



Strengthening One Health Through University Alumni Tracking: Lessons Learned from the Democratic Republic of Congo

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Technical support on risk communication and community engagement provided by SOHIC Alumnus Prisca Kabangu to community Health workers, community leaders and Red Cross workers during Rabies Day 2024

Tracking alumni trained in One Health is essential for assessing the practical application of competencies, enhancing institutional accountability, and securing ongoing donor support. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where health systems face challenges such as emerging infectious diseases, inadequate infrastructure, and environmental degradation, alumni tracking provides a critical tool for advancing sustainable One Health initiatives.

With support from USAID, AFROHUN has made significant strides in this area. A total of 93 students were supported, 54 of whom completed the training, while five higher education institutions received technical support through the Student One Health Club (SOHIC). Furthermore, AFROHUN facilitated the review of the Kinshasa School of Public Health (KSPH) curriculum to incorporate One Health core competencies. This initiative equips Master of Public Health (MPH) graduates and in-service professionals

with the skills needed to address the country's complex health challenges effectively.

Despite these efforts, gaps remain in understanding alumni progress and their integration into interdisciplinary One Health initiatives. To bridge this gap, AFROHUN undertook an alumni tracking activity aimed at evaluating the graduates' involvement in One Health approaches nationwide and improving the effectiveness of training programs. By fostering stronger links between alumni and interdisciplinary initiatives, this effort is expected to strengthen the foundation for impactful and sustainable One Health collaboration in the DRC.

Approach

The initial phase of the alumni tracking process focused on engaging former leaders of the Student One Health Clubs (SOHICs) and heads of MPH cohorts supported by USAID at the Kinshasa School

of Public Health (KSPH). The Students One Health Innovations Club (SOHIC) is a meeting place for students from a wide range of sectors and disciplines who are learning and applying One Health (OH) principles and skills, under the supervision of one or more instructors. The AFROHUN DRC office, led by the country manager, organized a series of online meetings with key representatives from SOHICs and MPH graduates.

As beneficiaries of the training, MPH alumni were invited to participate in the tracking activity to share their career trajectories, experiences, and contributions to the field. Their insights were crucial in assessing how training

outcomes translate into real-world applications. Additionally, SOHICs from five higher education institutions in the DRC played a vital role in mobilizing current students and recent graduates, acting as a bridge between alumni and their institutions.

The National One Health Platform (NOHP) networks were also leveraged to identify and engage former SOHIC members. During these discussions, participants suggested using a “snowball” approach to reach more alumni effectively. They also recommended forming a WhatsApp group as a practical and widely used platform for community engagement and information sharing.

To streamline participant identification and data collection, a shared Excel link was provided in advance. This enabled efficient data management and ensured the inclusion of relevant stakeholders.

The process culminated in a one-day online meeting, attended by SOHIC alumni, KSPH faculty members, and representatives from five higher education institutions, moderated by a former country manager and the Country SOHIC coordinator. A meeting link was shared with all participants to facilitate access and ensure active engagement. This initiative laid the groundwork for a comprehensive roadmap to enhance alumni tracking efforts.

Results

The tracking initiative engaged 250 alumni, including MPH graduates and members of SOHICs. Participants benefited from networking opportunities, professional development resources, and platforms to share their contributions. The meeting also included current MPH students and SOHIC members, who gained insights from alumni experiences, fostering a culture

of mentorship and collaboration. The table below summarizes the profile of alumni and participants, showcasing a diverse representation across human, animal, and environmental health sectors. The table also highlights gender distribution, and the multifaceted contributions alumni are making in various domains.

Table 1: Profile of Alumni and Participants

Categories	Number	Sector			
	Gender (%)	Human	Animal	Environmental	Others
MPH Alumni	18	16	1	0	1
	F (9) M (91)	F (35) M (65)	F (0) M (100)	F (0) M (0)	F (0) M (100)
MPH not yet graduated???	30	57	0	0	0
	F (2) M (98)	F (30) M (70)	F (0) M (100)	F (0) M (0)	F (0) M (0)
SOHIC Alumni	130	10	56	9	75
	F (33) M (67)	F (3) M (97)	F (18) M (82)	F (25) M (75)	F (45) M (55)
SOHIC	72	15	6	5	44
	F (27) M (73)	F (15) M (85)	F (4) M (96)	F (15) M (85)	F (45) M (55)
TOTAL	250	70	63	14	123

Alumni Contributions and Impact

Many graduates reported applying their One Health training to lead health initiatives, contribute to research, and address interdisciplinary health challenges. For instance, an MPH alumnus from the Kasai Region shared:

“Training on the One Health approach allows me to improve the understanding of the response needed to address complex public health events. Each sector should be considered if we are expecting to improve the well-being of the Congolese.”

Table 2 below details alumni integration into various sectors, demonstrating their involvement in key national and sub-national initiatives, including the Ministry of Health, Rabies control, epidemiological surveillance, and local NGOs.

Table 2. Alumni Progress and Integration

Structure	Level	Number
Former Ministry of Health	Sub-national	1
NOHP	National	15
The national focal point of Rabies	National	1
Risk Communication and Community Engagement Taskforce	National	1
Epidemiologic surveillance system	National	2
Public Health Management	Sub-national	5
Sub-national One Health platforms	Sub-national	5
Local NGO related to health	National/Sub	3
One Health research	Sub-national	4

Improved networks

The SOHIC members reported improved alumni connections with universities, fostering collaboration and community engagement.



Challenges

- 1. Resistance to the One Health Approach:** Alumni noted challenges in integrating the One Health approach due to resistance from some stakeholders, misconceptions about its purpose, and limited engagement from key actors.
- 2. Data Accessibility:** Identifying and locating alumni continues to be a significant hurdle, particularly for those who have relocated or changed their contact details, resulting in incomplete or outdated records.
- 3. Sustainability:** Establishing and maintaining a long-term alumni tracking system requires substantial resources, institutional commitment, and consistent funding, making sustainability an ongoing concern.
- 4. Alumni Engagement:** Many alumni face time constraints or fail to see the value of participating in tracking activities, leading to low levels of engagement and responsiveness.
- 5. Comprehensive Impact Assessment:** While tracking alumni career paths is relatively straightforward, assessing the real-world application of training competencies in professional settings remains a complex and resource-intensive process.
- 6. Technological Limitations:** In low-resource settings, a lack of reliable digital tools and internet connectivity significantly hinders data collection, communication, and the overall effectiveness of tracking systems and engagement mechanisms.

Recommendations

- 1. Develop Digital Tracking Platforms:** Establish user-friendly online platforms where alumni can regularly update their profiles, share experiences, and stay connected with the institution. These platforms should include features that simplify data collection and enable seamless communication.
- 2. Incentivize Alumni Participation:** Introduce incentives to encourage alumni involvement, such as offering access to networking opportunities, professional development resources, or alumni-exclusive events. These benefits can motivate alumni to actively participate in tracking activities.
- 3. Integrate tracking into program design:** Incorporate alumni tracking into program design from the start by collecting baseline data during training and implementing periodic follow-ups. This will ensure continuous data collection and strengthen the connection between alumni and the institution.
- 4. Collaborate with Stakeholders:** Engage donors, partners, and employers in the alumni tracking process to improve data quality and foster collaborative initiatives. These partnerships can also leverage alumni expertise for shared goals and enhance the overall impact of the program.
- 5. Enhance Impact Measurement:** Develop comprehensive evaluation frameworks that go beyond career outcomes to measure the broader societal and health impacts of alumni contributions. These frameworks will provide deeper insights into the effectiveness of training programs and alumni initiatives.

Lessons learned

1. Alumni tracking is an effective tool for assessing the long-term impact of training programs, offering insights into the successes and areas needing improvement.
2. Establishing strong alumni networks promotes continuous collaboration, knowledge sharing, and engagement between alumni and their institutions.
3. Engaging alumni early and maintaining consistent communication significantly facilitates tracking efforts and fosters a sense of belonging.
4. Tracking training initiatives can identify gaps in training programs, provide actionable data for curriculum refinement and improvement, benefiting both alumni and the institutions.
5. The success and sustainability of alumni tracking systems rely heavily on institutional commitment and active collaboration among stakeholders.

Conclusion

The intervention in the Democratic Republic of Congo has highlighted the transformative potential of alumni engagement for evaluating training outcomes and fostering broader health and development impacts. By building a methodical alumni tracking

system, this initiative provided a replicable model for other institutions to follow. However, the replication of this approach must consider local contexts, such as alumni accessibility and resource availability, to ensure successful implementation and

long-term sustainability. This activity underscores the critical role of alumni tracking in driving improvements in public health and One Health education and practice while strengthening institutional accountability and impact.

ABOUT AFROHUN

Africa One Health University Network (AFROHUN) is an international network, currently in 28 higher education institutions of public health, veterinary medicine, pathobiology, environmental sciences, medicine and global health, in 10 countries in Africa. The countries are *Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Liberia, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania and Uganda*. AROHUN is formerly OHCEA.

AFROHUN is working to transform the training environment and approaches in universities and allied institutions in Africa, to develop a One Health workforce: a workforce with no disciplinary boundaries. AFROHUN is building a workforce with competency to predict, detect and respond to the kind of complex health challenges we are witnessing today. To achieve this transformation, we are reviewing curricula, designing new and exciting experiential learning multidisciplinary training programs, re-tooling teachers and trainers, educating communities on existence and transmission of zoonotic and infectious diseases, while engaging national and sub-national governments to integrate One Health into national policy and strategic planning.

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