

Making Good Use of HMIS Information in Ethiopia

Dilla is a Gadeo zonal town in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region (SNNPR) of Ethiopia. Located 375 kilometers from the capital city of Addis Ababa, the Gadeo Zonal Health Department (ZHD) in Dilla town is structured like any other zonal health department in Ethiopia. There is a planning process office that is responsible for health sector planning, performance monitoring and evaluation (M&E), managing health budgets and supporting other business processes within the ZHD. The Planning Coordinator and Health Management information System (HMIS) Officer at the Gadeo ZHD is Meron Umer. With the support of the Gadeo ZHD Head, Ato Buzuneh Negussie, Meron has played a pivotal role in making Gadeo stand out.



After receiving her Bachelor of Economics degree from Dilla University, Meron's first job was in the planning process office of Gadeo ZHD, and she has been working there for just over a year. Meron did not receive any formal training on HMIS, but traveling to different woredas, or districts, and health facilities in the zone with the MEASURE Evaluation HMIS Scale-Up Project staff provided her the necessary insight for better understanding the new health management information system. The Federal Ministry of Health (FMOH) in Ethiopia is scaling-up a reformed HMIS in the country. For that purpose, the USAID-funded MEASURE Evaluation HMIS Scale-Up Project is providing technical and financial assistance to FMOH in general and particularly in SNNPR.

Meron sees her life unfolding in phases. When she joined the Gadeo ZHD, her phase one target was to teach herself to adapt to the environment and the system. Her second phase goal is "to contribute to the society and accomplish what is expected from her" in her role as zonal planning and M&E coordinator.

During her regular supportive supervisory visits to health posts, she found that the Health Extension Workers (HEW) have skill gaps in using the Community-based Health Management Information System (HMIS), specifically the Family Folders and Tickler File system. A Family Folder is issued to every family and the health and treatment records of each family member are filed in it. The Tickler File system helps to remind the HEW of the next follow-up visits to clients and to identify service defaulters. In many Health Posts in Gadeo, the HEWs were not able to use this system properly. So Meron discussed this issue first with the Gadeo ZHD management and the ZHD Head. Later, with the collaboration of MEASURE Evaluation HMIS Project and utilizing the opportunity of mobilizing funds from SNNPR Regional Health Bureau (RHB), she was able to retrain over 250 HEWs and 44 district and health center level supervisors on the HMIS.

The result was encouraging. One striking example is the Gola Health Post in Dilla-Zuria woreda of Gadeo Zone. Here the HEW Meselech, after getting the retraining on CHIS, organized by the ZHD with the technical support of HMIS Project Officers was able



HEW Meselech at her Health Post—before getting retrained



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HEW retraining in their respective woreda



Gola Health Post—after Meselech was retrained

to reorganize the Family Folders and the Tickler File system. Using the Tickler File system, she observed that each month a number of health cards were left behind in the previous month's Tickler Files. On examining she noticed that these health cards belonged to infants who have not returned for their follow-on vaccination doses. HEW Meselech raised her concern at a kebele cabinet meeting. There it was decided to do house-to-house counseling and advocacy for mothers to stress the importance of continuity of care and completing the vaccine doses rather than going from one clinic to another because of other interests.

In fact, in all the 27 Health Posts of Dilla-Zuria woreda, the HEWs started following-up children for their vaccination. In the previous three months in Dilla-Zuria woreda 842 infants received the first dose of pentavalent vaccine vis-a-vis 767 infants receiving their third dose of the vaccine indicating that many children were dropping out. Since getting retrained on HMIS and the tickler file system, the HEWs of Dilla-Zurari woreda in the Ethiopian month of Senei (June–July 2012) alone vaccinated 752 children with the 1st dose of pentavalent vaccine and 986 children were given their 3rd dose—a clear indication that not only children who were previously missed out got their shots, but also those who defaulted were brought back to complete their vaccination.

Meron Umer is excited with these developments. Working with the MEASURE Evaluation HMIS Project staff, she has caught the very essence of HMIS. Thus, she has set her mission as “to achieve excellence in HMIS information use in district health offices and health facilities and make Gadeo a model of HMIS information use.”

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