

A checklist for implementing rural pathways to train and support health workers in low and middle–income countries

Background

There is a strong interest in investing in rural pathways to develop and support the rural health workforce and improve rural health outcomes, worldwide. However, there has been limited consolidation of evidence to inform effective action.

Objective

This WHO–sponsored project involved the development of a Rural Pathways Checklist: a complete guide to implementation of rural pathways in a range of contexts, particularly low and middle–income countries (LMIC).

Method

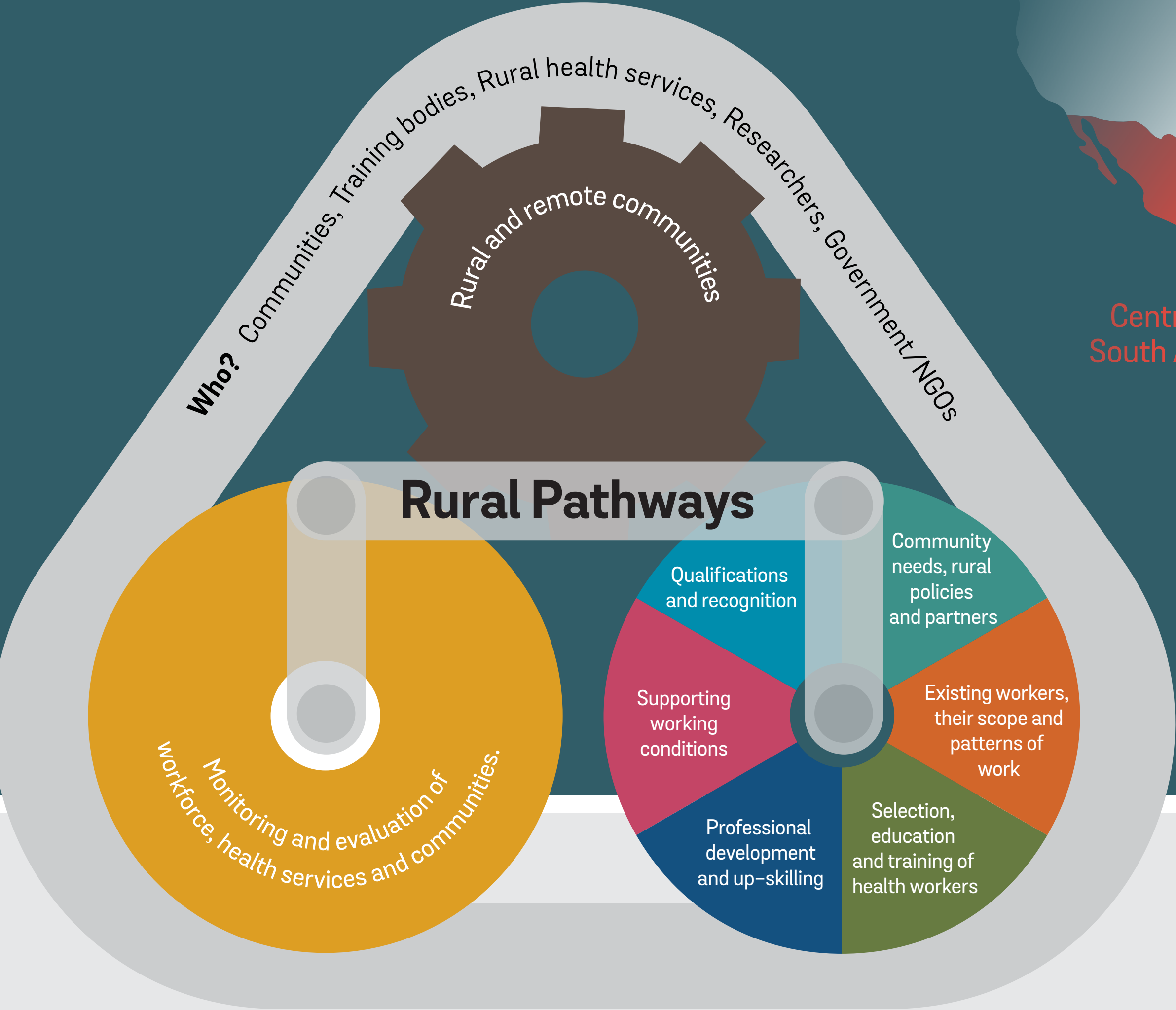
- The Checklist was based on:
- Concept mapping via two focus groups with LMIC stakeholders
 - A scoping review of evidence including 127 articles spanning effective pathway strategies in LMIC
 - A policy analysis and review of LMIC rural health context
 - 3 stages of virtual consultation, involving feedback from rural pathways implementers
 - Regular meetings of a Steering Committee

Checklist actions



	Question	Evidence
	What do our rural communities need?	Working with rural communities is essential to define priorities and involve them in solutions.
	Do we already have workers with the skills for this scope of work?	Rural and remote healthcare teams who are appropriately trained, and supported to use their breadth of skills can improve access to comprehensive local care. They are more satisfied and likely to be retained.
	How can we select workers for this role from the community?	Selecting people with a connection to “place” and a commitment to serve others, motivated to learn and invested in improving access is important.
	How can we effectively educate and train people in rural areas and for the breadth of skills needed by rural communities?	Learning through distributed training systems using locally–available qualified teachers and supervisors, in the place where people are going to practice is important.
	How can we ensure practice conditions in the community promote health worker satisfaction, recruitment and retention?	A supportive learning culture in the health service is essential along with sufficient supplies, clinical infrastructure, good remuneration and sustainable workload.
	How can trained rural workers be accredited and recognised for transferability of qualifications?	Accreditation and formal professional recognition recognises the worker’s training and scope of practice and reinforces the value of their personal commitment in doing more training.
	How can rural workers be professionally supported?	Professional supervision and networking opportunities (virtual or face–to–face) reduce health worker isolation and reinforce skills development.
	Is the program being implemented as planned, with progress towards the intended outcomes?	Monitoring rural pathways allows for quality improvement and provides evidence about the effect on rural workforce supply, qualifications and retention along with health, social and economic impacts on rural communities.

Stakeholder map



Exemplars from WHO regions



Conclusion

The Rural Pathways Checklist signals a way forward for conceptualising, developing and benchmarking rural pathways to train and support health workers, for the benefit of rural communities around the world.