Examining the Impact of Knowledge Management Interventions: The Knowledge for Health East Africa Field Project

Research Brief

February 2017

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research brief is made possible by the support of the American People through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The Knowledge for Health (K4Health) Project is supported by USAID's Office of Population and Reproductive Health, Bureau for Global Health, under Cooperative Agreement #AID-OAA-A-13-00068 with the Johns Hopkins University. K4Health is led by the Johns Hopkins Center for Communication Programs (CCP) in collaboration with FHI 360, IntraHealth International, and Management Sciences for Health. The information provided in this research brief is not official U.S. Government information and does not necessarily represent the views or positions of USAID, the United States Government, or the Johns Hopkins University.

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Research Highlights

- To test the effects of knowledge management interventions at the field level, the Knowledge for Health (K4Health) project conducted a baseline and endline study focused on the East, Central, and Southern Africa Health Community (ECSA-HC).
- Knowledge management interventions positively improved effectiveness and efficiency of knowledge sharing and use of knowledge management techniques among ECSA-HC staff members.

BACKGROUND

Knowledge management interventions can influence learning, behavior, and results within the context of health systems— but measuring this effect requires strong assessment tools. To better assess progress after the intervention, K4Health developed a systematic baseline/endline study approach. The purpose of this study was to gain a comprehensive understanding of the process and effects of knowledge management interventions implemented by the K4Health East Africa Field Project. The aim of the project was to improve the exchange of knowledge concerning health service delivery among governments and stakeholders in East and Central Africa. K4Health sought to answer the following three research questions:

1. How have the project interventions influenced knowledge management knowledge, attitudes, and practices among ECSA-HC staff members?
2. Which specific knowledge management practices were preferred and adopted widely by ECSA-HC and why?
3. What are the knowledge management capacity strengths, weaknesses, and gaps among ECSA-HC staff members to manage knowledge management activities?

METHODS

K4Health employed a mixed-method approach. The study was conducted among ECSA-HC staff. The data collection phase included three sequential components to enhance and validate findings: a structured survey, the knowledge management capacity assessment tool, and key informant interviews. Data were collected in August 2015 (baseline) and October 2016 (endline). This study received ethical approval from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health Institutional Review Board. Survey data were analyzed through Microsoft Excel and qualitative data were analyzed through ATLAS.ti.

This research brief highlights three outcomes:

- Role and definition of knowledge management. Staff members answered survey questions about their understanding of the role and definition of knowledge management. They were asked to indicate their level of agreement.
- Use of knowledge management approaches. Staff members answered yes/no survey questions about their use of specific knowledge management approaches over the last six months.
- Knowledge management capacity. Staff members answered open-ended survey questions about their ability to perform knowledge management-related activities.

RESULTS

Role and Definition of Knowledge Management

ECSA-HC staff members understood the value of knowledge management and recognized the leadership commitment to further integrate knowledge management approaches into their day-to-day work. ECSA-HC staff members articulated the role of knowledge management champions well and frequently interacted with them to ask for programmatic and technical advice. Attitudes toward the role of knowledge management and an understanding of knowledge management improved from baseline to endline (Table 1).

Table 1: Trends in defining and stating the role of knowledge management

Knowledge management role and definition	Baseline (N = 19)	Endline (N = 17)
Knowledge management is very essential	95%	100%
Definition includes the purpose of knowledge management (e.g., to make decisions and achieve goals)	37%	53%
Definition includes various forms of knowledge management (e.g., publication, website, training)	21%	6%

Use of Knowledge Management Approaches

Three knowledge management approaches were considered useful and relevant for ECSA-HC: after-action reviews, data visualization, and fact sheets/briefs. Staff members indicated that they were very practical for everyday work and felt the need to use them continuously and systematically. Use of knowledge management approaches increased from baseline to endline in general (Table 2).

Table 2: Knowledge management approaches used in the last six months

Knowledge management approach	Baseline (N = 19)	Endline (N = 17)
After-action reviews	47%	47%
Data visualization	26%	76%
Fact sheets/briefs	58%	65%

Knowledge Management Capacity

In terms of knowledge management capacity, progress was measured using a competency scale describing five stages of capacity on five core domains: people, process, platform, partnership, and problem solving. There were improvements in each domain from baseline to endline in general (Table 3).

Table 3: ECSA-HC's knowledge management capacity assessment stages

Domain	Sub-Domains	Overall Stage (1 to 5)	
		Baseline	Endline
People	The people domain covers: (1) resources/human capital required for knowledge management; (2) leadership, which is the organization's senior management support to knowledge management; and (3) organizational culture supporting knowledge sharing and networking.	2	3
Process	The process domain refers to: (1) the knowledge management strategy aligned with the broader mission of the organization; (2) knowledge flow/cycle of assessing, capturing, generating, adapting, and sharing knowledge within the organization; and (3) measurement such as monitoring and evaluation, indicators, and data use.	1	2
Platform	The platform domain includes the organization's use of (1) knowledge management systems such as an intranet, program management tool, or database; (2) knowledge management approaches such as after-action reviews and data visualization; and (3) information technologies.	2	4
Partnership	The partnership domain refers to the organization's involvement in collaborating with key stakeholders and partners for (1) knowledge exchange and gathering and (2) coordination and networking purposes.	2	4
Problem Solving	The problem-solving domain covers skills such as (1) knowledge seeking to take initiative and locate knowledge and (2) identification of new ideas and problems.	2	3

DISCUSSION

K4Health systematically measured the effect of knowledge management interventions in the East African region by using a baseline/endline study design. The study identified a number of key findings and recommendations. These include the need to have strong leadership commitment of knowledge management use, the need to systematically review knowledge management needs and implement appropriate strategies, and the need to strengthen collaboration between ECSA-HC and other intergovernmental organizations and organizations in the region to showcase ECSA-HC's technical expertise in health.