

The OSHiversity training and development initiative

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The African continent has a population of over one billion and the sub-Saharan African region has the largest youth population, globally.¹ One would think that this would mean growth and productivity. However, because this population is not adequately trained and skilled, harnessing these potentials becomes difficult. According to reports, only 14% of Africa's entire working population has formal wage-paying jobs, while 86% are in the informal sector.²

In seeking ways to contribute towards bridging the competency gap in needed skills to make more Africans employable, we came up with the idea of the OSHiversity training and development initiative. It is important to note that OSHiversity uses both for-profit and not-for-profit governance models. We offer occupational health and safety (OHS) training to corporate organisations that are able and willing to pay for their employees' training; we use those revenues to meet our not-for-profit social concerns. These funds are invested into offering FREE OHS training to Africans as well as citizens from low- and medium-income countries (LMICs).

OUR MOTIVATION

We were driven to action by the observations listed below:

- Scarcity of trained OHS professionals in developing countries
- The opportunities offered by the new world of technology, including the ability to conduct online classes
- The potential for meaningful employment value derived from training
- The need to improve safety in our workplaces
- The continuous need to reduce 'quackery' in the field of OHS

Reasons for Africans and citizens from LMICs not venturing into OHS professions include:

- Few institutions offering relevant courses
- High cost of training
- Poverty
- Few employment opportunities for trained OHS experts

These considerations guided us to conceptualise a skills and competency improvement programme that addresses the needs of new entrants to the field of OSH and those seeking specialised training in specific knowledge areas. We have developed a model that focuses less on the issuance of certificates and more on competency improvement. This does not mean that we are averse to certifications but we want to build skills – a strong driver in the future of work. This being true, then the need for everyone to have access to smart online OSH training should be a collective resolve.

OUR OBJECTIVES

- To train the layperson with a passion for OHS and help him/her to translate that passion into competences
- To encourage a culture of competencies rather than certification

These training programmes were carefully designed to attract fresh university graduates who are interested in the OSH profession, to guide and direct other professionals in the direction of OSH, to

guide and train existing OSH professionals towards specialisation, and to provide training to experts in search of task-specific, short-term training for specific job profiles.

We took cognisance of areas of training that are usually not available, even in countries where OHS training institutions exist. Most of these courses are needed for the growth of OHS research and training effectiveness in Africa and other LMICs. Some of the courses that we have developed to meet these specific needs are:

- OHS career advisory and coaching
- Introduction to OHS management
- Introduction to occupational hygiene
- Workplace mental health and wellbeing training
- How to train and facilitate OHS programmes
- Workplace health and safety leadership
- Patient safety and process improvement in healthcare
- The science of developing and managing OHS data
- Workplace health and safety supervision
- Health and safety in facility management
- How to conduct OSH research
- The art of abstract writing

These are our primary focus areas while our Faculty Advisory Board continues to identify and develop new training modules. Our classes will run online to have a wider reach. Anyone, in any corner of the world, who has a computer or smart phone with Internet connectivity, can join our training. There are no fees to register for our classes; the only pre-qualification is interest and a willingness to learn. Participants are encouraged to be active, complete all tasks, and use their acquired knowledge and skills to improve health and safety in their workplaces and to improve their competencies and personal growth.

Participants have the option either to complete the training and leave, or to request a certificate of attendance; no one is under any obligation to request a certificate. To receive a certificate, participants must have completed pre-course training tasks and post-course assessments, and have participated in class. The pre-course assessments are used to measure the level of individual knowledge before class, and the final assessments measure the training impact. The application cost of a certificate is USD 8–15, depending on the course size and duration. Every certificate paid for indirectly helps us fund at least two persons to attend our classes for FREE. We are open to funding, donations and volunteering.

The Faculty Advisory Board has six members who are experts from different fields of health and safety. The Board has equal gender representation. The members are:

- Dr Yohama Caraballo-Arias: Occupational health physician, Venezuela
- Dr Kevin Uzoma: Occupational medicine physician and international healthcare consultant, UK
- Dr Amira Omrane: Occupational medicine physician, Tunisia.

- Wellington Mudenha: Environmental safety, health and quality expert, South Africa
- Dr Chinwe Adebisi: Physician and health economist with a post-graduate residency qualification in psychiatry, Nigeria
- Ehi Iden: Occupational safety, health and wellness management consultant, Nigeria

Our first course, 'Managing mental health at the workplace', will be held on 17 December 2020. Information about courses can be found at www.oshversity.com.

REFERENCES

1. The World Bank in Africa. World Bank; 2020. Available from: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/region/afr/overview> (accessed 3 Dec 2020).
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