

## The need for strengthening management/workforce performance at district level

In Malawi, we need more health workers and better health workforce performance to achieve Universal Health Coverage. Managers at district level are being supported to improve annual planning and implementation in the devolved structure of service delivery. They also need a simple and sustainable way of improving workforce performance management and the relevant management competencies.

## The PERFORM management strengthening intervention

The PERFORM initiative developed a management strengthening intervention (MSI) and tested it with District Health Management Teams (DHMT) in Ghana, Uganda and Tanzania from 2012-14. The MSI used an *action research* approach (see Figure 1) to enable the teams to analyse their own problems related to workforce performance and develop appropriate workplans (**plan**); implement the workplans (**act**) and learn about management from the experience (**observe** and **reflect**). The MSI was facilitated by national research teams in each country through meetings, short workshops (Figure 2) and joint meetings of DHMTs, and follow-up support. The teams tackled problems such as poor supervision, high absenteeism and ineffective staff appraisal systems. They developed

integrated strategies to be included in the annual district plans, largely using available resources. The evaluation of the MSI showed that it helped to strengthen management for health workforce performance. Some strategies were even attributed to improving service delivery. For example, in Ghana, improved supervision of Community Health Officers led to better record-keeping and defaulter tracing and ultimately higher vaccination coverage and reduced drop-out rates. The MSI was also convenient for the DHMTs – fitting in with their busy schedules – and promoted collaboration both within the district team and between district teams. DHMTs wanted the use of the MSI to continue and suggested that the approach should be expanded to more districts. A toolkit with all the MSI materials was developed, so that the initiative could be used in other contexts (1).

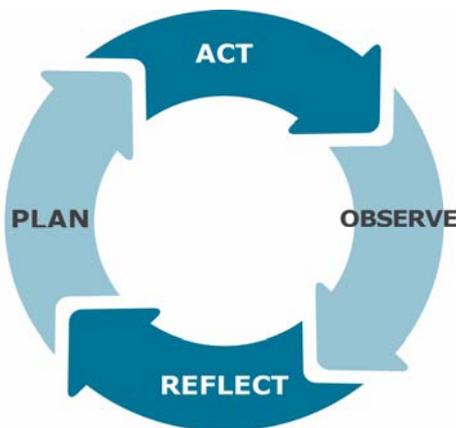


Figure 1: the action research cycle



Figure 2: Problem analysis by a DHMT in Uganda

## What PERFORM participants said ...

*“PERFORM ... made us aware that even when there are no funds something can be done and it is important to monitor and strategise on progress.” (DHMT member, Ghana)”*

*“Before we used to wait a long time for change, but the AR cycle has shown us that we can push change.” (Health Manager, Tanzania)*

*“What I can say is that absenteeism rates have dropped, and these days people value their work.” (Health Manager, Uganda)*

## Scaling up the PERFORM MSI

To increase the impact of the MSI on strengthening district-level management and improving health workforce performance, it needs to be implemented both continuously (Figure 3) and at scale. The aim of the five-year PERFORM2scale initiative is to develop and validate a costed national scale-up process for the MSI. This initiative is also being conducted in Ghana and Uganda to increase learning across different contexts. The plan in Malawi is first to introduce the MSI to one group of districts. Then to continue the MSI cycles in these districts to deepen the learning and at the same time to scale up the number of participating DHMTs. The scale-up strategy includes working with government and other employers, and relevant stakeholders to integrate the initiative into existing high level management structures to sustain the implementation of the MSI at district level in Malawi.

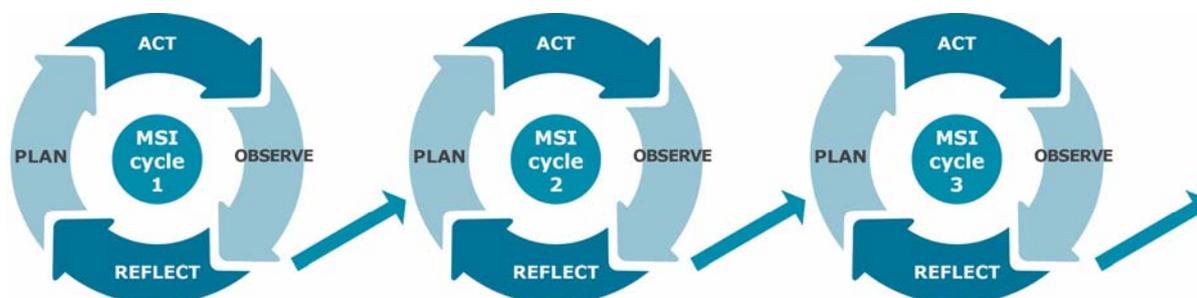


Figure 3: The MSI cycle will help DHMTs to solve problems and gradually improve their management competencies

## What's happening next?

In the inception year we are: engaging key stakeholders; ensuring coordination with other initiatives supporting DHMTs; developing the scale-up strategy; and designing the monitoring and costing tools needed to refine the strategy to ensure effectiveness and affordability in the longer term. The first MSI cycle for DHMTs will start in early 2018.

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### Notes:

1. [www.performconsortium.com](http://www.performconsortium.com) (action research toolkit); more resources are available on this site