Building Global Data Engagement One Workshop at a Time

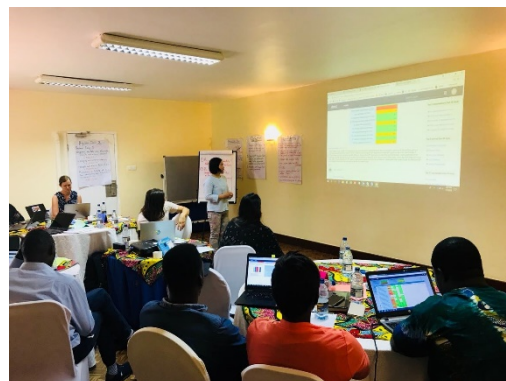## How WHP country staff learn innovation for decision-making with DHIS2

By Isaiah Nyabuto, junior DHIS2 consultant

From the 14 – 18th of May 2018, The Women's Health Project (WHP) program teams from four Population Services International (PSI) countries were trained at the WHP Data to Action workshop in Tanzania on how to effectively use and engage with data in DHIS2.

Meeting growing data demands with capacity building

DHIS2 is a powerful, web-based and opensource platform that's used for data analysis and reporting for global health programs. As a leader and innovator of this platform, PSI extensively uses DHIS2 with its programs, incorporating the system's data collection and program monitoring capabilities into its own "data for decision-making" objectives. For PSI, building a strong culture of data use is essential to the success of its projects, and emphasizes this through its collaboration with the University of Oslo, the original creator of DHIS2, working together to greatly improve the platform and make it the best choice for Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).

As the push for supplying data for evidence-based decision-making has grown, program managers are now struggling to face the higher demands for drawing insights from data. Much of the frustration is due to a limited capacity to engage with data and poor transparency on insights and action capabilities in DHIS2.

Ammaline Vongsitthi, WHP manager from Laos, shares insights at the workshop

Recognizing the issue, PSI designed a workshop that would meet the specific needs of their country teams, and was organized specifically under the direction of three global departments at PSI: The Global Evidence Department, Global Business Systems (GBS) and the Women's Health Project Core Team.

A lesson in DHIS2 and Data to Action

The objective of the four-day workshop, attended by 15 program managers from Laos, Uganda, Tanzania, and Nigeria, was to strengthen program teams' capacity to effectively engage with data and build their capacity and confidence to make better programmatic decisions.

With engaging hands-on presentations and exercises led by staff from the evidence and systems teams, the participants were equipped with necessary skills and tools to insightfully engage with data and draw actionable plans through two important PSI adaptations to the standard DHIS2 software: Data to Action (D2A) frameworks, which highlight the metric's objectives and requirements; and the interpretation features in DHIS2, which places commentary from insights and action in the data right next to the data visualizations.

The result? The participants agreed to set up monthly review meetings with project teams to discuss on the key metrics while sharing their interpretations in DHIS2. They also came up with a wish list of items or changes they would like to see on their dashboards to further engage with at data after the workshop.

"Thank you so much for this, I could see a lot of possibilities to further improve program decisions through the Data to Action (D2A) and the interpretations features",

-Daniel Falaju, a WHP manager from Nigeria.

The next step: Inspiring new levels of engagement

Participating in collective learning environments such as workshops often inspires excitement and motivation that, in the moment, is conducive to building patterns for growth and change. But the hard work is in keeping that momentum going at home.

Three weeks later, since the workshop has ended, the WHP program teams are still driving forward to further engage with data and to improve on the visibility of insights and the associated actions through sharing of interpretations in DHIS2. So far, the staff have already put their plans into action, where some countries met to critically analyze current methods, such as at PSI/Laos.

Molly Siwula, Program Manager for the WHP core team, explains:

> "PS/Laos held a meeting with the program team to review their dashboards with a critical eye and to discuss on how they could be made more visually compelling and effective in spurring engagement and data use".

Other country teams brought their staff together to teach new methods learned and create Data to Action frameworks, as Siwula shares:

> "Nigeria have held a brown bag session with all staff to disseminate the workshop learnings and to further emphasize on the importance of engaging with data and sharing interpretations in DHIS2. Uganda also oriented the M&E staff in the North and East on the workshop learnings (specifically data use and interpretations), as well as the HQ staff. They are planning to develop Data to Action frameworks by the end of June to further improve data use and decisions taken from program data."

Following the success in the first initiative of its kind, PSI's systems and evidence teams continue to innovate around data use while supporting country offices to routinely engage with data in DHIS2. And as the workshop represents a solid step to advancing capacity building for PSI's global staff, it ultimately promises to accomplish PSI's primary vision: better serving Sara.