BACKGROUND

• Decision space (Bossert 1998, Soc.Sci.Med 47:1513-27) is defined by laws and regulations ("de jure") and by the operational one ("de facto");
• It is important to understand how much of the decision space conferred "de jure" is actually available and used by local managers to make decisions in practice ("de facto");
• In Uganda decentralisation of essential functions to district health management teams (DHMTs) is considered high;
• There is need for stronger evidence on whether shifting decision-making powers from central to district level translates into more autonomy for DHMTs to manage their workforce;
• This study is based on the work that PERFORM Research Consortium, using action research to strengthening DHMT's capacity, undertook in three districts in Uganda from 2011 to 2015.

AIM

To improve understanding about how district health managers perceive and use their decision space for human resources management and how action research can support this in order to improve health workforce performance.

MAIN CONCLUSIONS

• Health managers at district level have limited power to make decisions about their workforce which undermines the rhetoric about the benefits of managerial decentralization;
• Decentralization, to fully achieve its objectives in regard to strengthening health workforce management, needs to shift power further down from district government and capitalise more on the management potential of district health managers;
• PERFORM, through action research, helped DHMTs to make greater use of the available decision space they have to make decisions about their workforce.

RESULTS

Policy
• Most HR policies arise from central level; local government develops and passes related by-laws; DHMTs’ role "de jure" is limited to adapt and monitor policy implementation;
• DHMT have a limited "de facto" role in policy formulation and wider role in enforcing and monitoring policy implementation;
• PERFORM helped DHMTs to prioritize according to resource constraints and to be more pro-active in local resource mobilisation.

Planning
• Central level defines "de jure" staffing norms and job descriptions; District government recruits, dismisses, appoints, promotes, retires and enforces discipline;
• DHMT’s "de facto" role is limited to identify HRH needs, posting and transfer and to assign functions to staff expanding their job description;
• PERFORMANCE increased awareness about HRH needs and triggered the initiative to expand the scope of job descriptions.

Remuneration
• Most decisions about wages are made at central level ("de jure");
• DHMT have and perceive "de facto" not to have a role in decisions about salaries;
• DHMTs actually use non-monetary incentives and sometimes mobilise monetary incentives from development partners;
• PERFORMANCE helped managers to use a more pro-active and entrepreneurial approach which is suggested to have increased their capacity to mobilise resources for incentives among local partners.

Performance
• Central level “de jure” produces tools to assess HRH performance;
• DHMTs perceived to have and fully use “de facto” authority to appraise and supervise their workers; some issues of inaccuracy in reporting performance; some workers had negative attitude towards appraisal;
• PERFORMANCE helped DHMTs to develop new practices for performance management and improve workers’ attitude towards appraisal.

Education
• District authorities, through the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) District Coordinator, are “de jure” responsible for continuous education of HRH;
• Despite wide space conferred by policy and DHMTs’ perceptions of authority, financial constraints and reported mismanagement by district authorities often limit “de facto” their decision-space in this area;
• PERFORMANCE indirect contribution through improved resource mobilisation.

Information
• Despite limited “de jure” space in this area, all DHMTs perceived having full authority over information management about their workforce;
• Improvements in access to HRH information is perceived “de facto” to have had a positive effect on workforce decision-making;
• PERFORMANCE increased awareness about use of information for decision-making on HRH.

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