The West Africa Health Informatics Team

The West Africa Health Informatics Team (WAHIT) is a proof of concept initiative funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development’s (USAID’s) Global Development Lab to test innovative technical assistance models and build health informatics leadership. WAHIT is a regional team of software developers and informatics experts based in the West African Health Organization (WAHO), with technical support provided by the USAID-funded Health Policy Plus project. WAHIT provides on-demand informatics technical assistance to countries within the region while building local software engineering capacity to support long-term sustainability of health information systems in the region.

Background

With growing recognition of the connection between human and animal health, One Health approaches that facilitate information sharing across sectors are needed. In the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) region, human and animal health data are often collected through siloed data systems, leading to incomplete surveillance of potential threats. Therefore, systems that allow for easy sharing of data and information are needed.

To facilitate information sharing across sectors and countries, WAHO organized the “One-Health Capacity Building Workshop for Human and Animal Health Data Managers” from March 5–18, 2018, in Abidjan, in collaboration with the World Bank’s Regional Disease Surveillance Systems Enhancement project and ECOWAS health ministries. The objectives of the workshop were to:

- Introduce the concept of One Health in the regional DHIS2 platform
- Identify a strategy that improves the integration of data within a One Health perspective
- Address challenges with the regional platform and identify areas of technical assistance to efficiently introduce One Health at the national level
- Strengthen the skills and capacity of the regional data managers

Several challenges constrain countries from completely adopting the One Health data platform, preventing WAHO from achieving its mission to prevent and control diseases across the region through strengthening health information systems.
management systems. Data managers from each country represented shared their experiences using the WAHO regional platform to upload data from national platforms. Import to and utilization of the regional platform varies across ECOWAS countries due to incomplete and low quality epidemiological data. Slow internet connections coupled with the already time-consuming process to upload the data are also barriers to importing into the regional system. In addition, data managers expressed challenges with the way animal health data is configured and collected in a decentralized process.

**WAHIT’s Solution**

During the workshop, WAHIT facilitated sessions on integration and interoperability of data systems. To ensure better data quality and completeness, while limiting multiple data entries and reducing human error, WAHIT developed an Extract, Transform, Load (ETL) application, which automates the weekly import of integrated disease surveillance and response (IDSR) data from the Excel form used by countries into the WAHO regional DHIS2-based platform. During the workshop, WAHIT introduced the ETL application to data managers and trained them to use it.

**Results**

By the end of the workshop, national data managers for both animal and human health better understood how to structure and manage the flow of information across sectors. The participants also expressed their challenges and consulted with WAHIT on additional technical assistance needs.

In total, WAHIT trained 25 data managers from 12 countries within the ECOWAS region on the use of the ETL application and provided DHIS2 capacity building support. The ETL application was widely accepted by the data managers, who requested the full application be operational by the end of April 2018. Through the use of the ETL application created by WAHIT, countries are now able to easily input information into the regional platform so that WAHO can continue to monitor health trends across the region.

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