

E-learning Solutions Help Nurses Renew Licences in Malawi



Source:

Maurizio Bricola

Country:

Malawi [MW]

Sector:

Health

Jesse Lobeni, a young nurse in Malawi, needs to renew her licence every year to continue practicing in the rural clinic where she works. In order to do that she needs to travel to the nearest location where she can attend classes and sit the eight exams needed for the renewal.

After spending about six months in the process every year, Lobeni has managed with outstanding efforts to get her licence renewal so far, but this clearly costs her a lot of money and time that she often cannot afford. Just like Lobeni, nurses and midwives in Malawi have to follow these courses and ICTs are playing a role to make this possible in rural areas without the burden of travelling to main towns.

Thanks to an ICT-based Continuing Professional Development (CPD), implemented by IICD in collaboration with the National Organization of Nurses and Midwives (NONM) in

Malawi, Lobeni has not only gained more credits to renew her licence, but she has also enhanced her computer skills, access to current health information and self assessment.

Start with a basic solution

Besides more complex comprehensive solutions on e-learning systems (CMS, LMS, etc.) the project started right after the 'stone age', by having staff from NONM scan the official nurse manual, which was later saved as PDF and made accessible to all nurses at the health facility. NONM also bought laptops, modems and Internet bundles, and trained about 20 nurses in basic ICT skills. A CDP coordinator, who is in charge of grading the exams within this system, was also trained.

Common challenges usually found in rural and often impoverished communities, such as shortage of equipment and frequent power blackouts, can be overcome by expressly setting up solutions with minimum bandwidth and energy requirements. Yet in this kind of ICT-based projects, the main challenges are often people-related.

The importance of project ownership and capacity development

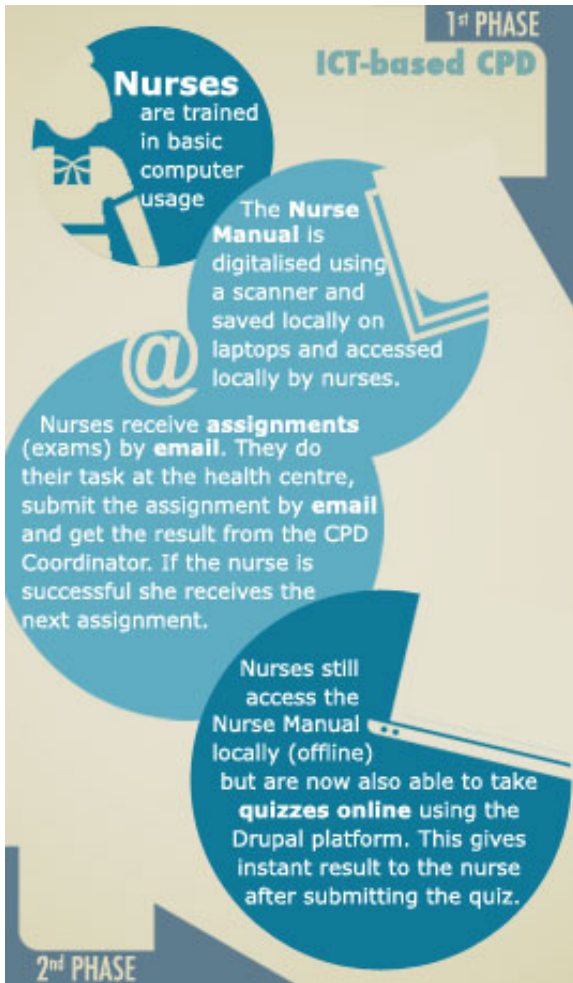
In order to facilitate multi-stakeholder involvement and create local ownership, the project and technical solution are designed together with the implementing partner, including the capacity development activities, training, installation and customisation.

Aiming to explore and analyse the possibilities of taking the NONM's CDP platform to the next level, IICD's Technical Adviser Maurizio Bricola travelled to Malawi earlier this year, "we had a very productive first meeting that ended up with four main action points. After the meeting I had a session on Drupal and Quiz module with the ICT officer to discuss local installation and customisation."

However, after the technical adviser left the country things did not run very smoothly for them. The communication with the ICT officer broke down, he was not able to repeat the steps and was eventually replaced by two new IT specialists. Despite initial concerns about the whole project coming to a standstill because of the staff changes, the new team took the project exactly where it was left and "all four action points were met and outperformed."



Thanks to this ICT-based *Continuing Professional Development*, nurses can prepare for their license renewal and even submit part of the assignments online. So far, nurses have been able to avoid seven of the eight visits to main towns, getting their license in half the time and obtaining even better grades.



NONM made a prompt start in three hospitals, the Mchinji District Hospital, the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Blantyre and St. Andrew Hospital in Kasungu, with a potential to reach out to about 1000 nurses.

A sense of ownership of the project and direct involvement in figuring out potential outcomes gave the new IT team the vision to explore new possibilities when using the provided platforms. “The local IT specialists were able to transmit the same excitement to the CDP coordinators that had been already trained in using the platform. Some of these coordinators had already started to create and score the quizzes and they were very happy to see that they could give nurses instant feedback”, said Bricola.

Paving the way to a broader e-learning experience

So far, this solution has been implemented by NONM in 5 health centres in Malawi and the platform will be also launched as part of the new NONM website. This will make the system accessible online to all nurses and health facilities involved and registered in the

platform.

As a starting point, the open source platforms Drupal and the Quiz module can be customised for current specific needs and different purposes but if future and more complex needs are required these can be better covered by full LMS solutions particularly if the project is up-scaled nationally.

“We are now even thinking of piloting with tablets since those can be now purchased for about 150 euro per nurse”, says Bricola.

In the long term, an ICT-based continuous learning process, which provides access to up-to-date nursing and healthcare information, will ensure updated knowledge, skills, competencies and attitudes that will eventually strengthen the health service delivery across the board.

To know more about IICD’s work in the health sector see our video [‘How IICD supports healthcare in Africa by using ICT’](#) and IICD’s [annual report](#).