The Electronic Community Health Information System for Health Extension Program Improvement Project

Ethiopia is home to a large rural population, with limited access to healthcare services. The use of digital health innovations in community health services can offer improved access to care, and improved data quality and data use, and better health outcomes.

A DIGITAL HEALTH SOLUTION

The Government of Ethiopia has called for an ambitious plan to optimize its Health Extension Program, which governs its community health structure, to ensure universal health access across the country. In 2020, JSI, with funding from the Children's Investment Fund Foundation, answered that call with the Electronic Community Health Information System (eCHIS) Scale-up for Health Extension Program Improvement project. The eCHIS project aims to optimize implementation of the Health Extension Program, in general, and improve reproductive, maternal, newborn, and child health outcomes, in particular. eCHIS is centered around tablet disbursement and use of a consistently upgraded mobile health application utilized by health extension workers (HEW). HEW are community-based, frontline health workers that serve often as gateways into the health system across the country.

The eCHIS project digitizes existing community health manuals, tools, and service workflows, along with all reporting forms. It allows HEWs to easily pull household member health data to ensure continuity of service, it gives each HEW access to counseling guides and aids supporting their delivery of the highest quality of healthcare, and it reduces paper-based reporting burdens.

Photo Credit: Robin Hammond

THE GOALS OF ECHIS SCALE-UP FOR HEP IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

- Improve quality of care, referral linkages, and use of data for evidence-informed decision-making at all levels of the health system;
- Unleash the power of eCHIS to transform community-level health data for health extension worker (HEW) performance management, targeting primary health services; and
- Design and implement performance management, incentive, and fingerprint biometrics interventions on the eCHIS platform that can be scaled nationally.

eCHIS is associated with the following advancements in health service delivery

Improves performance monitoring and analysis

Enables tailored services to households and individuals thanks to being able to access their now digitized health data at point-of-care or at their household

Reduces HEWs' administration workload compared to the previous paper-based system

Avoids loss and falsification of data, and data incompleteness

Simplifies data and report retrieval

This project began with training HEWs and supervisors on tablet use, and implementation in "learning woredas" - six pilot communities that could teach us how to implement our eCHIS innovations more widely. We have pivoted at several points throughout these three years, ensuring more or better on-site mentorship, adding new modules for other diseases and preventive actions (counseling on malaria, TB, HIV and AIDS, childhood wellness, and general app updates), testing biometric data use, and strengthening performance-based incentives and program management. Though significant further investment is needed, particularly in network connectivity, data management and storage, and power infrastructure, the investments made to provide early data on outcomes have been powerful:

- A greater number of pregnant women accessing all four antenatal care visits thanks to eCHIS ability to remind HEW to follow-up before appointments with reminders.

- A greater number of infants receiving essential newborn care.

- A greater number of children receiving immunizations.

Photo Credit: Antonio Fiorente

Find out more about this work, here.   **jsi.com/ethiopia**

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