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Over 200 Dalarna University alumni help advance education and care in Africa and Asia: A Short communication

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The term "alumni" derives from Latin and refers to former students. As faculty members at Dalarna University (Sweden), our objective is for all former students to take pride in their accomplishments and, with enthusiasm, drive progress in Sexual, Reproductive, Perinatal Health, and Human Rights (SRPHR) wherever they are. We firmly believe that our alumni have the capacity to become agents of change in their respective countries, given the opportunity within a supportive education, policy, clinical, and societal system (Erlandsson et al., 2022). Equipped with knowledge, they can assume ownership and become catalysts for progress in SRPHR (Erlandsson et al., 2019; Erlandsson et al., 2017). This can be achieved through inspirational sessions and brainstorming in workshops, where ideas are generated for joint research applications and capacity-building projects. These ideas can then be implemented in clinical practice, education, societal development, policy changes, and through collaborative supervision of master's and PhD candidates in their respective countries.

For Dalarna University, the journey of capacity building for educators began in Somaliland in 2008. The master's in SRPHR was strategically supported by local Next Generation Learning (NGL) grants in 2009. Subsequently, Dalarna University received an internal grant and

Swedish Development Agency (Sida) funds in 2010 to pilot-test a blended online and onsite learning course. A larger Sida grant from 2013 to 2016 helped enhance the capacity of 84 educators in Somaliland and Puntland (Erlandsson et al., 2017). Resulting in Jama Ali Egal, the first midwife in Somaliland, to obtain a PhD (Egal, 2023). Additionally, PhD candidate Jonah Kiruja is poised to become the first nurse from East Africa to obtain a PhD degree from Dalarna University (Kiruja et al., 2020), as a result of the fruitful collaboration spanning almost 15 years in the Somali region.

Through UNFPA-funded support in Bangladesh since 2016, we have successfully capacitated 150 educators in the country (Erlandsson et al., 2019). Furthermore, more than 10 scientific publications together with our partners and three-month-long country visits yearly, coupled with lectures on pedagogic skills, leadership, management, practical midwifery skills, and research, have contributed to Dalarna University faculty's understanding of the benefits and challenges involved in introducing midwives as a distinct profession in Bangladesh (Pappu et al., 2023).

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The agenda for capacitating alumni aims to contribute scientific knowledge, including the design and testing of innovative care models, when integrating midwives as a separate profession in Bangladesh.

The international collaboration for Dalarna University continued to evolve, leading to a proposal for partnership and support in the field of women's health, midwifery, and midwifery education from the Health Ministry of The Gambia during the World Health Assembly in 2019. Recognizing our extensive expertise in supporting midwifery and midwifery education in Africa and Asia, the Swedish Foreign Ministry turned to Dalarna University. Subsequently, an educational collaboration commenced, with six midwifery educators from The Gambia College School of Nursing and Midwifery enrolled in the global master's programme at Dalarna University alongside Swedish and international students.

The establishment of an alumni network bridges the gap between rhetoric and reality in midwifery education, facilitated by the participation of alumni from Dalarna University. This network provides a platform for the 250 alumni to grow as leaders through the exchange of knowledge and expertise on clinical midwifery education, midwife-led care, leadership, communication, and research. The ripple effect of this network spans across the globe, encompassing alumni from every continent enrolled in the global SRPHR master's. Dalarna University admits 35 students annually into this programme, running parallel to the regular midwifery program.

As part of the ongoing alumni network online sessions focus on the sustainable

development of midwifery care in alignment with the sustainable development goals, engaging over 50 alumni. These sessions emphasized interdisciplinary teamwork between midwives, physicians/obstetricians, and nurses. Subsequently, a workshop took place at Högskolan Dalarna, Campus Falun, from in June 2023. The workshop included sessions on leadership, online and onsite pedagogical training, SRPHR beyond intrapartum care, skills training orientation on Helping Babies Breathe (HBB) and Helping Mothers Survive (HMS), as well as a study visit to the hospital. During the workshop, one day was dedicated to the dissertation of a Dalarna University collaborative partner in Somaliland. The thesis highlighted the importance of evidence-based, respectful maternity and newborn care, irrespective of the healthcare professionals providing it (Egal, 2023). The dissertation session, led by opponent Prof Margareta Larsson and PhD candidate Jama Ali Egal sparked and inspired the alumni to develop projects and research proposals tailored to their respective contexts. The alumni network provides recognition for their status as alumni and equips them to lead with a master's degree from Dalarna University. By presenting cutting-edge research and evidence-based practices, the alumni aim to inspire policy-level participants to investigate the deployment and utilization of Dalarna University alumni in their respective countries.

The alumni network aims to ensure that alumni are utilized as leaders in education, midwifery care, communication, and research. Having midwives as leaders in SRPHR in a society is essential, as their clinical work, teaching, research, and collaboration with the community have

been proven to be instrumental in promoting sexual and reproductive health. When midwives are given the opportunity to work as leaders in SRPHR, their full potential can be harnessed, leading to a healthy and productive population, which is crucial from both societal and health economics perspectives. The utilization of alumni students in the Somali region, Bangladesh, and The Gambia will also help sustain donor investments, including those from the Swedish Government. In summary, our message is that by leveraging the expertise of alumni students from Dalarna University, policy, education, clinical, and societal decisions that promote SRPHR in the population can be made collaboratively by nurses, midwives, and doctors. It is important to appreciate the achievements made thus far in terms of SRPHR and recognize the ongoing need to prioritize SRPHR, midwives' career paths, and working environments for the betterment of the population's health.

PhD candidate Jonah Kiruja presented a research seminar as he approached the final stages of thesis writing before his dissertation on October 6th, 2023. Kiruja and Egal's journeys serve as inspirational examples for alumni, showcasing how midwives and nurses can build successful careers in their respective countries, starting from a diploma-level degree and progressing to a master's and PhD, without necessarily obtaining degrees from western universities. The alumni week at campus Falun fostered inspiration among all participants and forged bonds between alumni from Somaliland, The Gambia, and Bangladesh. The next step potentially involves field studies at clinical placement sites in Somaliland, The Gambia, and Bangladesh, where midwifery care can be

showcased or prototyped in 2024, based on the suggestions of workshop participants, in order to enhance evidence-based care and education. The results of these studies will be documented by a photographer/filmmaker. Workshops on proposal writing will potentially be conducted, and research proposals will be developed and submitted to the Swedish Research Council and other donors. Ethical clearance for the projects can be sought. Through these initiatives, alumni from Dalarna University will continue to collaborate sustainably, working towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 2030 through quality education and care. Quality care is paramount for improved health outcomes in SRPHR and for the development of sustainable societies in line with the SDG 2030. Quality midwifery care, provided by licensed and well-deployed professional healthcare providers, including midwives, has the potential to prevent 60-80% of maternal, neonatal deaths, and stillbirths globally (Nove et al., 2018). Barriers and facilitators for quality midwifery care exist at various levels within health and education systems (Pappu et al., 2023). Despite substantial geopolitical differences between the Somali region, Bangladesh, The Gambia, and Sweden, there is ample opportunity to learn from one another and create ripples on the water, globally, using quality midwifery care and education. The faculty at Dalarna University stands ready to provide support and capacity building wherever possible.

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