

PERFORM2Scale in Malawi – our successes

Staff from the **Research for Equity and Community Health (REACH) Trust**, in collaboration with the **Ministry of Health (MoH)**, are working with DHMTs in three district groups (DG) in Malawi (three districts in each DG). In each district they are supporting staff in identifying and tackling specific **workforce and health service performance-related problems** which are impacting on service delivery in their districts.

This management strengthening intervention – a process of planning, implementing, reflecting and refining – allows staff to take ownership of their own problems and to address them using existing resources.

There have been many successes including:

- Ntchisi increased the number of managers who had developed personal workplans in the previous six months from 20% to 90%, with some departments achieving 100% completion rates.
- Salima increased health facility supervision (an identified cause of poor quality service delivery) from <50% to 75%, and demonstrated increased team cohesion and coordination.
- Salima DHMT also reported successfully using the PERFORM2Scale methodology when addressing COVID-19 in their district.
- In Dowa there is evidence that DHMTs' lobbying and entrepreneurial skills have been enhanced, resulting in a dormant health facility being reopened, operating theatre equipment repaired and additional staff recruited.
- Improvements in the DHMTs' management skills have been observed across the DHMTs, eg the Ntchisi team reports improvements in group working, confidence and empowerment.

The input of the Quality Management Directorate (QMD) of the MoH is vital to the delivery of the MSI. The QMD is a strong supporter of the MSI and is at the forefront of running and scaling-up the initiative. The MoH appreciates the MSI's practical approach to quality improvement. It is hoped that the intervention will be taken to all districts in Malawi and embedded in national and district-level health planning.

A Ministry of Health view of PERFORM2Scale

Dr Bongani Chikwapulo

I coordinate leadership management programmes at the Ministry of Health and am passionate about leadership development. Early in my career I doubled as a medical doctor while managing the clinical department. It was not an easy task and I made a lot of mistakes because I was not prepared for the leadership role. From then I was passionate about ensuring doctors in Malawi were given leadership skills. PERFORM2Scale is in line with that, so I have always supported the programme.

This programme meets a pillar of the ministry's health strategy - to strengthen health leadership – and the approach taken (of involving Ministry of Health structures) is sustainable. PERFORM2Scale gives ministry-level managers opportunities to interface with managers at district level - to provide real time guidance - something that wasn't happening before.

The uniqueness about PERFORM2Scale is its practical approach. DHMTs are supported to identify and resolve a problem that they face every day. In doing that process there are also practical lessons that they can take and apply when addressing other problems.

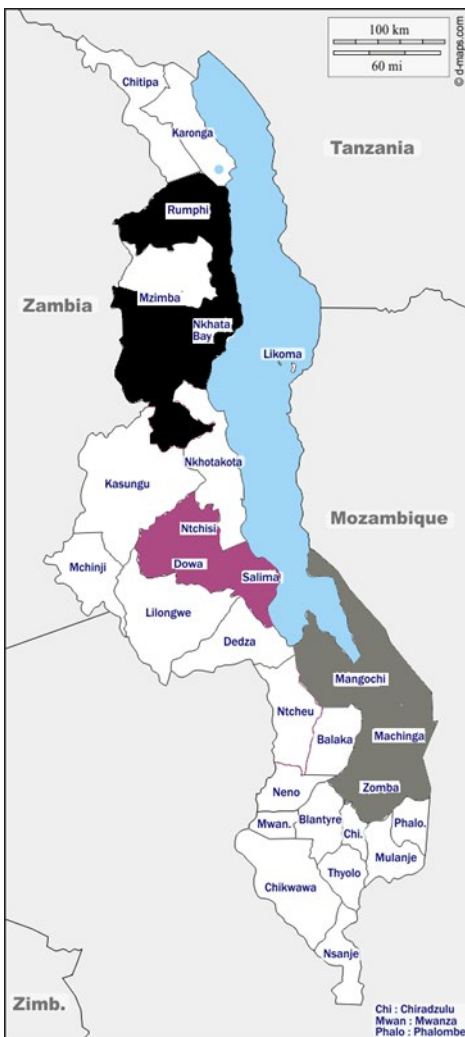
Another issue about PERFORM2Scale is the sharing of experiences. In Malawi there are many challenges but limited resources, and sometimes managers feel they could give up. But when managers hear the experiences of others, that they have been able to address problems with similar resources, they are encouraged.

When you are working in a limited resource setting you don't have a choice but to have strong leadership. We need synergetic, efficient leaders, able to use limited resources to achieve more. Strengthening leadership is not an option for us - it is something that we need to do - and PERFORM2Scale has actually made leadership support to DHMTs easy.

Background to PERFORM2Scale

In 2011-15, the PERFORM project tested a management strengthening intervention (MSI) with District Health Management Teams (DHMTs) in Ghana, Uganda and Tanzania. The MSI was designed to help DHMTs identify workforce-related problems and develop solution strategies to be integrated into their annual district plans. It used an **action research approach** to enable the teams to analyse their own problems, develop and implement appropriate workplans, and to reflect and learn about management through experience. Evaluation showed that by solving problems such as weak supervision, high absenteeism and ineffective staff appraisal systems the health workforce performance improved, as did service delivery. Those involved also became better managers. The MSI fitted in with DHMTs' busy schedules and largely used existing resources.

To have a wider impact, and so contribute to achieving UHC, the MSI is being scaled-up in PERFORM2Scale in **Ghana, Malawi** and **Uganda**, supported by partners from universities in Ireland, Netherlands, Switzerland and the UK. By repeating the MSI cycle it is intended that learning is embedded (management is strengthened), service delivery is improved and the infrastructure for scale-up is secured. This will support countries in achieving UHC.



Map: © d-maps.com

Why PERFORM2Scale in Malawi is different

- The DHMTs analyse their own district contexts and understand the human resource and service delivery problems. With the support of the MSI framework they are the right people to choose the problems to address, decide how best to tackle them within their resource pot and then implement the changes. This also increases their **ownership of the process**.
- It presents clear **evidence** of the positive effects of the MSI.
- It is **action research-based** – DHMTs learn by doing. One MoH staff member remarked: *“we do not want projects that come with the aim of developing guidelines etc – we prefer projects which have action at their heart. PERFORM2Scale has stood out as an MSI initiative.”*
- The MSI is flexible. It can be **aligned** with government policies and integrated into existing systems and structures, eg recommendations from national health policy and District Implementation Plans.
- The MSI has helped to develop strong relationships and communication between **stakeholders at all levels**, eg DHMTs, MoH and Councils; and MoH and MoLGRD, as well as among departments and directorates.
- DHMTs are encouraged to reflect on their actions and learn from the outcomes, and also those of the other districts. This is vital if real change is to take place but also helps **adapt the MSI to different contexts**, promoting its sustainability and potential for scale-up across Malawi.

Fig 1. The area covered by PERFORM2Scale in Malawi

There are three district groups:

DG1 - Dowa, Ntchisi and Salima

DG2 - Machinga, Mangochi and Zomba

DG3 - Mzimba south, Nkhata Bay and Rumphu

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