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WEST AFRICA HEALTH INFORMATICS TEAM (WAHIT)

What are the needs?

Health information systems are a foundational piece of health infrastructure. They support a government's ability to prioritize and allocate resources to provide routine health services and respond to health emergencies. During the 2015 National Health Information Systems Summit in Ghana, all 15 members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) cited a lack of technical capacity to maintain and adapt digital health platforms as contributing to challenges faced during the Ebola outbreak. Many of these countries lack a critical mass of local experts needed to build and maintain health information systems, and often, reliance on external support jeopardizes the successful implementation of digital tools for health—impeding progress on developing public health systems.

Responding to these needs, the West African Health Organization (WAHO) established WAHIT to provide technical leadership and support in health information systems to ministries of health within ECOWAS, with priority offered to the Ebola-affected states of Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. WAHIT will consist of local health informatics experts who will strengthen capacity to make immediate improvements to health information systems and provide direct support in the event of another major outbreak. In addition, WAHIT aims to set minimum standards for the utility of health information systems among ECOWAS ministries of health. The initiative will work toward sustainability by providing recommendations for establishing a regional center of excellence in health information systems within WAHO.

Our goal is to build capacity to strengthen health information systems in West Africa, leading to improved routine health data reporting and improved detection and prevention of disease outbreaks.

Objectives

- Engage with ministries of health to define software needs for national health information systems and develop standard operating procedures

- Improve the robustness and interoperability of national and regional health information systems

- Provide technical support and build capacities at ministries of health

- Build the capacity of WAHO in health informatics technical leadership by establishing a regional team of health informatics experts

- Increase capacity for technical support at national and regional levels by developing a database of West African-based health informatics experts to supplement WAHIT

- Conduct a sustainability assessment with recommendations for transitioning WAHIT to a WAHO center of excellence

Who is WAHIT?

WAHIT will start as a five-person team comprised of a technical team leader, a business analyst, and software developers from the West Africa region. WAHIT is led by WAHO, with funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and support from USAID's Health Policy Plus (HP+) project.

How will WAHIT work?

WAHIT will identify priority technical initiatives in each country with near-term results that can be quickly realized and will demonstrate value. Building off of prior assessments and the prioritized improvements identified with WAHO and USAID, WAHIT and HP+ will review each national health information system with the objective of determining the feasibility of implementing improvements within the first year and gathering the requirements to make such improvements. Throughout the first year, WAHIT will test and assess innovative approaches for providing technical assistance to ministries of health within the region, funded by USAID.

Building on its global experiences, HP+ will train WAHIT members using a customized health informatics curriculum, preparing them on a diverse range of topics from health systems generally to server configuration. The comprehensive training will include initial coursework, ad hoc training, and on-the-job mentoring.

Sustainability

The first year will serve as a proof-of-concept for a sustainable program that will become part of a broader regional center of excellence for health informatics. All activities will be designed to test innovative approaches in providing sustainable health information system support to ECOWAS countries, while making immediate feasible improvements from hands-on mentorship and training of WAHIT

Examples of WAHIT initiatives

- Integration of separate DHIS2 instance for malaria reporting into the national DHIS2 instance.

- Creation of a dashboard for reproductive maternal, newborn, and child health based on existing indicators

- Integration of the newly approved tuberculosis form into the national DHIS2

- Automation of national health management information system data into WAHO's DHIS2 instance

- Continued training of district monitoring and evaluation officers in data entry and reporting quality

- Support strategy development for training ministry of health staff in using data to make informed decisions

members. At the end of the first year, the approaches will be updated based on findings and included in recommendations for establishing the health information system center of excellence. Ultimately, the center would serve as an informatics hub to (1) improve management capacity in health informatics, (2) provide training and resources, and (3) provide technical support when needed.

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