Focus Areas: Health, Data for Decision Making

Service Provided:

- Strategic Landscape Assessments
- Detailed Process Mapping
- Solution Build and Implementation
- Capacity Building and Training
- Stakeholder Alignment and Management

Partners:

- Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
- Ministries of Health
- Technology providers
- Implementing partners
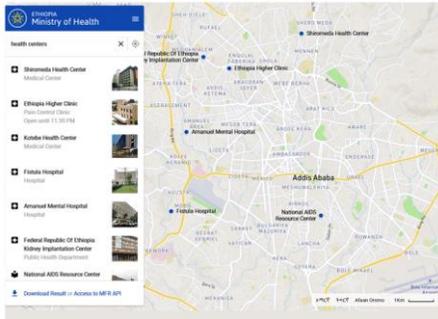
Improving Data Use in Sub-Saharan Africa

Challenge

Improved health outcomes cannot simply be met by providing new medicines or health technologies. Instead, health workers and administrators need reliable data on the burden of disease, patient history and behavior, and the health of neighboring populations in order to best deliver care and direct resources. The use of timely, high-quality data is essential to strengthening health systems and providing efficient health services.
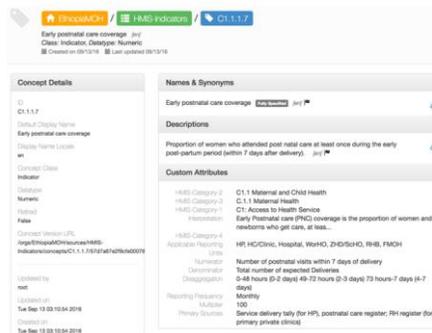
Despite enormous strides in improving health outcomes, health information systems (HIS) remain fragmented and inefficient in many low- and middle-income countries. Often funders and implementing partners duplicate disease-specific interventions. Incentives and policies are untested, nonexistent, or not structured to improve data quality and use. Additionally, information typically only flows up for reporting to central offices and donors, and it is rarely available in a usable format for those delivering frontline care. Further, investments in local capacity and training on how to collect, analyze, and use data effectively is chronically lacking.

Solution

In late 2015, Vital Wave began working on the Data Use Partnership, an initiative based on the theory that specific drivers create a demand for data and a culture of data use. Introducing standards in data collection, aggregation, and analysis creates higher-quality data, triggers increased demand for data, and increases

➔ *Master Facility Registry*

➔ *National Health Data Dictionary*

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use of data for informed decision-making. Informed decision-making leads to better performance of the health system and improved health outcomes. Vital Wave and its partners put this theory into practice in Malawi and Ethiopia.

Both countries envisioned a transformation in the culture of data use supported through targeted investment in digital health infrastructure and HIS governance. In Malawi, Vital Wave supported the Ministry of Health by reviewing all technical systems supporting national HIV/AIDS programs and developing a strategic plan for system integration to reduce data fragmentation. In Ethiopia, Vital Wave supported the Ministry of Health by developing and implementing a new national strategy for transforming healthcare delivery through data use—including plans for an integrated national HIS architecture and governance structure, costing for a DHIS2 national rollout, and two foundational systems to support interoperable information exchange between health system stakeholders. In both countries, the firm built capacity within government and technical partner teams to create long-term ownership and sustainable operations.

Results

In Malawi, a comprehensive HIS improvement and interoperability plan was developed, based on the Open Health Information Exchange model, with detailed implementation plans for local technology partners. Vital Wave's work in Malawi represents a replicable process for governments who wish to reduce system fragmentation to achieve specific health program objectives.

In Ethiopia, the firm's work set the foundation for implementing DHIS2 nationally. In addition, Vital Wave and its partners implemented the National Health Data Dictionary—providing a common language for clinicians, technicians, pharmacists, and administrators to communicate and exchange health information—and the Master Facility Registry—providing transparent and efficient access to facility data for the Ministry and its partners. These two tools allow disparate, disconnected systems to communicate, ensure accuracy in aggregated data reports, and improve facility planning and resource management.

Vital Wave's work in Malawi and Ethiopia demonstrates how governments can design and implement initiatives that reduce siloed data and increase the value of existing and new data systems. In turn, these efforts make data easier to share, understand, and use—further strengthening health systems and care.