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COUNTER NETWORKS, COMMUNICATION AND HEALTH INFORMATION SYSTEMS

A Case Study from Mozambique

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Abstract: Mozambique, actively trying to deploy ICTs like many developing countries, faces critical problems in providing health care services to its population, especially those living in rural areas. These attempts are extremely complex due to a variety of constraints ranging from inadequate infrastructure to manpower shortages, to a culture that does not yet value the “efficient use of information.” In this paper, we unpack the relationship between communication practices and health information flows within the context of the primary health care system of Mozambique, and argue that understanding this relationship is crucial for developing context-sensitive approaches to implementing computer-based health information systems. Through an empirical analysis of ongoing efforts in a health district within the Health Information System Program (HISP), we seek to understand the communication practices which surround processes of collection, analysis and transmission of health data up and down the various levels of the health administration hierarchy. The nature of these communication practices has a visible impact on the quality, timeliness and usage of health data. The paper describes the functioning of the health information system as a network comprising multiple human and non-human actors within deep-rooted socio-cultural structures. Inspired by Castells, we examine how understanding the reciprocal relationships between communication practices and health information can help to develop “counter networks” to provide hitherto marginalized groups and regions in the potential access to “network society.”

Keywords: Information and communication technologies, Health information systems, Mozambique, Actor-Network Theory, Network Society, work practices.

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