DevInfo in Action

Rwanda: Using DevInfo to Combat Malnutrition

For the last two decades, malnutrition has persisted as a significant public health problem in Rwanda, contributing to high infant and child mortality rates across the country. Recent international and national surveys point to the disturbing fact that nearly half of Rwandan children under five suffer from stunting caused by malnutrition, with underweight prevalence affecting up to 1 in 8 under-five children.\(^1\)

So serious is the situation that in April 2009, the Government of Rwanda declared the fight against malnutrition a national emergency. In response, nutrition was positioned in the center of national development activities with the development of a multi-sectoral National Emergency Plan to Eliminate Malnutrition.\(^2\) Later in November of that same year, the First National Nutrition Summit in Rwanda was convened, which stressed the importance of developing multi-sectoral, well-coordinated District Plans to Eliminate Malnutrition (DPEM) at the sub-national level.\(^3\)

The most ambitious government initiative to date has been the launch of the National Multisectoral Strategy to Eliminate Malnutrition (NmSEM), with a three-year Action Plan for Implementation (2010 - 2013) to reduce by 30 percent all forms of malnutrition in Rwanda by 2013. The Action Plan consists of eight nutrition-related strategies, each consisting of several measurable results.\(^4\)

Enter DevInfo. The UN-endorsed database system had been previously adopted by the Government of Rwanda for monitoring progress towards achievement of the 2008-2012 Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy as well the Millennium Development Goals. Consequently, the Ministry of Health, with support from partners, decided to also retain the use of DevInfo to monitor the implementation of DPEM modelling in six districts.

\(^1\)2010 Rwanda DHS Preliminary Report, National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda.  
\(^3\)Ibid., p. 13.  
Indicators used to monitor DPEM progress towards achieving the eight nutrition strategies are being entered into DevInfo databases. Once complete, these databases will allow planners, decision-makers and policy-makers at the district level and within national line ministries and development partners to analyze data, monitor and evaluate progress, generate reports, adjust existing strategies, and set new priorities, among other activities.

The Ministry of Health in Rwanda, with the support of partners including UNICEF, organized a series of workshops in May 2011 to begin creating databases in DevInfo for six selected districts modelling DPEM implementation. District technical teams with central level support and development partners gathered to provide critical input into the selection of database indicators and data values, ensuring that the final databases would fully support full implementation of the NmSEM.

A subsequent series of training workshops are scheduled for August-September 2011, which will train key stakeholders at the district level on how to use the DevInfo DPEM databases to track progress and provide data for evidence-based decision-making.

With DevInfo helping to monitor the Government of Rwanda’s campaign to end malnutrition, the country stands an even better chance of improving the lives of its most vulnerable citizens in the years ahead.

Data making a difference.

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