational development. It also highlighted the benefits of doing work online with regards to organizational effectiveness and wider impact through information dissemination at a global level. The advantage of using online networking resources in time management, information dissemination, and promotion were key points communicated. In addition, the workshops brought about commitment to enhance existing IT infrastructure and capacity.

The introduction of PHE Ethiopia Consortium website also is major component and output of the workshops. Majority of the participants were not familiar or non-users of PHE Ethiopia's website. Overall, participants were very excited about the content and possibilities of the website. This was confirmed by the over 25% rise observed in the number of visitors to the website. The workshop also allowed for gathering of feedback on PHE Ethiopia Consortium's website content and opportunities for partnerships, including demand on technical support to enhance utilization of online resources by members and partners.

These findings are also further confirmed from the findings of the short and very informative pre and post tests. For example, in general, there was a reasonable knowledge and/or familiarity about online networking resources. During the pre-test, some 69% of the participants identified Facebook as an online social networking resource. At the same time, 33% to 44% still identified other choices (i.e. LinkedIn, Yahoo Group, and Google Group) as online social networking resources. On the other hand, during the post-test, the proportion of those that identified Facebook was 81%. However, the proportion of participants that identified the other types of online networking resources as an online social networking resource also went up by a similar proportion.

Thus, two conclusions can be drawn. First, participants only had very basic familiarity about online networking and the workshop did improve the knowledge level of participants about online social networking resources. Second, there still remains a sort of confusion about which resource is categorized as professional or social online networking resources. Accordingly, ongoing engagement on the matter is necessary to enhance the qualitative knowledge of members and partners about online networking resources.

Participants were also asked to reflect about the usefulness of online networking. During the pre-test, participants stated the following as reasons why online networking is useful: information exchange; cost-effectiveness; time management and capacity building. These major reasons and/or factors were also identified by the participants during the post-test. The difference was in the proportion of participants that were able to state at least one such reason. In addition, the depth of knowledge increased significantly during the post-test with participants being able to state multiple reasons for the usefulness of online networking.

In addition, the pre-test tried to determine the level of familiarity of participants about the PHE Ethiopia Consortium's website and online resources. Very few participants were able to identify components of the website and the majority of the participants did not respond to the questionnaire. This was very different during the post-test and majority of the participants stated at least one of the website components. The component identified the most by participants as being useful for their work was the resources section. Participants also indicated the same components that were included in the website as being very important during both the pre and post tests. A simple conclusion can be drawn from these findings, which is the right direction that PHE Ethiopia Consortium is on to enhance the quality and appeal of its website and online resources. This effort needs to be sustained to create ongoing demand and ensure appeal to members and partners.

It was also possible to confirm that the workshops both meet and far exceeded the stated expectations of participants. During the pre-test, participants identified expectations such as learning of new ideas and tools; increase knowhow on online networking and capacity building; and increased familiarity about PHE approach and the consortium. During the post-test, participants gave a unanimous yes response when asked if the workshop meet their expectations and if it was useful. Thus, the workshop did manage to deliver on all the stated objectives. During the workshop, a major point of discussion was also the significant importance of targeting higher education institutions (i.e. teachers and students). This was also reflected in the pre and post tests. However, it is essential to engage on a similar effort

regularly, at least once a year, to sustain interest and commitment. Doing so will also ensure increased knowledge enhancement of previous and new participants since high staff turnover is a major challenge for development stakeholders.

Throughout the workshops, there was also increase in the number of feedbacks and requests made by visitors as well, making the site increasingly interactive and dynamic. This also enhanced the content quality and development process. The workshop also created additional demand for similar engagements by organizations such as the Haromaya University, located in the Eastern part of Ethiopia. It also solidified the partnership with members and partners and expanded the relationship base by involving a wider number of staff from targeted organizations. This was critical as the relationships from the past primarily focused on Executives and Senior Managers.

It was also possible for PHE Ethiopia to create demand and gain insight into the types of technical support that members and partners required including monitoring and technical support to enhance their online presence. The workshops also provided opportunities for learning and resulted in reflection about PHE Ethiopia and its online strategy. It enabled the identification of strategies and greater needs to ensure viability and sustainability. These enabled for further understanding of members and partners and presented an opportunity for future organizational development. It is based on these findings that the reflections below are articulated.

## Workshops Reflections

Based on the pre/post tests and discussion/feedback so far, the workshops had a significant impact in enhancing awareness, creating demand and identifying barriers to online networking and resources for capacity development. It served as an opportunity for reflection by members and partners on their use of online networking and resources for capacity development beyond. Overall, there exists an impressive level of interest and diversity among members and partners. These have serious implication on the sustainability plan under development in general and articulation of strategies and activities in particular. For example,

- Knowledge gap is a challenge and needs to be addressed in the context of demand creation to ensure relevance and effectiveness of PHE Ethiopia's website and online resources in the short and medium term;
  - Information dissemination and promotion, capacity building and experience sharing among members/partners through various channels need to be highlighted in the plan;
  - Activities that respond to the personal and organizational capacity of members/partners (and their staff) with intent to transform are essential and need to be highlighted in the planned sustainability plan;
- External (i.e. Ethiopian Telecommunication Corporation) and internal (i.e. members and partners) online infrastructure and commitment to investment is critical and the resulting impact need to be articulated when formulating the sustainability plan;

- Promotional and marketing efforts need to be able to address and overcome these issues to observe desired behavior change in online resource utilization (i.e. PHE Ethiopia’s website);
- Implementation planning and budgeting needs to take these issues into consideration as well when developing a timeline and budget for various activities that can help ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of identified strategies;
- Planned activities need to take into account the diversity of members and partners, especially along regional location and organizational resources, to be effective in translating articulated strategies into actions to overcome observed gaps in infrastructure and commitment;
- Content development and interactive forums within the PHE Ethiopia website need to play a central role in the sustainability plan to ensure ongoing interest and support by members and partners including financial (e.g. annual core funding) contribution and materials/information communication; and
- Technical support and backstopping are also essential strategies that need to be incorporated into the sustainability plan with various activities that are relevant in the short, medium and long term thinking of both the PHE Ethiopia Consortium and its website.

As the above highlights indicate, a lot of information is come out of these workshops and will shape the development of the sustainability plan for the PHE Ethiopia website. There is also significant implication for the organization and its functioning that can help inform the strategic and communication/marketing plans and efforts. Accordingly, additional support needs to be provided to PHE Ethiopia Consortium to further streamline coordination, communication, resource mobilization and sustainability related activities and strategically position PHE Ethiopia to be relevant and effective in the years to come.