



DIALOGUE

PEOPLE-CENTERED

We aim to give young African students skills and training because we read in their eyes the best future for Africa. Growing and supporting new health workers in Africa means contributing to the future, not only of healthcare but of an entire continent.

TEXT BY / DON DANTE CARRARO / DIRECTOR OF DOCTORS WITH AFRICA CUAMM

We so often hear them called human capital, but at CUAMM we prefer to call them just “people.” It’s people who have always made the difference and in whom we will keep on investing in Italy and Africa alike.

There is a good reason that this issue of *Health and Development* is all about human resources in health and their shortage in a situation of crisis on an international scope that is even more severe in African countries. It is also the reason that the focus of the CUAMM’s “Mothers and Children First” program, whose third phase has been launched, is “People and Skills.” This program involves 8 countries and 14 hospitals and was conceived to support the care of mothers and children in their first 1,000 days of life while also supporting the development of human resources and the skills of health workers, which are the engine driving health systems that work and are sustainable over time.

This is also why some of our medium-term efforts are focused on training health workers in Africa, especially young people. This is to say that people are both the focus and key players in the cooperation we have been building for over 70 years.

The great commitment we are working on now involves mobilizing to make Africa truly central with its needs and those of its people. We start from a vision, which we always translate into planning, engagement, and action in the field as well as opportunities to meet with people. In the coming months alone, there will be over 200 events on awareness-raising on these topics, which we will organize throughout Italy, bringing us to *African Day*, which was celebrated last May 25, until our next *Annual Meeting* in Milan on November 4, 2023. This will be the most important event of the year. We will gather to share the point on the path we are on and our upcoming destinations, along with the people who support and make up CUAMM every day, in Italy and Africa.

One of the specific objectives of this intensive action of sharing is to involve as many people as possible in our next challenge: training 10,000 new health workers in Africa. This is a challenge that looks to the present and even more to the future at this time in history when health care is suffering a shortage of personnel and health systems are at risk of failing. The data that tells of the shortage is alarming and the accounts of doctors, nurses, and workers who do not quit or move to other countries describe difficult working conditions, psychological strain, the lack of practical support and recognition (as we can read in the article on page 4 gives an unsparing portrait of this situation).

In Africa, the problem has become even more extreme, adding to the structural difficulties of the local health systems: Africa has 24% of the global disease burden with only 3% of the global health human resources, as described in one of the following articles (pg. 13). This is a reason that this issue is so important to us because it is to do with inequality and working to reduce it through long-term interventions, field research, and training people.

At CUAMM, we want, as always, to give space to all people who contribute, each in their own way, to building health in Africa in the most remote places and in conditions that would be reductive to call just complex. We especially want to give space to the many young students in whose eyes we see a better future for the continent. These young men and women follow a dream with determination and stubborn tenacity. Just like Gordon did. He’s a South Sudanese midwife whose story is that of an entire country that is looking ahead and building its story through its difficulties. This is a story of war, loss, and difficulties as well as commitment and faith in the future as individuals and as communities.

Training a health workforce in low- and middle-income countries can truly make the difference and in the mid to long-term could turn the tide, symbolically and tangibly, for young Africans. Young Italian residents can open new prospects by choosing to take part in the JPO – Junior Project Officer program, which CUAMM has organized for over 20 years. In this issue, an article considers the recent publication of a peer review on the lasting value that the experience has for young doctors.

This theme – people and their skills – will continue in our next Annual Meeting in Milan on November 4 to which you are all warmly invited.