

## Strengthening Evidence Based Health Management in UThungulu District, KwaZulu Natal, South Africa

**MEASURE Evaluation Strategic Information for South Africa (MEval-SIFSA)** Project supports the Department of Health (DoH) at national, provincial and district levels to improve strategic information for evidence-based management of HIV and related health programs. MEval-SIFSA seeks to ensure that the health system in South Africa produces useful and high quality information that contributes to sustainable policy, planning, and programmatic decision making.

The MEASURE Evaluation Strategic Information for South Africa (MEval-SIFSA) project is a PEPFAR initiative funded by United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The project launched the first revised Evidence Based Health Management (EBHM) training in UThungulu District, KwaZulu Natal Province in February 2014 as a response to a training request by Mrs Nokuthula Ngubane, District Health Services Deputy Manager Planning. Desire for the training was driven by the need to raise awareness of the importance of data, its quality, use, as well as the importance of performance reviews. “The greatest challenge is that clinicians are only exposed to data, and are required to use information only when they get to management positions. Only when one becomes a manager we get to know we need information for this or that aspect,” said Mrs Ngubane. “Often there are gaps in the data we receive. When we audit, that is when people say, ‘We did not know the importance of data’.”

MEval-SIFSA conducted the 5-day EBHM course at the UThungulu Health District Office in Empangeni from 3-7 February 2014. The course content includes:

- Strengthening systems to improve health status of the population
- Routine health information management
- Data quality
- Use of information for evidence-based health management

UThungulu District benefited with 30 (25 Female; 5 Male)



Participants deliberate over indicators during a group exercise.



MEval-SIFSA enhances the capacity of DoH officials in South Africa to understand different levels of the results chain, as part of improving skills in evidence based management.

participants completing the course, and acquiring knowledge and understanding of a number of key concepts in evidence based management. Participants, from health facilities to district level, included Program Managers (such as HIV and AIDS, Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) and Tuberculosis, and Maternal and Child Health), Health Facility Managers, M&E Managers, Clinicians (including three Deputy Nurse Managers and one Medical Doctor), and other allied healthcare professionals. This was a rich mix of those who produce data and those who use information for decision making.

After the training, some participants indicated that they now recognize their role not only in producing data and ensuring it is of good quality, but

also in using information to assess how far they are in implementing their program, identifying successes, and gaps requiring attention for further action. On data quality, participants were proactive in self-reflection agreeing, “If it is not recorded, it was not done”. One participant added, “If it was not done, do not record as if done!” Many participants had previously not identified with the importance of knowing their targets. This training catalyzed their appreciation of the importance of ensuring realistic targets are set for their health facility, or that they negotiate the same with the District Management Team. Participants were quick to grasp the difference between data and information; data elements and indicators (processed data). This will assist them to understand one of the reasons why the numbers they report (raw data) come back during feedback looking different (processed data).

On the fifth day, the course participants were joined by three Deputy District Managers: Mrs I.F. Mkhize (Monitoring and Evaluation); Ms T.E Maphalala (Clinical and Programmes); and Mrs Nokuthula Ngubane (Planning). Jointly they participated in a self-assessment of UThungulu District utilizing the *Facilitated Group Self-Assessment on Data Demand, Data Quality, and Information Use Tool*, collated by MEval-SIFSA. Participants were upfront in being critical of their capacity and practices, indicating they will, “Call it as it is.” They regarded the assessment of UThungulu District as “an eye opener”, and the tool as a good listing of the various practices they should improve,



Healthcare workers hold their certificates outside the UThungulu Health District Office in Empangeni upon completing the EBHM course, 7 February 2014.

including the importance of those who produce data and those who use information working jointly together. One gentleman indicated, “Data is for all of us. No one is excluded.” Another enthusiastic participant immediately said, “I will go back to our health facility, apply the tool to see our gaps, score ourselves with our team, and develop action plans. Here we did it for UThungulu District. I want to know the score for myhealth facility!”

Reflecting on how the knowledge and skills gained from the training will assist UThungulu District, Mrs Nokuthula Ngubane said, “The training is very important in helping me in my dream of creating a mass of colleagues and managers in UThungulu District who are aware of the importance of data, actively work to improve data quality, use their data, and participate knowledgably and actively during the District Quarterly Review Meetings.” She further appreciated MEval-SIFSA’s support adding, “We had a wonderful experience as UThungulu District Team when your team of experts was in our midst. I say experts, because they received high ratings from the participants in all aspects of course facilitation, sharing of information, and still want them to come back for more.”



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