

Improving Use of Health Data through Data Use Champions

Background

The MEASURE Evaluation–Tanzania (MEval-TZ) project had an overarching objective to build sustainable capacity in use of quality health data for evidence-informed decision making and programming. A key area of this work was technical assistance and building capacity of regional and council health management teams (R/CHMT) in the analysis, interpretation, and use of routine health data for decision making purposes.

R/CHMTs are government employees charged with overall responsibility for coordinating, supervising, monitoring, and coordinating health service delivery. The core members of this team are the regional and district/council medical officer of health, the health secretary, the health management information system focal person, the AIDS control coordinators, and the child health coordinator. Since 2014, MEval-TZ has identified, built the capacity of, and supported a total of 40 data use champions from 26 councils spread across eight regions: Dar es Salaam, Mwanza, Mbeya, Iringa, Njombe, Morogoro, Dodoma, and Singida.

The data use champions strategy was born out of the experience that it is not enough to provide one-off trainings and technical assistance to foster a sustained culture of data analysis and use within health organizations. The continued presence of an advocate or opinion leader within the system can act as an agent of change to mentor others and promote a culture of data demand and use (DDU) among team members. To this end, MEval-TZ identified and trained regional and district-level data use (DU) champions to spearhead DU initiatives and sustain efforts to strengthen the capacity of healthcare workers to use data for policy, advocacy and monitoring of health and social service programs. Data use champions are envisaged as responsible leaders who have technical competency in DU and work directly with regional, council, and facility health management teams to facilitate an enabling environment within their regional, council, or health facility for effective use of data in health program planning and decision making.

Champions' Identification Process

The MEval-TZ data use team reached out to key informants at council and regional level who could recommend persons



A data use champion makes a presentation during a data use training workshop. Photo by MEval-TZ.

who answer to the selection criteria and thus complete the first level of identifying potential champions. Thereafter, champions could identify and support other champions in consultation with regional and council health management teams. While no strict eligibility criteria were followed, the selection decision was based on the following considerations:

- Previous participation in MEval-TZ's technical assistance or training activities
- Passion and motivation to improve data use
- Experience in program monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and/or health management information systems (HMIS) or the district health information software version 2 (DHIS 2)
- A good understanding of health program indicators (e.g., HIV, malaria, social welfare, etc.)
- Membership in the RHMT/CHMT
- Recognition by colleagues as a supporter of evidence-based decision making

- Willingness to take the role of DU champion in the region or district

The goal was to identify DU champions and intensify technical assistance for the individuals who wanted to make a deliberate effort to improve use of their data. In turn, these champions would mentor other team members at lower levels of the healthcare system and advocate for DU in decision making. They would lead and coordinate with their team to define better indicators; set realistic targets; monitor their programs; and analyze, interpret, and use data to strengthen information systems and service delivery.

Data Use Champions Capacity Building Strategy

The data use champions went through a 5–7-day intensive training on DU competencies and advanced functions of the DHIS 2 for analysis and presentation of routine health data. This training drew from the [DHIS 2 Functions and Data Use for Health Information System Strengthening Training Manual](#) developed by the Ministry of Health, Community Development, Gender, Elderly and Children, with MEval TZ's technical assistance. The organized workshops were complemented by mentoring and supportive supervision in the field. The skills acquired were reinforced during quarterly or semi-annual data and performance review meetings where



A quarterly data review workshop facilitated by a data use champion. Photo by MEval-TZ.

the data use champions developed action plans to address gaps in both data use and program performance.

In addition, MEval-TZ organized a three-day annual data use champions' workshop to promote sharing of experiences and peer learning. This annual event was also used to recognize champions who performed well, based on four DU criteria: (1) increased knowledge of health indicators, data elements, and targets; (2) increased data quality and data visualization; (3) use of data to identify issues and make formal recommendations (e.g., create performance action plans to address the issue); and (4) monitoring implementation of recommendations to improve program performance.

Lessons Learned

The DU champions have taken increased responsibilities in strengthening data use within their localities. For instance, they have developed, implemented, and monitored action plans to:

- Identify late and non-reporting health facilities, follow up, and build capacity in data collection and reporting
- Conduct monthly DHIS 2 data cleaning by running DHIS 2 validation rules to identify data entry errors, incomplete data entries, and contact specific health facilities for their missing reports
- Orient health workers on how to fill death registries and distribute death registry forms to health facilities
- Train health facility in-charges on how to use the data verification form in DHIS 2 for internal data quality review
- Advocate for increased budgets for HMIS tools in the annual comprehensive council health plans

Recommendations

- Quarterly performance and data reviews by R/CHMT is a best practice that should continue to be supported at the regional and council level to improve data quality and use.
- Support should continue to be provided to sustain data demand and use through DU champions at the regional, council, and health facility levels.