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Subtheme: CHWs programmes (past, present, future)

Title: Can stakeholder engagement with community-level health data improve performance of volunteer CHWs? An experience from the slums of Freetown, Sierra Leone

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Background: Community Health Workers (CHWs) are essential to building robust health systems and their meaningful involvement is a prerequisite to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, documentation of community participation and its influence on CHW performance is scarce.

Project *Al Pikin fo Liv*, implemented in ten slums of Freetown, Sierra Leone from October 2011 – June 2017, aims to reduce maternal, newborn and child morbidity and mortality. The operations research study is testing a participatory community-based health information system to determine if and how communities can use CHW gathered surveillance data and verbal autopsy (VA) outcomes for decision making, and whether this can improve health behaviors and outcomes.

Methods: 1,325 CHWs and Peer Supervisors (PSs) were trained using MOHS materials, and CHWs were assigned 25 households to visit monthly. CHWs disseminate health messages, check for danger signs, and collect vital event and morbidity data. In the intervention area, bimonthly community health data review (CHDR) meetings are conducted where community stakeholders review CHW performance data, aggregated household health data, and VA outcomes.

Results: At baseline, CHW reporting in intervention and comparison areas was 36% and 40%; PS reporting was 74% and 77%. Since CHDRs began, CHWs reporting in the

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intervention area has risen to 51% while the comparison area declined to 39%; PS reporting was 86% and 75%.

Conclusions: Our findings indicate that community stakeholders can interact with data and enact strategies to improve CHW performance. Quality community surveillance data are integral for strengthening health systems. Active community engagement with the data improves the frontline health workforce performance and builds a responsive community health system through increased household-level surveillance coverage, timely care-seeking through referrals, and improved health knowledge. A quality CHW intervention can contribute to optimal health system performance and is a keystone to achieving the SDGs.

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