Connecting Communities to the Health Facilities Registry Using Mobile Technology

BACKGROUND

As a medical doctor, every day I see challenges in the health sector that could be solved by increasing data use. One of these challenges relates to the accessibility of information on the types of services offered in health facilities around the country. The Government of Tanzania has made an online Health Facilities Registry (HFR) – with information on the location and services of each health facility in the country – available to the public; however, this data remains inaccessible to many Tanzanians.

Interviewers reviewing and interpreting the results from the HospitalInfo system market validation

PROBLEM

Although the HFR represents a major step in open data, the system has several limitations:

- The web-based system requires internet access to use;
- Data are available only in English;
- Services offered are infrequently updated; and
- No cost information is provided.

SOLUTION

As a medical doctor and an innovator, I want to improve access to information about health services – including where specific services are offered, at what cost, when they are available, and whether health insurance is accepted - by making the HFR more accessible to Tanzanians. My team will make HFR data available through a user-friendly system that can be accessed using basic mobile phones and short text messages, a function that is more widely available than the internet.

PROCESS

Market Validation

We first conducted a market validation study with 150 residents (91 women and 59 men) in Kyela District Council and Mbeya City Council. We learned that people want to know bed capacity, number of staff, and hours of operation for their local health facilities, and they preferred a system that would allow users to type in a keyword (e.g., “HIV”) and generate a list of hospitals that provide related services (e.g., HIV Testing and Counseling, Antiretroviral Therapy). Of those surveyed, 93% indicated that they would be willing to pay for this information, with most of those surveyed suggesting a between 100 and 200 Tshs.

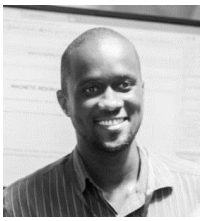
Challenges

Much of the information about health facilities and the services they provide exists only on paper. These hard copies reside in district offices, and our team was able to obtain this information through collaboration with the District Medical Officer (DMO) Office and other members of the district health management team.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES & IMPACTS

Our project will have a positive impact on the citizens of Tanzania by providing them with all the information that they need about a health services in their area. This access to information will improve users' decision-making about when and where to access healthcare services, starting with the residents in our pilot area, Kyela District and Mbeya Region. The reach of the project will be measured by counting the number of SMS inquiries received, the number of visitors accessing the website on a weekly basis, and the number of people downloading the mobile application.

KEY COLLABORATOR



Dr. Jackson Ilangali and his team benefitted from a 25,000 USD grant from DLI Innovation Challenge in January 2017. Dr. Ilangali and his team have received mentoring that has allowed them to develop and pilot the Hospital Information Project in Tanzania. He is available through the following e-mail address: jacksonilangali@yahoo.com. Mr. Innocent Kateba is the lead system developer of this system and is available at katebasoft@gmail.com.

The Data for Local Impact Innovation Challenge (DLIIC) is providing financial and technical support to this project. DLIIC is fostering data-driven innovations through small grant challenges for youth and entrepreneurs. Visit www.dlinnovationchallenge.com or follow DLIIC on Twitter @DLIinnovation for more information.

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