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Global Fund Project in Zimbabwe Uses Technology to Improve Data Collection

A project being implemented under a Global Fund grant will improve Zimbabwe's health information systems by providing Internet connection infrastructure for 82 urban and rural sites. The Zimbabwe project is just one of many similar projects around the world where modern communications technology is being used to enhance data collection.

The project is part of a Round 8 health systems strengthening grant to Zimbabwe for which the principal recipient (PR) is the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The project is designed to improve the availability of timely quality health data, which is critical for planning, implementation and monitoring of health programmes in Zimbabwe.

The project is a response to weaknesses in Zimbabwe's data collection systems. An example of these weaknesses is the fact that medical reports have not been transmitted on time from the district and provincial levels to the national level because of a poor fixed telephone line network and the unavailability of an Internet connection. A 2010 study reportedly revealed that only one-third of the districts in Zimbabwe have access to email.

In 2011, with support from UNDP and the Global Fund, the Ministry of Health commissioned a study to assess the specific Internet connectivity needs of 82 sites comprising district and provincial offices. The assessment identified broadband technology options that are available and can be installed at each of the 82 sites. The CCM endorsed the findings and built the recommendations of the assessment into its proposal for Round 8. The proposal was approved for funding.

Marcela Rojo, a spokesperson for the Global Fund, told GFO that the Fund encourages recipient

countries to use part of the funds for health systems strengthening to improve information systems.

“Across Africa, health information systems require strengthening to enhance monitoring of disease trends, Ms Rojo said. “To maximize the quality of data and the reliability of results, the Global Fund and partners are addressing common weaknesses in in-country data management and health information systems.”

Other countries

In Swaziland, the recipients of Global Fund malaria grants use an immediate disease notification system which allows health workers to report confirmed malaria cases by calling a toll-free number. The system has significantly improved reporting by health facilities. In addition, centralised data collection has reduced the administrative burden on health care workers and has strengthened information systems.

In Colombia, financing from the Global Fund has supported the piloting of a system which reads malaria rapid tests and sends results to the central disease surveillance system – thus minimising human error and reporting delays. The data is transmitted through the Internet.

In Nigeria, the Global Fund and its partners supported the government’s roll-out of a Logistics and Health Program Management Information Platform. This system transmits routine HIV data from 215 service delivery points to the national level by using mobile phone technology, while also sending key programme and logistics information back to the field.

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