Ministry of Public Health

Statement on Institutional Development

Summary
The new Minister of Public Health, Dr Feroz is strongly committed to ensuring the ministry is a well governed, gold standard state institution whose functioning better benefits the health status of the people of Afghanistan. Among a number of implications of achieving and maintaining good governance and high performance is that the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) needs to manage change towards improving effectiveness ministry wide.

This brief statement firstly gives a definition of institutional development as applied to the current context of, and in, the MoPH. It then goes on to give the issues currently of most importance in institutional development to the MoPH. Finally some implications of, and challenges in, institutional development are highlighted.

A working definition of institutional development of the MoPH
Different people interpret the term institutional development in different ways rather like they do ‘coordination’¹ and ‘governance’². What the term does do is encompass a large area of management theory and practice. The theory, while important, is mostly basic common sense. It is mainly concerned with the analysis and exploration of human behavior to get insights to institutional challenges so that changes are relevant and have a good chance in succeeding.

The management of change is towards improving the effectiveness and overall performance of the ministry and in doing so have a greater positive impact on the health of the people of Afghanistan. A working definition of institutional development as currently applied to the state institution of the MoPH is:

Institutional development in the Ministry of Public Health Afghanistan is a set of theories, values, strategies and techniques that aim to develop the principles and practice of managing change and improving effectiveness. Undertaken mainly through changing the capability, capacity and attitudes of staff including strategic thinking, appreciation and application of the values and working principles of the ministry and of management skills, the development of processes and systems, and having insight into and applying issues in the wider context of politics and policies to institutional challenges. All with the aim of having an effective and efficient ministry whose working culture and practices having a positive sustained impact on the health of our people.

Key issues and factors
The important issue to remember about institutional development is that it is about managing change which itself is forever in a state of fluctuation. Learning to live with the many forms of change, with uncertainty, is the art of change management. What

¹ For the current definition of coordination in the MoPH see the MoPH Position Paper on Coordination in the Health Sector, April 2015.
² Similarly, for a working definition of good governance see the MoPH Statement on Good Governance of the Health Sector, April 2015
may have been right five years ago in the national health strategic plan or in other more recent policies, strategies and practices including the ways of approaching an issue may well not now be relevant or appropriate.

This is mainly because of changes in the environment external to the ministry, the wider political, economic and social context, which necessitates changes in ‘transformational’ factors within an institution such as the MoPH. Factors such as its mission, strategy, institutional culture and leadership which if transformed can have a positive impact across the MoPH and its staff. They are the drivers of major, positive change.

Changes in such transformational factors lead to the need for changes in what is called ‘transactional’ factors within the institution, factors such as its structure, systems and work atmosphere. These factors are the fine tuning of an institution which may or may not have an institution wide impact. Together changes in transformational and transactional factors will affect motivation, which in turn impacts on performance, the getting of good results or not. The key relevant institutional development factors for the MoPH are:

- External context
- Leadership
- Mission, strategy, values and working practices
- Institutional culture and memory
- Management practices
- Systems
- Structure
- Work atmosphere

All these elements or factors need to be used creatively to build a dynamic, high performing MoPH that constantly adapts itself to necessary change. They do not fit together in a set way, like a jigsaw puzzle. This would result in a static, mediocre state institution where strategic thinking, working pro-actively and innovation do not happen. It is the ‘how’ of change that is key, the ‘what’ is easy to identify.

Implications and challenges
Many people are resistant to change and it takes time to win them over, if ever. One of the most challenging changes will be about power within the ministry and how it is shared and resources allocated. Some other complex challenges are related to individual behaviour such as dealing with and changing: staff expectations, relationships between directorates, departments and units, staff positions to better have a job-person match, factors contributing to the prevailing low motivation and attitudes to ensure an institutional reputation of being client friendly.

Finally, a challenge is to ensure that among staff there is a clear understanding of the difference between ‘governance’ and ‘institutional development’. The two terms are sometimes used interchangeably, which can create confusion. While there is a link between the two, that of effective functioning, institutional development is about effecting the necessary changes towards having an effective MoPH institution, governance is about the MoPH better functioning as a capable, accountable and responsive state institution³.

---

³ Also see the MoPH Statement on Good Governance of the Health Sector, April 2015