

## SWEDD SERIES: OPERATIONAL BRIEF

# REGIONAL CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF REPRODUCTIVE, MATERNAL, NEONATAL, CHILD AND ADOLESCENT HEALTH SERVICES (RMNCAH)

The research informing this brief was led by the Centre humanitaire des métiers de la pharmacie (CHMP) and focused on the SWEDD project. The information will guide the implementation of SWEDD+

This operational brief is one of a series that retrospectively documents the process of implementing the interventions of the Sahel Women's Empowerment and Demographic Dividend (SWEDD) project, and describes the good practices, challenges and lessons learned in setting up three centres of excellence (CE) in the project area. It presents a summary of a literature review and conversations with key respondents in Niger, Mali and Côte d'Ivoire in November 2022, which is detailed in a guide of the same name. These centres were established over two phases.

### The roadmap for the centres is based on several points of agreement:

1. Each centre focuses on a single speciality;
2. The organization of teaching that is aligned across the centres, with, among other things, the establishment of a Scientific and Teaching Council, the appointment of a Head of Department, the appointment of a Head of Teaching Unit (TU) and the designation of a teacher to manage each component of the TU (TUC);
3. The principle of continuous assessment;
4. Assessment of placements based on available standardized tools, with only one repeat year allowed;
5. The Master's degree coursework culminates in a dissertation;
6. Remuneration and incentives schemes for teachers, supervisors and members of the examination panel are left to the discretion of each institution, in accordance with the legislation in force in the country concerned;
7. Registration and tuition fees aligned across the centres.

## The phases involved in setting up centres of excellence

### Phase 1: Conceptualization and selection of centres

- A public call for expressions of interest: launched in order to identify and invite centres interested in hosting the Master's course, preceded by the sending of a letter to the Ministers of health of the six (6) SWEDD countries and requiring each country to publish this call in the main national daily newspapers for a period of 15 days.
- The development and validation of selection criteria for centres of excellence and future students.
- An assessment of the requirements for the centres to host the Master's degree programme, based on information on the organizational system; the financial, procurement and fixed assets management system; human resources management; and academic management, teaching and training.
- The final selection of three centres based on an analysis of the evaluations of the seven candidate centres.

### Phase 2: Establishment of centres

- The launch of the activities of the regional centres for the Master's in Nursing and Obstetrics following a preparatory workshop to define the implementation procedures.
- Implementation of teaching courses.

### The implementation of the centres of excellence has been a success, but there have also been bottlenecks.

#### Successes:

- ▶ A teaching approach based on a facilitator-companion relationship, rather than a teacher-student approach;
- ▶ The availability of online teaching, which was important during COVID-19, and critical for the planned interconnection between the centres.

#### Bottlenecks:

- ▶ Inadequate facilities for reception, logistics and teaching materials in some of the centers;
- ▶ The need for more systematic post-training activities;
- ▶ Disruptions linked to students, security issues and the COVID-19 pandemic;
- ▶ Student training costs considered high;
- ▶ The absence of a permanent framework for consultation between the heads of training institutions in some of the centres.



The implementation experiences described in this brief and the guide serve to inform the development of centres to improve the quality of RMNCAH services through high quality training in the nursing and obstetric sciences provided at the Master's level. These experiences are useful for SWEDD+, and for other projects in countries in the Global South, particularly in West and Central Africa, which are seeking to improve the quality of RMNCAH services, especially for adolescents and young women.

## SUMMARY OF KEY LESSONS

Phase 1: Conceptualization and selection of the centres	1	In order to address regional disparities and specificities of the Master's degree in Nursing and Obstetrics, the ECOWAS Member States had to adopt a harmonized curriculum.
	2	A public call for expressions of interest, preceded by a letter to the countries' health ministers, helps to guarantee the transparency of the process, while opening up the competition to private training schools.
	3	The involvement of the supervisory ministries (Health and Higher Education) from the outset of the process provides an enabling policy framework for the subsequent and successful completion of the process, and a guarantee that students will be reintegrated after their training.
	4	The decision to use an evaluation to select the centres of excellence is important because it emphasizes performance as the sole criterion for making the choice.
	5	It is important to organize a pre-test of the evaluation tools to identify their weaknesses so that they can be corrected before the actual evaluation.
	6	The co-chairing of the workshop to select centres by the directors of the key institutions (in this case, WAHO and UNFPA) strengthens the leadership of these sub-regional institutions in the establishment of the centres.
Phase 2: Establishment of centres	7	The roll-out of centres of excellence enables alignment of the criteria for access to the Master's degree and to teaching practices in Nursing and Obstetrics across the countries of a sub-region.
	8	An absence of benchmarking means that it is not possible to make informed comparisons with other initiatives that design and establish centres of excellence, as is the case in the SWEDD countries.
	9	Delays in starting the programme illustrate the difficulties faced by regional initiatives implemented in several countries, where success depends on interaction between a range of actors, including politicians, institutions and academics.
	10	The implementation of the Master's programme demonstrates that the centres of excellence can satisfactorily develop expertise in maternal, neonatal, child and adolescent reproductive health.
	11	The implementation of the Master's program highlights disparities between countries in the availability and level of the material and teaching environment across centres of excellence.
	12	Given the long duration of the Master's programme, it would seem appropriate to consider regular review and revision to take into account innovations in the sector.
	13	Building the capacity of the centres of excellence in teaching and learning materials, coupled with rigorous selection of trainees, has improved learning conditions and training quality.

This brief is based on a guide that sets out the process in detail. It is one of a series of four briefs and guides aimed at documenting the experiences of SWEDD interventions to improve the provision of reproductive health services. These include Community-Based Distribution (CBD) interventions to bring services and products closer to communities, experience in building the capacity of health-care staff, particularly midwives (establishment of Centres of Excellence, mentoring) and the deployment of these midwives to make up for the shortage of staff on the ground, particularly in rural areas. The documents were developed by the Centre humanitaire des métiers de la pharmacie (CHMP) with the support of UNFPA and the World Bank.

For more information on the documentation of the processes involved in this intervention and on the SWEDD project, visit the SWEDD project's virtual resource platform: <https://sweddknowledge.org/>.