



USING PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH TO STRENGTHEN DISTRICT HEALTH MANAGERS' SKILLS

Background

The shortage of staff in sub-Saharan African health systems is a well-documented problem. However, interventions to improve staff performance have been minimal.

PERFORM2Scale adopted a participatory action research (PAR) approach to help strengthen the management skills of District Health Management Teams (DHMTs) in Ghana and Malawi. Ghana and Malawi are decentralised contexts and staff have greater autonomy to use human resource and health system strategies to improve workforce performance.

This poster shows how PAR can be used to improve workforce performance in decentralised contexts – an important step to achieving UHC.

What did we do?

DHMTs were helped to identify their own work force-based problems. They were supported by Country Research Teams and government officers. For example:

Yilo Krobo district, Ghana: Yaws was a known problem in the municipality but there was low case detection

Salima district, Malawi: Only 20% of health facilities were supervised in the 2018/19 fiscal year

An action research cycle of Plan – Act – Observe – Reflect was employed to help the DHMTs to address those problems and to learn from their actions.



DHMTs conducted a situation analysis of their districts, identified and analysed problems, and developed health systems and human resource strategies to address those issues.

Facilitated visits and inter-district meetings (3 districts per cohort) were run, encouraging DHMTs to reflect, interact and learn from their experiences and other DHMTs. The cycle was repeated several times to embed the process within the teams. A total of nine districts participated in both Ghana and Malawi.

About PERFORM2Scale

PERFORM2Scale took a highly effective, management strengthening intervention and up-scaled it in Ghana, Malawi & Uganda. This four-year study showed that the intervention is effective in developing management competencies and can lead to sustainable improvements in health workforce performance and service delivery.



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What did we conclude?

The PAR approach can be used to **improve health workforce performance in decentralised contexts, helping teams to make better use of available human resources.** We saw that it enabled the development and application of effective health system and human resource strategies by DHMTs which led to service delivery improvements. This also led to increased management capacity of the district health managers.

What we found

Improved teamwork was registered in DHMTs in both countries. This led to both instant and gradual successes for the DHMTs.



In Yilo Krobo district in Ghana, yaws case detection and treatment increased:

- 2017 - 2 cases
- 2018 - 33 cases
- 2019 - 88 cases

An increase in the detection of neglected tropical diseases (eg 171 cases of ulcers) was also experienced – a welcome if unintended consequence. Other changes included:

- Increased knowledge of managers, supervisors and health staff about yaws
- Trained volunteers on NTDs case detection
- WhatsApp platform for health information searching
- Health staff empowered to detect/treat yaws & other NTDs
- Inclusion of NTD cases in performance appraisal
- Stimulated more regular interactions between DHMT and facilities



In Malawi, improvements included:

- Two supervisory teams put in place
- Supervision vehicles secured and ring-fenced
- New resources were mobilised (via engaged partners)
- Recording and reporting improved, eg malaria case reporting increased from 17% (timeliness) and 60% (completeness) to 100% for both

The approach stimulated more regular interactions between DHMTs and health facilities in both contexts. We saw:

- Better planning, reporting and feedback loops
- Rekindled and strengthened partnerships between the health system and community, leading to improved service delivery
- Better involvement of development partners in supporting DHMT work

The intervention also provided opportunities for district managers to come together to share experiences, learn from each other and overcome challenges.



Further information on PERFORM2Scale can be found here:

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