



Improving Communications for Informed Decision-Making: A Strategic Secondment to Mali's Center for Documentation, Planning, Training, and Health Information

The Health Policy Plus (HP+) project, funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), aims to improve the enabling environment for equitable and sustainable health services, supplies, and delivery systems. HP+ strengthens the capacity of in-country partners, organizations, and institutions to steward change and improve performance within systems. In Mali, HP+ is making notable progress toward this end through the secondment of staff to Malian government ministries. This brief describes how one seconded staff member is working to strengthen ministerial capacities to effectively manage, implement, and self-sustain improved performance. For more detail on HP+'s approach to secondments, see [Case Study on Secondments: A Promising Approach to Government Sector Capacity Strengthening in Mali](#).

Improving Data for Decision-Making

Dr. Yacouba Koné was seconded to the Ministry of Health and Social Development's (MOHSD) Center for Documentation, Planning, Training, and Health Information (CDPTHI) in 2019. Dr. Koné brought extensive experience in data analysis, training, facilitation, and field epidemiology. His prior involvement with the Center meant he understood the internal protocols and staff roles, helping him to quickly earn the trust of ministry colleagues.

Dr. Koné began by working with the team to jointly assess opportunities for improvement

and where to prioritize his support. The team agreed that secondment activities should focus on strengthening staff's ability to collect, analyze, and present key health data to various ministry stakeholders.

CDPTHI staff play a crucial role in Mali's health decision-making processes at all levels. By synthesizing and disseminating health data to regional health directorates, technical and financial partners, and other health stakeholders through monthly, quarterly, and annual reports, the Center provides essential, synthesized information for busy decision-makers across the health system.

These reports include visual representations of epidemiological and health system data analyses, extracted from the District Health Information Software 2 (DHIS2). Most importantly, the reports document progress on various health indicators, which informs action planning and allows government departments to respond proactively to emerging health needs or threats. For example, a report indicating an abnormal elevation in cases of a particular disease would alert health officials of the need to investigate the cause of the outbreak and establish additional disease control measures.

Before Dr. Koné began supporting the CDPTHI, errors in data collection or analysis frequently led to inaccurate reporting. Often, readers would need to use valuable time cross-checking data in the DHIS2, and this slowed or hampered decision-making processes significantly.

Process and Outcomes

Dr. Koné employed several strategies to strengthen the capacity of the Center's health information system staff to improve how they analyzed and reported information. To begin, he identified problems and areas that needed support by examining data from previous reports and reports that were in draft form. He noted various errors related to the detection and correction of outliers, the optimal presentation of data, and the calculation and interpretation of data reliability. After establishing these areas for improvement, Dr. Koné worked closely with personnel responsible for statistical health system reports (approximately 15 staff) and epidemiological reports (approximately 12 staff), offering in-depth coaching to ensure that they could use the skills they learned, train future new staff, and institutionalize the processes as standard procedures.

His collaborative approach helped staff to feel invested in improving quality and to take ownership of the new skills they acquired. As he mentored staff through the process of developing several reports, Dr. Koné empowered his colleagues to identify errors, make corrections, produce more sophisticated analyses of raw data, and present findings clearly in stakeholder reports and briefs.

Thanks to Dr. Koné's work, ministry staff are now able to independently create high-quality tables and graphs, organize data, and identify and correct errors when collecting, analyzing, and presenting data. Staff now understand the best ways to visually present different types of data and communicate results. They can also detect data trends and produce time comparison curves, which further fosters health officials' preparedness to respond to evolving crises.

Colleagues have noted that his support has noticeably increased the quality of the ministry's

"[Dr. Koné's] support has been vital to improving the quality of data entered in the DHIS2 database," says the Director of the CDPTHI. "We hope to see ongoing assistance to [help us] continue increasing the quality of data at all levels of the health system, which allows for better decision-making."

outputs: both raw data and reports are now more comprehensive, timely, accurate, and consistent. Now, the reports provide a unique source of reliable data and comprehensive analysis to those who routinely use the data, including the Secretary General of the MOHSD and partners determining where to invest resources. The improvement in data quality has reinforced development partners' and government colleagues' trust in the CDPTHI.

Moreover, planning and decision-making on the ground has improved due to the transmission of trustworthy data to district-level health officials. For example, when data on neonates helped the Center identify a problem with the use of chlorhexidine during delivery, Dr. Koné helped draft a technical note to improve communication regarding the use of chlorhexidine. This support was invaluable to the General Directorate for Health and Public Hygiene and to the subgroup of health workers focused on neonates.

Dr. Koné's secondment has aimed to strengthen the Center's performance in a sustainable manner and, in turn, to support the MOHSD's decision-making. In many areas, this objective has already been achieved. In addition, Dr. Koné's work to institutionalize within the CDPTHI internal learning processes for new staff has helped to ensure that high turnover among government staff is not a barrier to the sustainable provision of high-quality information to guide Mali's path to better health system performance.

CONTACT US

Health Policy Plus
1331 Pennsylvania Ave NW, Suite 600
Washington, DC 20004
www.healthpolicyplus.com
policyinfo@thepalladiumgroup.com

Health Policy Plus (HP+) is a seven-year cooperative agreement funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development under Agreement No. AID-OAA-A-15-00051, beginning August 28, 2015. HP+ is implemented by Palladium, in collaboration with Avenir Health, Futures Group Global Outreach, Plan International USA, Population Reference Bureau, RTI International, ThinkWell, and the White Ribbon Alliance for Safe Motherhood.

This publication was produced for review by the U.S. Agency for International Development. It was prepared by HP+. The information provided in this document is not official U.S. Government information and does not necessarily reflect the views or positions of the U.S. Agency for International Development or the U.S. Government.