



Get Inspired!

A pilot qualitative study of global health volunteering with Commonwealth Partnerships for Antimicrobial Stewardship

Background

The Commonwealth Partnerships for Antimicrobial Stewardship (CwPAMS), funded by the UK Department of Health and Social Care's Fleming Fund, managed by the Commonwealth Pharmacists Association and Tropical Health and Education Trust, aim to build antimicrobial stewardship (AMS) capacity in low/middle-income countries (LMICs) through health partnerships with the UK. CwPAMS-Phase-2 (CwPAMS2) was launched in March 2023, and currently supports 24 UK-LMIC partnerships delivering AMS interventions in 74 health facilities across eight African countries (Fig 1). Since CwPAMS inception, with the launch of CwPAMS1 in 2019, UK NHS volunteers have actively provided support for capacity building in LMIC-partner organisations.

AIM

Explore the impact of CwPAMS volunteering, in particular, to understand potential benefits and how it could be better integrated into NHS systems.

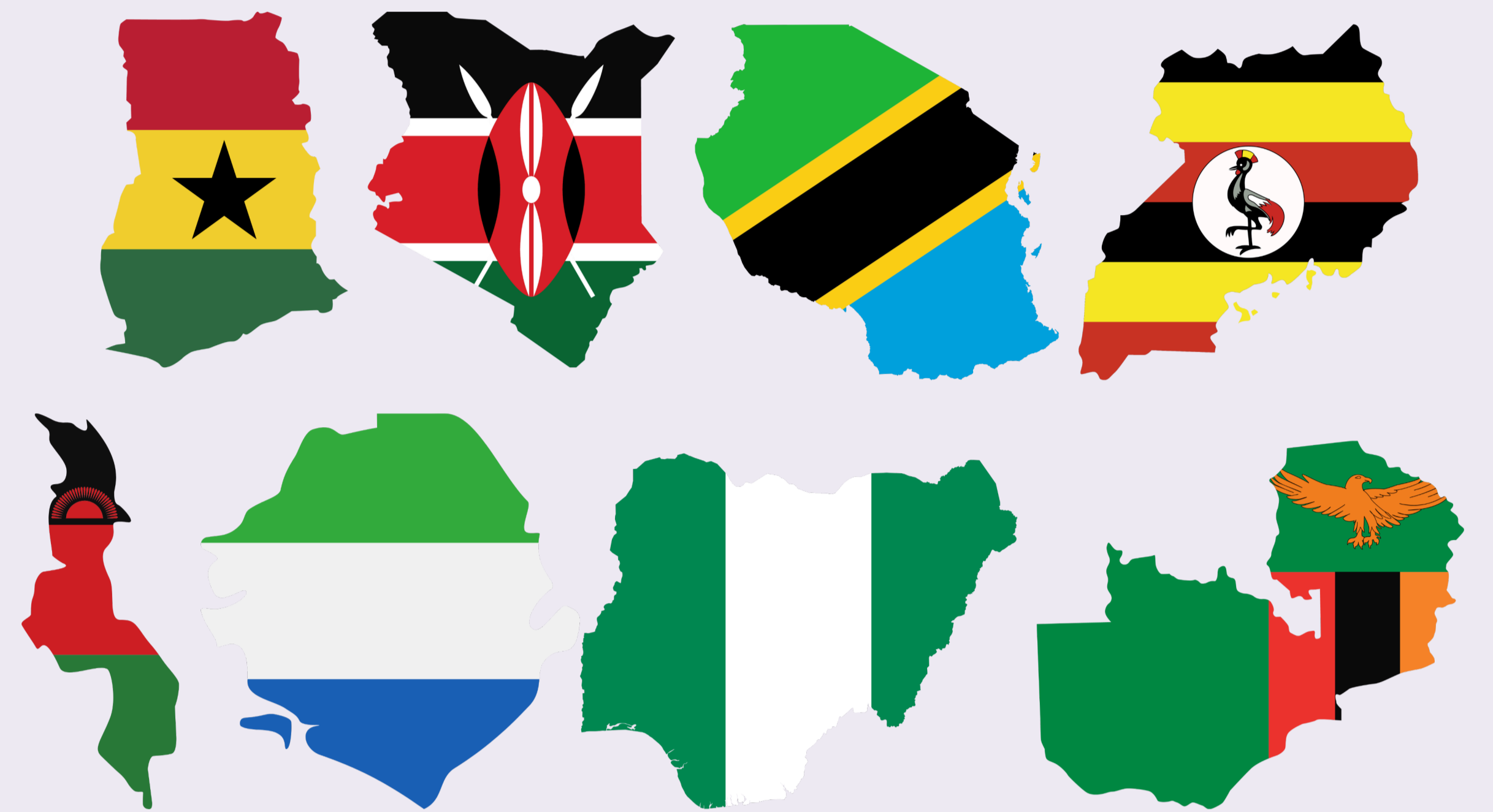


Fig. 1 Flags and borders of Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Malawi, Sierra Leone, Nigeria & Zambia.

Method

Participants: CwPAMS UK volunteers were identified through CwPAMS2 participation and leadership roles. Non-probabilistic, purposive sampling was used; a small number of volunteers were approached via email to pilot the qualitative, semi-structured interview.

Data collection: Semi-structured interviews were held between April and May 2024 with 5 UK volunteers, as well as their line managers; all agreed to scheduled, recorded discussions indicating consent. Interviews focused on the impact of volunteering experiences on UK NHS institutions, and how these could be more formally integrated into continuous professional development (CPD) pathways.

Data analysis: Qualitative data was thematically analysed.

Results

At the point of the semi-structured interviews, UK volunteers had contributed >1000 days (combined) as part of CwPAMS2, with just under 1000 more days to be contributed before the end of the programme to fully reach the anticipated outcomes.

General benefits of global health volunteering to the NHS

Interviewees reported benefits to the NHS through shifts in health workforce attitude, perspective and behaviours, consequently influencing wider teams (horizontally and vertically). Changes were regarded as extremely relevant and impactful to the NHS and staff CPD goals.

Benefits to NHS staff recruitment/retention

A prominent theme from the interviews was the significant impact of global health volunteering on recruitment and retention. Individuals spoke about an **injection of motivation, passion and enthusiasm into work** - a reminder of the importance of their roles and the reason for staying in their jobs longer: 'it is a reason to come and join the team and a reason to stay'. A 'can do' attitude with demonstrable leadership also evolved with one manager noting a stark contrast with volunteering staff identifying and solving problems compared with non-volunteer staff just reporting problems to senior staff.

Clinical learning: From LMICs into the NHS

There was widespread appreciation for the NHS and the resources available in the UK, compared to LMICs. Shared examples of new systems, processes and clinical skills gained and transferred from LMICs into the NHS included:

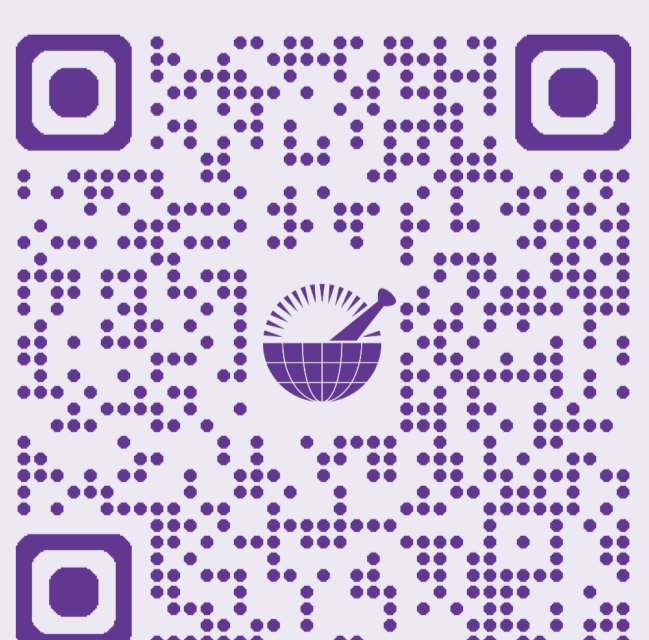
- the ability to make alcohol hand gel in-house;
- dealing with malaria cases;
- improving stock management systems.

Perceived barriers to global health volunteering

- Lack of structure and formalisation of volunteering opportunities
- Old ways of thinking and doing things
- Risk aversion
- Lack of understanding of its benefits to individuals and organisations
- Human resource issues (e.g. needing to find cover for travelling staff)

Conclusion

Staff retention is a considerable challenge for the NHS. Volunteering is a great opportunity for personal/professional growth, fostering leadership and motivation, whilst simultaneously improving healthcare practices. Global health volunteering could be integrated into formal CPD pathways in the NHS to capitalise on the relatively small investment in staff time in return for knowledge and skills development. Full implementation of the questionnaire to assess the impact of CwPAMS volunteering on individuals and institutions is planned for delivery at the end of the programme.



Commonwealth Partnerships
for Antimicrobial Stewardship

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