

VERTICAL OR INTEGRATED HEALTH PROGRAMMES?

The Consequences for the Laboratory Information System in Mozambique

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Abstract: The theme of this paper is the challenges associated with the integration of diverse information systems. Our case concerns the information systems in health care, and we discuss specifically the systems for reporting routine data from clinical laboratories in Mozambique. This case is particularly interesting and challenging. Many developing countries are heavily dependent on foreign financial support for providing vital social services to the population. However, donor policies often limit the scope for national decision making and planning by focusing the support on vertical and stand-alone projects that exist alongside, but are not integrated with the national structures. This is generally recognized as problematic, and we discuss the current attempts by the Ministry of Health to integrate these vertical programmes. These integration attempts are going to place new demands on the sector's information systems. We think laboratories are interesting to look at in this context as they provide services to several of these programmes. In this paper we identify and discuss the challenges associated with this and whether useful lessons can be learnt from the IS literature regarding similar attempts at integration of diverse and fragmented systems. Our main message is to emphasize the need for a profound knowledge of local work practices and work environments, when attempting to integrate the systems. Of particular importance is an understanding of the how these are interdependent with each other and with practices at other levels in the hierarchy.

Keywords: Health information systems, clinical laboratories, integration, data quality, developing countries, work practices

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