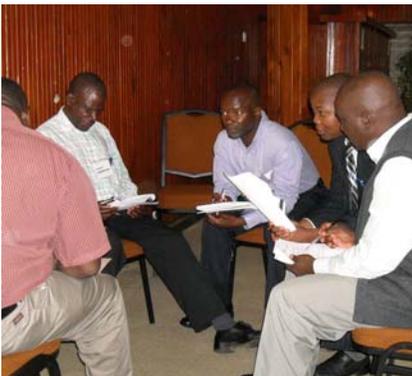




USAID | DELIVER PROJECT

Success Story

Malawi: Standardized Laboratories Aided by the USAID | DELIVER PROJECT



Ministry of Health staff members discuss the standardized test list during a consensus building workshop.

Standard tests, techniques, and equipment helped Malawi reduce chemistry machine types by 77%, hematology machine types by 60%, and CD4 machine types by 50%.

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Any country planning to provide the comprehensive package of testing required by public health programs will need to stock and administer many different laboratory tests. Numerous commodities must be purchased to support these tests, in addition to functioning equipment, trained personnel, and an established infrastructure. In limited resource settings, such as Malawi, standardizing the laboratory testing was critical as the country moved to strengthen laboratory services and systems. Standardization is the first step in building a reliable laboratory system; it offers benefits and opportunities that outweigh the challenges needed to achieve it. Strategies to standardize and streamline the testing services can be used to simplify and improve the efficiency, quality, and affordability of testing, for both the service provider and the patient.

An assessment of laboratory services and supply chain management, conducted in Malawi in February 2009, recommended that the Ministry of Health Diagnostics Unit develop standard tests and testing technique menus for each level of the health system. Malawi has four health care delivery levels: central, district, and rural hospitals, and health centers. The

results of the assessment stated that all clinical and laboratory staff were required to agree on, disseminate, implement, and advocate for the tests and techniques. The assessment report also recommended that a laboratory standardization workshop be held. In May 2009, the Ministry of Health (MOH) conducted the workshop; it included participants from the clinical and nursing services (programs, procurement, pharmaceutical, and laboratory

“The standardization has been an appropriate process. It will help streamline the provision of testing services and ensure laboratory commodity security. It reflects the tiered approach, hence even those not directly involved with laboratory services will be able to understand. The next step is to include the standardized list in the laboratory policy, develop dissemination strategies, and solicit resources to sustain the system and strengthen monitoring and supervision.” Reuben Mwenda—Deputy Director of Health Technical Support Services (HTSS)

experts), donors and partners, and private hospitals at all levels of service delivery. After the workshop, laboratory tests, techniques, and equipment were standardized according to the level of service delivery.

By standardizing the tests, techniques, and equipment, Malawi was able to reduce the number of types of chemistry machines from a total of 13 to 3 (76.9 percent), hematology machine types were reduced from 5 to 2 (60 percent), and CD4 machine types were reduced from 6 to 3 (50 percent) (see figure 1). Because of these reductions, the number of laboratory commodities went from more than 700 to 374 (about 50 percent) (see figure 2).

To ensure that all the commodities required by the laboratory would be stored at the Central Medical Stores (CMS), the staff used the current list of laboratory commodities to update the CMS catalog. After the standardization was complete, the staff also discovered that the CMS catalog of laboratory commodities was incorrect, including duplication of items, missing items, and items presented differently from international standards. Therefore, they also updated the CMS catalog.

Since standardization is an ongoing process and changes in technology and testing practices are inevitable, the country must regularly review and update the standardized list. To direct the reviewing and updating of the list, the MOH developed standardization guidelines, with a review period of every three years. To meet changes in technology or best practices between the three-year reviews, they also established a mechanism for the addition or deletion of tests, techniques, and equipment. A standing standardization committee will be appointed to give technical advice on additional standardization.

In conclusion, laboratory standardization has been successfully implemented in Malawi; it was achieved thanks to the commitment and dedication of the MOH and support from the USAID | DELIVER PROJECT, CHAI, Howard University Technical Assistance Program, and other development partners in Malawi.

Figure 1. Number of Equipment Types in Malawi Before and After Standardization

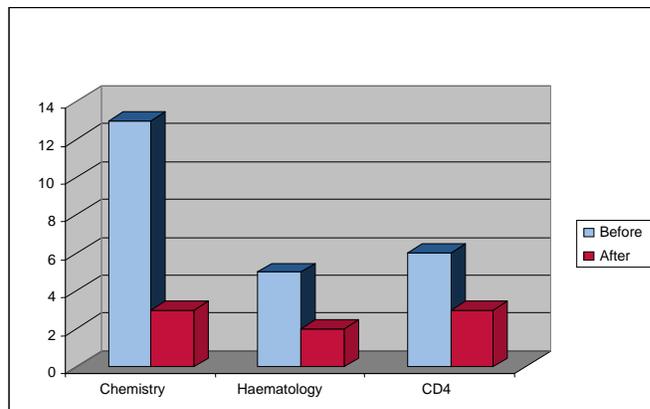
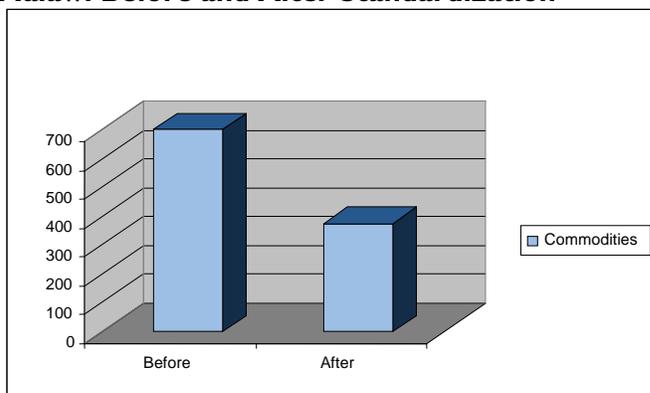


Figure 2. Number of Laboratory Commodities in Malawi Before and After Standardization



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