

THE INTERNATIONAL NURSES' DAY 2022:

INVESTMENT IN NURSING WORKFORCE AND RESPECT RIGHTS TO SECURE COMMUNITY HEALTH:

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The 12th May—the birthday anniversary of Florence Nightingale—the ‘*lady with the lamp*’—founder of modern nursing is also the International Nurses’ Day.

Nursing is key to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 3): *Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all ages*—with nurses being the primary providers of healthcare to all communities in all settings. It is therefore imperative to celebrate and advocate for protection of, and investment in the nursing workforce.

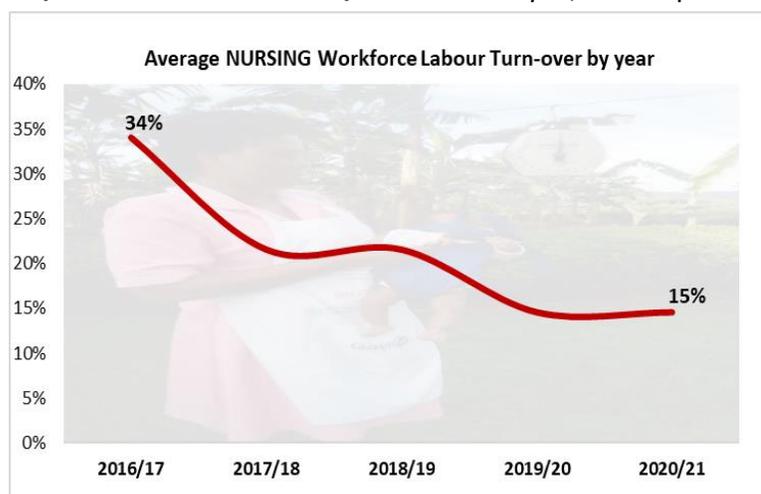
This year’s theme is; **Nurses: A Voice to Lead – Invest in Nursing and Respect Rights to secure Global Health.**

The need for investment in attraction & retention of nursing jobs, training and education, leadership and practice and nurses’ safety in the face of the pandemics such as COVID-19 and others has become ever more highlighted—especially recognising the centrality of the nursing workforce to COVID-19 response effectiveness and resilience in Uganda. A deliberate and proactive investment package of the nursing and midwifery workforce boosts health system resilience; --and this includes appropriate remuneration, safe work-place environments and other non-monetary incentives.

Of the total health workforce of 10,319 in the Catholic Health Network in Uganda, the nursing workforce accounts for nearly 1 in every 3 health workers (**26.7%**)—of whom 85% are female—with average age 28 – 35 years.

The Uganda Catholic Medical Bureau (UCMB) network has implemented a series of network and supported institutional investments—such as training and education e.g. through the UCMB and individual institutional Scholarship programs, and other incentives—especially non-monetary initiatives, which have partly facilitated a **progressive 5-year reduction in the annual nursing labour turn-over from 34% in FY 2016/17 to 15% in FY 2020/21**. For example, in the past 20 years, the UCMB scholarship program benefited over 1,180 beneficiaries, 35.2% of whom were to the nursing workforce. And this is coupled with bonding terms which foster retention.

The reduction was most significantly observed among the Enrolled nursing workforce—which declined by 31% against 8% for Registered Nurses in the 5-year period. The graph is illustrative.



Despite the investments, challenges remain. The average annual nursing workforce labour turn-over rate of 15% is comparably high—which impairs sustainable quality of care, threatens patient safety, results in high costs of labour recruitment, replacement and new training in the network. This is mainly due to variations of remuneration (salaries) between the UCMB network nursing workforce—and generally the faith-based health sub-sector and their public sector workforce counterparts of same & similar training and qualification—which creates an osmotic attraction, causing disruption in consistent supply of quality health care services.

For example, In comparison with the recently (2022) revised Government of Uganda pay rate for Enrolled Nurses in public sector health facilities, the lowest paid enrolled nurse in the UCMB network will earn 15% of what her counter-part (enrolled nurse) in government sector earns—i.e. **while her colleague in government earns Ushs. 100, the UCMB enrolled nurse will receive Ushs. 15**, while the ‘highest’ paid Enrolled Nurse in the UCMB network will earn 73% of what her counterpart in public sector will earn!

This inequity—which, if to be remedied, would require external support, lest the UCMB health facilities cease being accessible and affordable, is grossly disruptive to the continuum of quality service delivery and impinges on the nursing workforce rights to decent living.

This scenario is primarily responsible for the relatively high labour turn-over—and threatens the gains that have been achieved over several decades in the faith-based health sector.

This has been worsened by inequities in access to other opportunities such as training & education, access to vaccination and career progression and recognition et cetera.

On this occasion to commemorate the International Nurses’ Day, the Uganda Catholic Medical Bureau (UCMB) calls upon all the nursing workforce to, at all times be mindful and jealously adhere to the nurse’s four universal and fundamental responsibilities—namely 1) **to promote health**, 2) **to prevent illness**, 3) **to restore health**, and 4) **to alleviate suffering**—and further wishes to remind the nursing workforce that they have an obligation to safeguard, respect and actively promote people’s health rights at all times and in all places.

The UCMB further calls upon all stakeholders to proactively support efforts and initiatives to harmonise PNFP sub-sector health workforce remuneration—to be consistent with the national aspiration of ensuring access to affordable and quality healthcare for the population.



Figure 1: A Nurse recording on the immunization card during an Outreach Immunisation Activity

“We have a moral obligation to protect all health and care workers, ensure their rights and provide them with decent work in a safe and enabling environment. This includes access to vaccines. As we recover and rebuild, investments in emergency preparedness and response must prioritise the education and employment of health and care workers, including nurses.” **DR. TEDROS ADHANOM GHEBREYESUS**, DIRECTOR GENERAL, WHO.