

Improving Quality of Malaria Data in Mali Supports Better Decision Making in the Health Sector

BAMAOKO, Mali—Since the introduction of the Routine Malaria Information System (MRIS) in 2011, Mali's National Malaria Control Program (NMCP) has not been able to adequately support the platform. Factors including limited funding—and insufficient staff training, equipment, and internet connectivity—have led to a lack of timely data reporting in several regions, limiting the program's ability to target services most effectively.

Why are reliable data important? Governments depend on timely information about the health and social service needs of their population to enable effective policymaking and resource allocation. Health information systems track critical health indicators, and in many countries these data are captured in the district health information system software known as DHIS 2.

In Mali, the Planning and Statistics Unit (Cellule de Planification et de la Statistique) of the Ministry of Health is preparing for nationwide rollout of DHIS 2. This ambitious effort, conducted with support from MEASURE Evaluation, includes the customization of malaria indicators and the



A community health center in Ségou, Mali. © 2008 Rachel Hoy, courtesy of Photoshare.

integration of the MRIS database into the DHIS 2 platform. The issue of the quality of data in the MRIS is therefore now more urgent.

Data that will be migrated into and collected by the newly integrated DHIS 2 platform need to be high quality for use to inform programmatic and policy decisions. Because the NMCP had previously assessed data quality using tools not specifically designed to measure all aspects of data quality—including accuracy and consistency—it requested MEASURE Evaluation's assistance.

In 2016, the project conducted an assessment in the Ségou region, using MEASURE Evaluation's Routine Data Quality Assessment (RDQA) tool. Training for the assessment began with a one-day workshop in Ségou that introduced the RDQA tool to national and subnational staff. MEASURE Evaluation subsequently supported those staff to conduct RDQAs in 32 health facilities in the region. These gathered valuable information about what was working well, where, and which aspects of MRIS performance needed improvement.



Dr. Seydou Fomba, NMCP (left) has championed the use of data quality tools developed by MEASURE Evaluation. Photo courtesy of MEASURE Evaluation.

After the RDQA assessment in Ségou, the NMCP's monitoring and evaluation (M&E) team reviewed the tool and found it easy to implement. They reported they found it useful and valuable for assessing MRIS performance data, and appropriate for use in other regions.

“During a workshop in Ségou organized by MEASURE Evaluation, I was trained on a tool for conducting data quality assessments,” said Dr. Seydou Fomba, with the Division of Prevention and Case Management under the NMCP. “It was exactly what I needed for conducting assessments and ensure consistency of data.”

After the RDQAs were completed, members of the NMCP M&E unit advocated NMCP decision makers to use the tool in other health facilities supported by other implementing partners, such as the Global Fund. The NMCP also requested technical support from MEASURE Evaluation to implement additional RDQAs, and has engaged the project in customizing the RDQA tool.

“By normalizing and institutionalizing data quality reviews, we expect that ongoing efforts to assess data quality will be successful, leading to measurable improvements in quality indicators such as timeliness and completeness,” says Diadier Diallo, MEASURE Evaluation senior malaria M&E advisor in Mali. “As confidence in the data quality increases among personnel in the health sector, and with support from our activities in the upcoming year to foster a culture of data use among decision makers at all levels, we expect the use of data for decision making to increase.”

For more information

MEASURE Evaluation is funded by USAID to strengthen capacity in developing countries to gather, interpret, and use data to improve health. Read more at <http://www.measureevaluation.org/measure/our-work/health-information-systems>

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