

Learning visits to explore private sector models as a mechanism for sustainable financing of Community Health Workers in Tanzania

Authors and Affiliations

Farhan Yusuf and Lior Miller, Results for Development/Health Systems Strengthening Accelerator

INTRODUCTION

- Tanzania launched the Integrated and Coordinated Community Health Workers (ICCHW) program in January 2024 aimed at formalizing and standardizing community health workers (CHWs).
- The Ministry of Health (MoH) & President's Office Regional Administration & Local Government (PO-RALG) is planning to train 8,900 CHWs across two districts in ten priority regions in 2024/25. The MOH's goal is to train 137,294 CHWs by 2028.
- To ensure program sustainability and CHW compensation, there is a need to identify sustainable financing for these CHWs and explore different models of financing including private sector models. Healthy Entrepreneurs is a model active in 7 countries, using Community Health Entrepreneurs (CHEs) to bring health products to the last mile, and enable CHEs to earn an income.

OBJECTIVES

- Observe and learn about private sector models for sustainable financing of CHWs in general and study Healthy Entrepreneurs as a potential model through learning exchange visits facilitated by the Health Systems Strengthening Accelerator to Geita region, Tanzania and to Uganda for the MoH, PO-RALG, donors, and implementing partners.
- Through the learning exchange visits in May-June 2024, inform the design of the ICCHW in Tanzania especially in terms of including innovative financing models with the aim of providing key health information and services at the last mile and leaving no one behind, while empowering CHE to earn an income and sustain their work.

METHODS

- The learning exchange visits included interactions with the local government authorities from the regional, district and community levels both in Geita and Uganda, as well as with CHWs themselves. In Uganda, the interactions also included Ministry of Health officials.
- Interactions with the CHWs/CHEs were organized in order to gain an understanding of their challenges and aspirations and the potential benefit of private sector models for sustainable financing.
- In Uganda, the visits also included home visits to observe the direct impact of the work the CHWs/CHEs are doing.

KEY LEARNINGS FROM THE VISITS

Government, Donors & Implementing Partners

- Government commitment in terms of resources and strategic planning and implementation are essential for community health initiatives.
- All levels of the government including the local leadership must be effectively engaged.
- The communities themselves should also play a role in identifying the CHWs.
- Public-private partnerships and innovative approaches such as entrepreneurial models are essential for sustainable financing and capacity building of the CHWs.
- Donors and implementing partners must align with the government priorities and discourage siloing of implementation and interventions based on vertical programs.

Community Health Workers

- Entrepreneurial skills-building should be included in the capacity building of CHWs so that they can financially sustain themselves.
- CHWs must have commitment in terms of serving their communities and be able to balance their roles as entrepreneurs and as providers of health information and services.
- Supportive supervision from the government and other implementing partners is essential in guiding the activities of the CHWs. This can be done either physically or through other supporting means such as call centers providing remote support.
- CHWs should be provided with the necessary tools such as job aids, reporting tools, transportation, etc. to be able to effectively conduct their responsibilities within the community. Digital tools can be useful.
- CHWs can be grouped together to establish entrepreneurial ventures and provide peer support for each other.

Other considerations

- Country context matters, and there are likely to be differences in implementation in entrepreneurial models across different countries.
- Entrepreneurship does not have to necessarily be related to health products. If the CHWs are provided the relevant skills and capacities, they can venture into non-health product related entrepreneurship such as agriculture.
- CHWs should be provided with the right communication skills so that they are able to effectively communicate to their communities and be able to set the right expectations and differentiate between health services and health business.
- Effective supply chains are needed both from the public and the private sector to allow the CHWs to effectively serve their communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Explore the opportunity to include basic entrepreneurship modules within the training curriculum for the CHWs to be trained in Tanzania.
- Coordinate with other partners and donors to design the inclusion and implementation of entrepreneurial models (both health and non-health products) within the implementation of the CHWs program in Tanzania.

