



LESSONS LEARNED ADAPTING ETHIOPIA'S HEALTH SUPPLY CHAIN TO COVID-19

The USAID Digital Health Activity (DHA) is a five-year project that works with the Government of Ethiopia to build sustainable, resilient, interoperable health information systems (HIS) to ensure that the health sector has the data, analytics, and relevant digital skills to advance the health and well-being of all Ethiopians. DHA is implemented by JSI. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the DHA team in Ethiopia supported the national pandemic response by ensuring the availability of critical COVID-19 supplies to protect frontline workers and citizens. This support included tracking infected patients, distributing scarce medical supplies to locations where they were most needed, replacing critical supplies via tracking, and expediting movement of supplies through customs.

DHA learned several key lessons from implementing and managing the COVID-19 surveillance and tracking system, especially with regard to the role of the national health supply chain. The most significant lesson from Ethiopia's digital health response to COVID-19 is that an adaptive digital supply chain system saves lives.

To ensure availability of COVID-19 essential commodities, DHA quickly leveraged human resources and infrastructure to enhance existing HIS (see figure below). These adaptations involved rapidly customizing and deploying existing tools, leveraging existing teams of well-trained personnel, and evolving an infrastructure suitable for routine and COVID-19-specific digital health systems.



LESSONS LEARNED FROM DHA'S COVID-19 RESPONSE

- Real-time supply chain information is crucial for emergency response. Managing supplies during a pandemic requires real-time supply chain information. Adaptation of the LMIS led to the accelerated movement of resources from one location to another. Such adaptability is crucial when repurposing and deploying existing supply-chain tools to pandemic response sites. In addition, real-time supply data should be readily accessible, easy to understand, and capable of triggering notifications and alerts. To this end, DHA built a Fanos¹ dashboard for the Ethiopian COVID-19 Emergency Operation Center, which has enabled the Center to prioritize, redistribute, and minimize the waste of personal protective equipment (PPE), drugs, and supplies at COVID-19 treatment centers, thanks to real-time, accessible supply-chain data.
- Point-of-service systems that track consumption at the health facility level are essential components of the supply chain. DHA expanded the use of Dagu² as a COVID-19 commodities inventory management system at health facilities that serve as COVID-19 treatment centers. An innovative multi-store concept resulted in a more efficient approach to dispensing critical items. In addition, the existing Dagu and Fanos integrations enabled data visibility at the treatment center level, enabling end users to access supply data and request supplies more efficiently.
- Digitizing business processes is critical to supply chain efficiency during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. DHA and its predecessor projects have supported the Ethiopian Pharmaceuticals Supply Agency to automate procurement. DHA maintains and supports the Vitas system,³ which helps to reduce procurement time for COVID-19 essential items, such as face masks, sanitizer, and test kits. DHA also customized Vitas to manage supplies obtained through donation, a mechanism for a significant amount of COVID-19 supplies. At the start of the pandemic, DHA developed a simplified process to expedite licensing and registration of COVID-19 supplies. In the latest version of eRIS,⁴ applicants for expedited licensing, such as alcohol-based sanitizer manufacturers, do not have to enter the existing queue. This has shortened the licensing process from three or more days to same-day licensing, with fewer documentation requirements. The new version of eRIS designed by DHA also decreases the time applicants spend onsite at the Ethiopian Food and Drug Administration (EFDA), reducing the risk of COVID-19 infection for applicants and EFDA staff. Additionally, in the latest version of eRIS, transparency and efficiency have been increased, contributing to essential items reaching the market faster.

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³ Vitas: A platform designed to support logistics management information and warehouse management and inventory control.

⁴ eRIS is the Electronic Regulatory Information System that facilitates the registration and import permit processes

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¹ Fanos is an online tool that makes Ethiopian Pharmaceuticals Supply Agency supply chain data accessible in real time through the visual presentation of selected supply chain indicators.

² Dagu is an open-source, custom software solution for supply chain management and inventory control in hospitals and health centers. In 2020, DHA provided Dagu support to 533 health facilities.