

THE NATIONAL HIS STRENGTHENING PROJECT

Kumalo F

The Health Systems Trust (HST) was contracted by the National Department of Health (NdoH) in March 2005 to strengthen the District Health Information System (DHIS). The aim of the project is to provide technical assistance to national and provincial departments of health to enable managers to maintain, manipulate and use data collected in the DHIS software and other sources for management. This paper covers project activities from May 2005 to March 2007.

Methodology

The project provided support to the Clusters Strategic Planning, PHC Districts and Development, Hospital Services, Health Information, Evaluation and Research and HIV/AIDS/STI and TB.

As a first step, a rapid assessment was conducted to identify managers' health information training and support needs. Support was provided to the national and provincial levels during the first year and extended to district and hospital level during the second project year. A facilitator was assigned to each province and a team of technical advisors supported the NdoH Clusters.

Key Achievements

- Over 4000 health officials trained in data handling
- The National Indicator Data Set fully implemented in all provinces
- Parallel data collection systems integrated into the DHIS and dataflow strengthened
- Facilitated the development of standardised facility definitions, which have been approved by the NDoH
- DHIS 1.4 has been further developed and readiness assessments conducted in all provinces followed by training in eight of the nine provinces
- Data review workshops facilitated per district to interrogate PHC and hospital data to instil ownership and improve data quality
- A Health Information System (HIS) audit of current staffing, equipment and infrastructure completed to inform planning and resource allocation

Key Challenges

- Lack of policies and guidelines to guide HIS nationally and provincially
- Human resources (numbers, skills and competency levels)
- Information and communication technology infrastructure
- A too-large dataset
- Lack of feedback at all levels
- Data quality

Recommendations

- Identified challenges should be addressed
- A Health Information Management Policy for South Africa should be developed to guide HIS management
- The NIDS should be revised and reduced
- DHIS 1.4 capacity should be strengthened
- Data quality should be the project focus in the 07/08 financial year