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Supporting Country-led Initiatives to Strengthen National Health Information Systems in East Africa

OCTOBER 2009

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The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Agency for International Development or the U.S. Government.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In response to a growing recognition of the importance of reliable and timely health information systems (HIS) to support improved decisionmaking for public health action and health systems strengthening, USAID supported a regional forum in East Africa that focused on engaging HIS champions from key public sectors—including health, finance, telecommunications, and vital statistics—and supporting country ownership of HIS. Toward that end, delegations from six focus countries (Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda, with Namibia and Sudan as observers) convened for a three-day workshop, “Country Ownership Strategies: Leadership Forum on Health Information Systems,” in Addis Ababa from August 10–13, 2009.

As part of the preparation and planning for this forum, the USAID | Health Policy Initiative, Task Order 1 designed and executed a semi-structured qualitative survey to capture the current state of HIS in each of the six focus countries.

This report highlights the results of that survey and includes background materials that supported the survey process. Given the overall success of the first forum, USAID is exploring ways to replicate this activity in other regions and continue to provide country-specific technical and financial assistance for HIS strengthening.

ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS	acquired immune deficiency syndrome
CDC	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
CSA	Central Statistics Agency
HIS	health information systems
HIV	human immunodeficiency virus
HMN	Health Metrics Network
ICT	information and communication technology
ITU	International Telecommunications Union
MOF	Ministry of Finance
MOH	Ministry of Health
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
PS	Permanent Secretary
TA	technical assistance
UN	United Nations
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WB	World Bank
WHO	World Health Organization

INTRODUCTION

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Bank (WB), and other key United Nations (UN) agencies and implementing partners, hosted a high-level forum, “Country Ownership Strategies: Leadership Forum on Health Information Systems,” in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in August 2009. The overall aim of this forum was to strengthen and accelerate country-owned and -led strategies for managing Health Information Systems (HIS) in six focal countries in East Africa (Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda). Namibia and Sudan were invited as observers.

Donors and national governments are increasingly recognizing that reliable and timely health information is essential for evidence-based decisionmaking for public health action and health systems strengthening. Health information systems that foster data collection, processing, and reporting and timely use of such information improve the quality of health service delivery at all levels of the health system. Strengthening HIS requires engaging all actors and institutions with a stake in health, including, but not limited to, the ministries of health, statistics, telecommunications, and finance. Historically, donor funding has been tied to specific diseases or health needs such as HIV and thus has contributed to introducing vertical, parallel systems in countries. With such duplication of efforts and increased inefficiencies in data collection, analysis, reporting, and use, there is a need to move away from vertical structures toward a horizontal approach to health systems strengthening. The HIS forum served as a venue for sharing approaches to HIS strengthening and linking countries with potential sources of technical and financial resources.

The specific objectives of the forum were to

- Develop an appreciation of other perspectives, challenges, and roles related to HIS by interacting with colleagues from other countries and sectors;
- Build a shared awareness of the options and strategies for improving coordination of country HIS;
- Work together as country teams to draft a preliminary stakeholder engagement agenda to promote ownership of HIS;
- Raise awareness on the part of donors about new opportunities to strengthen country ownership of HIS; and
- Identify follow-on resources (information, financial and technical assistance) available through national and international partners committed to supporting country-level HIS strengthening.

The target audience for the forum included senior-level leaders and policymakers who play critical roles in promoting the improvement of national HIS. Delegations from the participant countries included decisionmaker-level representation from their respective ministries of health (MOH), ministries of finance (MOF), the ministry responsible for telecommunications, the HIV/AIDS commissions (or equivalent) and/or coordinating council mechanisms, the institutions responsible for country vital statistics or censuses, and the military medical services (if they provide significant health services). Country representatives were joined by other development partners, including USAID, WHO, the Health Metrics Network (HMN), WB, the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), and other bilaterals.

The three-day forum included informational sessions aimed at bringing all participants to the most up-to-date understanding of HIS challenges and opportunities, as well as working sessions designed to engage the country teams in problem solving and action planning focused on building their team to meet country-specific challenges. Country representatives made presentations on the current status of managing HIS in their respective countries. Donors and development partners provided an overview of available financial and technical resources to support coordinated HIS at the country level. During the forum, country delegations worked in plenary and breakout groups to identify key strengths and weaknesses in their

countries' HIS and develop strategies for coordination and improvement. By the end of the forum, country delegations had successfully initiated development of their respective country action plans. (See Annex A for the complete forum agenda.)

The expected outcomes for the forum included the following:

- Country teams realize the value of owning and managing health information as a national asset.
- Participants gain the understanding and skills needed to assess current HIS capabilities, manage this asset, learn strategies to improve it, and identify emerging opportunities.
- Country teams become aware of available technical and financial resources and know how to identify, access, and use them to respond to existing and new HIS challenges.
- Country teams appreciate the multisectoral efforts and skills required to advocate and lead efforts to strengthen country HIS.
- Country teams are committed to lead and champion the execution of multisectoral action plans to apply strategies and techniques acquired during the forum.

With a systems understanding of Data Demand in Use and strategic information, the Health Policy Initiative team for this activity played focused technical design, research, and facilitative roles in planning and executing the forum.¹ Although project funding for this activity was tied directly to HIV results reporting, as per guidance from the Office of the Global AIDS Coordinator and USAID, such activities funded under the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief are intended to benefit the entire health system, not just the portion dealing with HIV.

The Health Policy Initiative was responsible primarily for developing and fielding a simple semi-structured qualitative interview guide as part of the pre-forum planning process. Results from telephone interviews informed the design and flow of the forum agenda. In particular, promising practices from the field or "impact stories" were woven throughout the three days of sessions. Interview data also gave a snapshot of the current state of HIS in each country, providing multisectoral country teams with a point of departure for in-depth discussions. Survey results were presented on Day 1, helping to set the stage for plenary and breakout group work. The following section provides detailed information regarding the pre-forum survey and presentation of results.

PRE-FORUM SURVEY

Methodology

The project team developed a semi-structured qualitative interview guide, with input from USAID and co-sponsors from various UN agencies, including the WHO, WB, ITU, and HMN. Planning team members identified interviewees as champions of HIS and representatives of the health, finance, telecommunications, statistics, or other allied sectors. The team conducted interviews, primarily by telephone, with 15 forum participants from 4 countries—Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda—and also received written responses from 4 individuals from Kenya, Malawi, and Uganda. Finally, the team conducted three individual on-site interviews in advance of the forum, with participants from Ethiopia, Malawi, and Tanzania.

¹ Abt Associates' Health Systems 20/20 project was responsible for the overall execution of the forum and will lead any follow-on work, including the development and production of a final forum report.

Interviews focused on the following basic questions (see Annex B for the complete list of survey questions):

- Who is currently coordinating, contributing to, and using HIS data?
- Who else could be coordinating, contributing to, and using HIS data?
- What steps have been taken to strengthen HIS?

Due to the challenges of conducting telephone interviews, responses were not representative of all sectors in each country. Instead, interview data were illustrative of HIS, providing a top-line perspective from each sector and country and resulting in thematic summaries.

Findings

Interview data provided a snapshot of the current state of HIS in each country. Thematic summaries revealed common challenges, as well as promising practices, across countries. Below are some of the identified key challenges and promising practices. (See Annex C for a detailed presentation of the survey results.)

Key Challenges

- The majority of interviewees indicated that country leaders do understand what steps still need to be taken to strengthen HIS at the national level. Countries urgently need funding to support these HIS-strengthening efforts.
- Respondents overwhelmingly identified the need for trained and skilled human resources at all levels—national, district, facility, and community—to strengthen HIS efforts.
- All countries continue to experience challenges with respect to network connectivity. Each country is trying to extend connectivity to its most rural areas.
- Respondents expressed an urgent need to use data for evidence-based decisionmaking. Interviewees explained that resource allocation decisions often are made based on historical data. Data need to be used in a timely manner to ensure strategic use of scarce resources.
- Likewise, respondents expressed a need to have data feedback across all levels of data flow—from the donors to the national level, national to district level, district to facility level, and facility to community level—to ensure strategic information.
- Interviewees explained that collecting data is easy; using data and sharing information is far more challenging.
- Interviewees identified the need for multisectoral engagement for HIS strengthening.
- As countries identify ways to increase coordination and collaboration internally, they continue to articulate the need for increased coordination among donors with respect to funding, data collection, and reporting.
- The private sector plays an extremely significant role in collecting and using health data. Still, the majority of interviewees identified challenges with respect to private sector compliance regarding reporting.
- Finally, countries expressed the importance of having confidence in the national HIS. Countries are collecting a tremendous amount of data but do not have confidence in the data quality.

In the face of these many challenges, countries continue to explore and apply innovative approaches to strengthening national HIS. The section below highlights some of the promising practices currently underway in each country.

Promising Practices at the Country Level

- In **Kenya**, the MOH is working to collaborate and coordinate with other allied sectors, including the National Bureau of Statistics, the Ministry of Planning, and the Ministry of Vital Registration. Most recently, a multisectoral working group collaborated on the development of a strategic plan for strengthening the national HIS.
- Line ministries in **Uganda**, including those of health, information and communication technology (ICT), and internal affairs, are collaborating so as to determine what data each should collect to identify and avoid duplication of efforts. Once they complete this “inventory and discovery” process, the pooled data will comprise a central repository, which also will be supported by the national backbone, an effort to ensure Internet connectivity.
- **Rwanda** is institutionalizing a coordination mechanism to engage multiple data subsystems within the health sector. Toward this effort, representatives from various groups within the sector began participating in “e-health meetings” to exchange information and discuss how the collaboration can move forward. The Rwanda Information Technology Agency recently has joined these efforts, and there is interest in engaging with representatives from the ministries of statistics, finance, and local government.
- Similar to its neighbors in East Africa, **Malawi** began working with HMN in 2006 to identify priority needs for strengthening national HIS. After experiencing delays due to funding challenges, Malawi finished its HMN assessment in spring 2009. This work was done in collaboration with the National Statistics Office, the MOF, and the Ministry of Economics, Planning, and Development. Malawi’s next step is to draft a strategic plan for strengthening HIS.
- In **Tanzania**, the Permanent Secretary for Health invited the Commission for Science and Technology to engage with the health ministry directors to better understand the potential role for ICT applications in meeting health goals. This group is now developing an ICT policy and strategy document.
- Finally, **Ethiopia** is developing its National HIS Plan and identifying strategic HIS priorities for the next 5–10 years. The MOH is leading this process, with significant input from the Central Statistics Authority, the MOF, the Addis Ababa University, and the Health and Nutrition Institute, as well as numerous implementing partners and donors.

FACILITATION OF BREAKOUT GROUPS

In addition to designing and fielding the survey, the Health Policy Initiative project team also played a critical role in facilitating country and sector breakout groups. Team members were responsible for working with the Kenya and Malawi country teams, as well as the telecommunications and health sector breakout groups. As facilitators, the team members led the country teams through a structured “learning and discovery” process, with the end goal of developing an action plan. The Health Policy Initiative’s partner organization project, Health Systems 20/20, will finalize these action plans and lead any additional follow-up efforts.

CONCLUSION

The survey findings helped to inform the design and flow of the forum agenda and, most important, to set the stage for the work to which the country delegations were committing for the three days and beyond. Common challenges across countries provided a starting point for developing a preliminary stakeholder engagement agenda within each country and across sectors. The promising practices highlighted country-owned and country-derived solutions already underway and encouraged the countries to share the information and lessons learned within and across their delegations and sectors.

Post-forum Survey

Thirty days after the forum, at the request of USAID, the Health Policy Initiative conducted a brief electronic post-forum survey. Its purpose was to inform the planning team of the progress each country delegation had made with its respective country action plans. (See Annexes D for the post-forum survey instrument.)

The Health Policy Initiative sent electronic surveys to members from each country delegation and received one written response per country. A summary of findings revealed the following:

- Participating countries continue to move their respective HIS agendas forward, albeit at varying levels and speeds.
- Uganda continues to be the most advanced with respect to HIS momentum.
- Follow-up efforts are needed with Ethiopia to understand what progress has been made.
- All countries cite the need for additional technical assistance (TA) and financial support.
- Country teams have continued expectations of the forum's organizers with respect to HIS leadership.

(See Annex E for details on the post-forum survey results.)

Next Steps

The Health Policy Initiative's deliverable (and funding) for this activity ended with the presentation of the pre-forum survey and the successful implementation of the forum activity in Addis Ababa. USAID, the UN co-sponsors, and participating members of the core planning team will continue to engage with the countries as requested to provide financial and technical assistance to support country action plans for strengthening HIS.

In addition to follow-up in these countries, it is USAID's intention to replicate this forum in Southern/Central Africa, West Africa, Asia, and Latin America. As the Health Policy Initiative heads into its final year, remaining funds already have been largely programmed. The project currently is negotiating with USAID regarding how to leverage available funding to replicate the project's role for future HIS forums. Depending on the level of funding, a future role for the Health Policy Initiative might include the following tasks:

- Design, conduct, and write the final report on HIS country surveys for eight countries in the Southern Africa region, based on the East Africa experience.
- Actively participate in the planning committee, including helping to identify country delegations and prepare for the forum.
- Facilitate country delegations in preparation for their participation in this forum.
- Perform a facilitation and event steering role at the actual forum (tentatively set for June 2010).

ANNEX A: FORUM AGENDA

Country Ownership Strategies: Leadership Forum on Health Information Systems Addis Ababa, Ethiopia Summer 2009 August 10–12, 2009

Proposed Objectives

- Develop an appreciation of other perspectives, challenges, and roles related to health information systems (HIS) by interacting with colleagues from other countries and sectors.
- Develop a shared awareness of the options and strategies for improving coordination of country HIS.
- Work together as country teams to develop a preliminary stakeholder engagement agenda and strategy to promote ownership of HIS.
- Identify follow-on resources (information, financial, and technical assistance) available through national and international partners committed to supporting country-level HIS strengthening.

Agenda

Day I: August 10, 2009

Time	Session
8:00 – 8:30 am	On-site Registration
8:30 – 10:30 am	Opening Session Introduction to the Forum <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Background and Purpose of the Forum• Commitment to Country Ownership• Forum Outcomes• Intro of Planning Group, Sponsors Opening Remarks Dr. Nejmudin Kadir, Ministry of Health, Ethiopia Introduction of Country Teams and Partners (20 mins) Pre-Forum Interview Results (20 mins) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Objectives and Methodology• Common Challenges & Promising Practices• Implications for the Forum Forum Objectives, Agenda, Methodology, Norms, Jeopardy HIS Keynote Speaker—Mr. Andrew Mwenda, Editor/Owner, The Independent Newspaper, Uganda
10:45 – 11:15 am	Coffee Break

Time	Session
11:15 – 12:30	<p>Country Ownership & Leadership of HIS</p> <p>Session Objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage participants in a hypothetical scenario to explore common issues and challenges in HIS • Introduce the country ownership and leadership continuum as a framework for benchmarking progress against country HIS goals <p>Plenary Presentation and Discussion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hypothetical HIS Scenario • Overview of Country Ownership Continuum <p>Impact Story #1—ICT in Kenya</p> <p>Preview of Afternoon Breakout Sessions</p>
12:30 – 1:30 pm	Lunch
(1:30 – 2:30)	<p>[Concurrent Media Briefing]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview of the Forum—groundbreaking effort that will be replicated based on lessons learned • Summation of why this is critical, what we are trying to accomplish • Norms of engagement/media package
1:30 – 4:30	<p>Country Team Working Group – Session #1</p> <p>Session Objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin to form the country teams and orient participants to the working group structure, roles, and process • Focus the working groups’ attention on existing HIS policies and mechanisms and develop a shared understanding of system gaps and challenges that deserve priority attention <p>Country Team Discussion Topics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Country vision and goals for HIS • Begin to identify gaps and better practices regarding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Governance and Multisectoral Engagement
2:45 – 3:15	Interim Coffee Break
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strategic Planning and Financing ○ System and Data Interoperability
4:45 pm	<p>Wrap Up for the Day</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preview of Day 2/Advance Reading • Announcements/Reception Logistics
5:00 pm	<p>Session Ends</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Debriefing with Planning and Advance Teams • Meeting with Rapporteurs
7:00 pm	Reception at the Hilton Hotel

Day 2: August 11, 2009

Time	Session
8:30 – 9:00 am	Overview of the Day Impact Story #2—ITU
9:00 – 10:30 am	<p>Sector Working Groups (Finance, Health, Communications/ Statistics/Information Technology)</p> <p>Session Objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the role of each sector in HIS • Identify key actors in each sector • Define HIS challenges and priorities specific to each sector <p>Discussion Topics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sector players and roles in HIS • Relevant policies and gaps • Coordination mechanisms and gaps • Resource and funding needs and gaps
10:30 – 11:00 am	Coffee Break
11:00 – 12:30 pm	<p>Country Team Synthesis and Preparation for Report Outs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Synthesis of Day 1 and Sector Working Group Sessions
12:30 – 1:30 pm	Lunch
1:30 – 2:45 pm	<p>Country Team Report Outs</p> <p>Session Objective</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an awareness of challenges and existing strategies for improving coordinated HIS across the region <p>Plenary Report Topics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HIS challenges • Country policy framework and gaps • Coordination mechanisms and gaps • Resource needs and gaps
2:45 – 3:15	Coffee Break
3:15 – 4:30	<p>Resources to Support HIS Strengthening</p> <p>Session Objective</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present the array of information, technical assistance, and funding resources available through national and international partners <p>Donor/Partner Panel</p> <p>Q&A</p>
4:30 – 5:00 pm	<p>Wrap Up</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preview of Day 3 • Action Planning Template • Role of Country Team and Donors
5:15 – 6:00 pm	Debriefing with Advance Team and Rapporteurs

Day 3: August 12, 2009

Time	Session
8:30 – 9:00 am	Overview of the Day Impact Story #3
9:00 – 10:30 am	Country Team Session #3—Action Planning Session Objectives and Discussion Topics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a shared understanding among country team members • Priority HIS challenges to address • Coordination mechanisms and strategies to promote • Needed information, technical assistance, and funding
10:30 – 10:50 am	Interim Coffee Break
10:50 – 12:30 pm	Country Team Meeting—Action Planning Continued
12:30 – 1:30 pm	Lunch
1:30 – 2:45 pm	Promoting Country Ownership Session Objective: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify next steps and outline a plan for continuing to work together as a country team to mobilize other stakeholders Discussion Topics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better practices for stakeholder outreach • Role of individual country team members going forward and follow-on commitments • Information sharing with the organizers and other country teams • Partnering with the media
2:45 – 3:05 pm	Coffee Break
3:05 – 5:00 pm	Closing Session Session Objectives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarify next steps for the forum organizers • Recommit donor/partner resources • Establish process and timeline for country teams to share progress and status reports • Motivate the country teams to continue the work begun at the forum Presentation Topics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Country teams report out immediate next steps • Follow-on actions and timeline for forum organizers • Conclusions and change going forward • Appreciations Forum Concludes
5:15 – 6:00 pm	Debriefing with Advance Team and Rapporteurs Celebration!

ANNEX B: PRE-FORUM SURVEY

Country Ownership Strategies Leadership Forum on Health Information Systems

Participant Survey

Background and purpose

During the last few years, country health information systems (HIS)—systems for collecting, analyzing, and disseminating health data—have received greater attention and funding as their value becomes better understood and appreciated by stakeholders. Building and strengthening these systems depends upon how key institutions and units function and interact. The increasing complexity of healthcare delivery and financing, the ever-greater role of information and communication technology (ICT), and the potential impact on human and financial resources are some of the challenges facing countries in building responsive systems able to collect, analyze, and manage critical information about health services and systems.

The purpose of this brief survey is to understand the current environment for your country's national HIS. As an advocate of and a leader for your national HIS, your insight and perspective will help inform the design of an upcoming high-level, interdisciplinary forum on strategic management in health information systems.

The forum will also serve as a venue for sharing approaches and linking country teams with potential sources of technical and financial resources on key topics covered in the forum. We are surveying HIS teams in (6) countries. We will use these results in aggregate in the forum and will share the specific results of this survey with you and your country team.

1. Please briefly explain your role in the national HIS and how long you have been in this role.
(Interviewer to look for technical, strategic, line manager, etc.)
2. In (name of country), what institutions and/or officials is/are responsible for the following?
(Interviewer to probe for MOH departments, other ministries/agencies, and donors and implementing partners.)
 - Coordinating the national health information system
 - Contributing data to the national health information system
 - Using national health information system data for decisionmaking (planning, policymaking, management, and monitoring and evaluation)
 - In your opinion, what actors/agencies have the potential to play a strong role but currently do not?
3. What steps has (name of country) taken in the past 3–4 years to strengthen the national health information system? In answering this question, please address the following:
 - What national strategies/action plans are currently in place that address health information systems? *(Interviewer to probe regarding whether country has a timeline; if they are funded; and if they follow the strategic plan. How were they developed and who participated? Interviewer to ask for a copy.)*

- In your opinion, what are the two or three most important ways that these strategies/action plans could be improved?
4. What two or three approaches have been most successful in strengthening the national health information system in (name of country)?
 - If there have been interagency coordination or efforts, what are some of the examples that worked well?
 - What factors in particular contributed to successful collaboration and coordination?
 - What are some of the challenges?
 - How might these have been overcome?
 5. What external partners have been involved in efforts to strengthen your national health information system in (name of country)?
(Interviewer to probe for nongovernmental organizations, private sector partners, multilaterals and bilaterals, etc.)
 - What are some examples of how these partners have contributed?
 - What factors have contributed to successful coordination and collaboration?
 - What have been some of the challenges to working with these partners?
 - What are some strategies that (name of country) might employ to address these challenges?
 6. What other institutions that are not presently involved should participate in strengthening the national health information system?
(Interviewer to probe for MOH departments, other ministries/agencies, and donors and implementing partners.)
 7. Our team looks forward to supporting your efforts as you continue to strengthen your national health information system.
(Interviewer to provide more details on the forum.)
 - What would you like to gain from your participation in a country health information system task force in advance of the forum?
 - What would you like to gain from your participation in the forum?
 8. What else do donors and implementing partners need to know about your national health information system and efforts to strengthen it?

ANNEX C: PRESENTATION ON PRE-FORUM HEALTH INFORMATION SYSTEM SURVEY RESULTS



Country Ownership Strategies:
**Leadership Forum on
Health Information Systems**

Pre-forum HIS Survey Results

Anita Datar Garten
Health Policy Initiative, Futures Group
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
August 10, 2009



Overview

- **Why was it important to gather this information?**
- **What methodology was used?**
- **What were the limitations?**
- **What were the findings?**
 - Common challenges
 - Promising practices
 - Actions taken
 - Barriers broken
 - Reflections from each sector
- **What are the implications for the forum?**

Why was it important?

- **To inform the design of the forum**
- **To identify potential participants from various sectors**
- **To produce a snapshot of HIS in each country**
- **To understand why HIS is important for health, finance, telecommunications, statistics, and other allied sectors**

What methodology was used?

- **Developed semi-structured interview guide with input from WHO, World Bank, ITU, HMN, USAID, and other partners**
 - Who is currently coordinating, contributing, and using HIS data?
 - Who else could be coordinating, contributing to, and using HIS data?
 - What steps have been taken to strengthen HIS?
- **Established interviewee profile**
 - Champions or leaders of HIS within sector
 - Cross-sectoral representation (health, telecomm, statistics, finance)
 - Countries (Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda)
- **Collected data**
 - 15 telephone interviews conducted during June and July

What were the limitations?

- **Telephone interviews resulted in technology and scheduling challenges**
- **Responses not representative of all sectors in each country**
- **Primarily resulted in thematic summaries**

What were the findings?

- **Thematic summaries**
 - **Common challenges across all countries**
 - **Promising practices by country**
 - Actions taken
 - Barriers broken
 - **Reflections from each sector**

Common Challenges

▪ Identified need for

- **FUNDING** to support the work of country leaders
- Trained/skilled **HUMAN RESOURCES**
- **CONNECTIVITY** throughout the country
- **DATA USE** for **DECISIONMAKING** at all levels of government
- Data to **FEEDBACK** to all levels of interaction
- **SHARING** information
- **MULTISECTORAL** engagement
- **COORDINATION** among donors
- **PRIVATE SECTOR** engagement
- **CONFIDENCE** with respect to data quality

In your own words

- *"We collect a lot of information in the country that we need to use."*
- *"... decisions are still standardized and not necessarily based on the evidence. There is no strategic targeting on what the data show."*
- *"At the national level, there is very little use of information... the budget is not linked with information and needs to be."*
- *"Data from routine HMIS is not enough to make decisions. We need to triangulate data from other sources and sectors to make decisions that are relevant to our local health system."*
- *"We should find appropriate ways of sharing information with communities."*
- *"The government should take control and own the information in the health sector."*
- *"HIS is larger than HMIS. It means having one national system....the challenges we face in trying to realize this vision will be bigger unless we start to build consensus."*

Promising Practices: Kenya

▪ Actions taken

- Efforts by the MOH to collaborate and coordinate with other allied stakeholders, including the National Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Planning, and Ministry of Vital Registration
- Collaborative development of a strategic plan
- Holding of a meeting to get buy-in and commitment from all relevant actors regarding their interests in HIS
- Efforts to have a one-stop shop for data at the national level

▪ Barriers broken

- Resistance to collaboration and information sharing replaced by multisectoral collaboration and engagement for purposes of strategic planning and one-stop shop for high-quality data

Promising Practices: Uganda

■ Actions taken

- Collaboration of line ministries (health, ICT, and internal affairs) to identify what data they collect to avoid duplication
- Sharing/pooling of data for a central repository, which will be supported by the national backbone
- Efforts by the Ministry of ICT to develop of a strategic plan to ensure connectivity across the country—including “the last mile” or remote rural areas

■ Barriers broken

- Parallel systems and duplication of efforts replaced by communication, collaboration, and information sharing
- Siloed sector process replaced by shared vision and multisectoral collaboration

Promising Practices: Rwanda

■ Actions taken

- Efforts to institute a mechanism to coordinate multiple data subsystems
- Beginning of monthly e-health meetings to discuss the way forward and exchange information (participants include various health sector partners and the Rwanda Information Technology Agency)
- Interest expressed by the MOH in engaging with the ministries of statistics, finance, and local government, particularly regarding e-health meetings

■ Barriers broken

- Vertical, parallel, and fragmented structures replaced by efforts toward harmonization and data standards, as well as information sharing within health and other sectors

Promising Practices: Malawi

■ Actions taken

- Began work with HMN in 2006
- After addressing funding challenges, conducted HMN assessment in spring 2009
- Conducted assessment, with multisectoral engagement, including the National Statistics Office, Ministry of Finance, and Ministry of Economics, Planning, and Development
- Planning for development of a strategic plan

■ Barriers broken

- Stalled process replaced by country-driven momentum and multisectoral engagement for strategic planning process

Promising Practices: Tanzania

■ Actions taken

- PS for health called upon ministry directors to engage with the Commission for Science & Technology to better understand potential role for ICT application in meeting their health goals
- Formed a committee with representation from public/private sectors, health and telecomm to support introduction of ICT applications within health sector and develop strategy and policy

■ Barriers broken

- Status quo replaced with strategic use of new technologies to introduce efficiency and build capacity

Promising Practices: Ethiopia

■ Actions taken

- Efforts to develop Ethiopian National HIS Plan and identify HIS priorities for the next 5–10 years
- Solicitation of inputs from numerous stakeholders, including Central Statistics Authority, Ministry of Finance, Addis Ababa University, Health and Nutrition Institute, and implementing partners and donors

■ Barriers broken

- Fragmented and disjointed HIS activities replaced with a country-led collaborative vision that encourages partner engagement

Reflections from each sector

■ Health

■ Telecommunications

■ Statistics

■ Finance

Reflections from Health

- *“We recognize the need to have a multisectoral approach. The forum will be helpful to help us create dialogue in the country.”*
- *“Financing the HIS strategic plan, employing skilled technical personnel, improving areas of data collection, reporting elements and areas of data management, and building capacity at all levels for data access, mining and creating demand to utilize data for evidence-based decisionmaking....are a few ways in which our national plan could be improved.”*

Reflections from Telecommunications

- *“As regulators of communication, we have an objective to ensure communication everywhere around the country. It is, therefore, an obligation for us to ensure that wherever there is a gap, we address the need. In the case of HIS, the MOH is trying to digitize their system. We therefore have a mutual and common interest.”*

Reflections from Statistics

“The MOH is the custodian of the national HIS. At Bureau of Stats, we are in charge of population and vital statistics...we are providing data for baseline populations and we make predictions using these data... these data are not captured at the facility level... MOH does not conduct these household surveys. MOH might conduct disease-specific surveys or surveillance. But ideally it is the role of the bureau to provide data on health indicators. Therefore, in order to have a complete picture, we need to work together.”

Reflections from Finance

- *“HIS requires considerable investment—unless the finance sector is part of the process and appreciates its use, HIS may suffer from low funding.”*
- *“If HIS works well, we form a better basis for allocating resources.”*
- *“Having strong HIS will allow for good quality and timely data, which will enable MOF to have strategic discussions with donors regarding need for additional resources.”*
- *“Though some of my colleagues in finance have a good understanding of why HIS is important, we have not had many opportunities to sit and discuss how we can help; this forum will provide that opportunity and will deepen our understanding.”*

What are the implications for the forum?

- **Common challenges across countries provide a starting point for developing a preliminary stakeholder engagement agenda and roadmap to promote ownership of HIS**
- **Promising practices highlight country-owned and country-derived solutions and encourage sharing of information and lessons learned within and across country delegations and sectors**
- **Reflections from each sector reinforce the importance of this work and the critical role that each of you will play for the next three days and beyond**

**Amesege'nallo'
Asante
Zikomo
Thank You!**

ANNEX D: POST-FORUM SURVEY

Dear Country Team:

Thank you again for playing such an important leadership role during the HIS leadership forum in Ethiopia. The organizers are interested in learning how each delegation is progressing and what obstacles or challenges they may be encountering.

USAID and colleagues in Geneva are committed to conducting similar exercises in other regions. Your feedback and comments would be most appreciated and will help inform their next steps. If you have any questions or concerns, please send them to Anita Datar Garten at the following email address: adatargarten@futuresgroup.com.

Please take a few minutes to provide your written responses to the eight brief questions below.

1. Since returning from the HIS forum, has your country team reconvened as a group?
 - Yes
 - No
2. Since returning from the HIS forum, what progress has been achieved by your country team delegation with respect to your country plan of action?
3. What challenges have your country team delegation encountered in implementing this plan of action?
4. What potential solutions have been identified to address these challenges?
5. In what ways could the HIS forum organizers (USAID, WHO, World Bank, HMN, ITU, others) help support your country team delegation's efforts?
6. Has your country team reached out to the HIS forum organizers? If yes, please identify the groups below.
 - Yes
 - No
7. (*If applicable*) Which, if any, of the organizations indicated above have responded, and in what way?
8. Is your delegation interested in receiving additional Leadership Skills training?
 - Yes
 - No

ANNEX E: POST-FORUM SURVEY RESULTS

Summary:

- Countries continue to move the HIS agenda forward, albeit at varying levels and speeds.
- Uganda continues to be the most advanced.
- Follow-up is needed with Ethiopia to understand what, if any, progress has been made.
- Countries cite the need for additional TA and financial support.
- Country teams have continued expectations of forum organizers with respect to leadership.

Country Team Responses						
	Ethiopia	Tanzania	Kenya	Malawi	Uganda	Rwanda
1. Since returning from the HIS forum, has your country team reconvened as a group?	Respondent (s) did not know. Suggested follow-up with MOH and Central Statistics Agency (CSA).	No.	Scheduled to meet on Sept 18, 2009 (date of response). Individuals have carried out advocacy for HIS at various forums and levels.	No.	Yes.	Not as a group, but we meet individually.
Organizers/sponsors comments on above responses:						
2. Since returning from the HIS forum, what progress has been achieved by your country team delegation with respect to your country plan of action?	Suggest follow-up with the MOH and CSA, as they were assigned responsibility to lobby senior government officials.	Talked to the MOH Permanent Secretary, who asked for a report from all ministry staff who attended the forum.	Plan to have a meeting on Oct 13–14 to get commitments to implement the HIS strategic plan.	Prepared a country report that was presented to the Minister of Health and were advised to present it to senior management committee. This has yet to be done.	Had follow-up meetings at the MOH and met USAID and Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Atlanta reps, which culminated in the following actions: Mission and core team members met with MOH Permanent	Planning WHO conference (scheduled to take place by early October 2009) on data policy for licensing, contracting, vendor relations, and ownership. Actively identifying and applying for resources to fund

					<p>Secretary, who agreed to be champion for HIS.</p> <p>Developed concept paper to guide the next round of activities. This paper prioritizes the actions to be taken.</p> <p>Scheduled weekly meetings to plan and execute an in-country HIS forum, scheduled for November 2009.</p> <p>Formalized Terms of Reference for core team members.</p> <p>Engaging key stakeholders to ensure publicity of and engagement in November forum.</p>	<p>priority activities, such as enterprise architecture and electronic medical records, as well as some other important HIS subsystems.</p>
Organizers/sponsors comments on above responses:						
3. What challenges have your country team delegation encountered in implementing this plan of action?	Don't know.	Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) staff within Ministry (those who attended forum) appear overwhelmed by daily duties. We need more trained staff to tackle these priority issues.	Core team member availability.	<p>Geography: we are not all co-located.</p> <p>Need better logistics and planning to have follow-up meetings.</p>	<p>Availability of core team members; members have been out of the office (country) on travel.</p>	<p>Too many competing priorities. Under-representation at the HIS forum means that many of the key players were not engaged</p>

						early on; Addis attendees have not been able to unite the larger group.
Organizers/sponsors comments on above responses:						
4. What potential solutions have been identified to address these challenges?	Don't know.	None yet.	None yet.	Need funds to organize a meeting. Funding would cover travel, accommodation, and incidentals.	Need to constitute technical task force to move things forward and report back to larger core team.	Core team needs to present the conclusions of the HIS forum back to e-Health committee and secure buy-in.
5. In what ways could the HIS forum organizers (USAID, WHO, World Bank, HMN, ITU, others) help support your country team delegation's efforts?	No response.	Consider providing one full-time person to support this work for a few months. This person should be from an independent organization that works very closely with the ministry in the area of HIS. This full-time equivalent would work with M&E ministry staff but would be free from other ad hoc obligations at the ministry. The ministry M&E group has experience with such an arrangement. Forum organizers should also pose this question to the Permanent Secretary.	Financial resources for the proposed meeting; seed money could have been given at the end the forum to avoid loss of momentum.	No response.	Need TA. Provide funding for technical assistance.	Keep up the dialogue.
Organizers/sponsors comments on above responses:						

<p>6. Has your country team reached out to the HIS forum organizers? If yes, please identify the groups below.</p>	<p>Don't know.</p>	<p>No, not as a group.</p>	<p>No response.</p>	<p>No, not yet.</p>	<p>Yes, but the Addis proceedings, especially from the breakout sessions, have not been [available] to us. A lot of good work was done in these meetings, which will be of great value in moving the in-country processes. They will also help in uniformity across the region.</p>	<p>No response.</p>
<p>7. (If applicable) Which, if any, of the organizations indicated above have responded, and in what way?</p>	<p>Don't know.</p>	<p>No response.</p>	<p>No response.</p>	<p>No response.</p>	<p>USAID and CDC have engaged in follow-up meetings in country and are following up via email. HMN has indicated it will support the Uganda team to attend meeting in Rwanda, which will be another opportunity to learn and share.</p>	<p>We have been working with the WHO to organize the workshop described above. We continue to work with the CDC to secure funding for key activities through [its] cooperative agreement.</p>
<p>Organizers/sponsors comments on above responses:</p>						
<p>8. Is your delegation interested in receiving additional Leadership Skills training?</p>	<p>We need continued discussion on how to implement HIS at the national level, but we don't need training.</p>	<p>Yes; everyone in attendance at Addis and other stakeholders. Need to remember the Zanzibar delegation.</p>	<p>No response.</p>	<p>No, regarding those in attendance at Addis. But yes, in support of efforts to identify others and ensure a critical mass of leaders to make a change.</p>	<p>Yes.</p>	<p>No response.</p>

	<p>Forum organizers need to invite higher government officials from telecomm, finance, MOH, CSA, and research and academic institutions to push forward all planned activities.</p>					
<p>Organizers/sponsors comments on above responses:</p>						

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