

Success in Uganda Leads to Health Information Technology Program Expansion

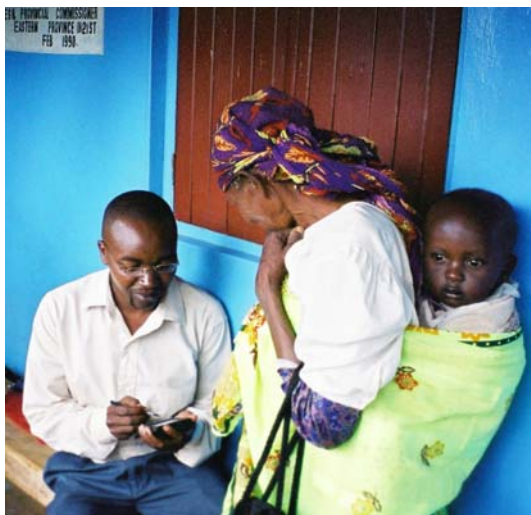
In a significant opportunity to take a simple idea to scale and make a major impact on health outcomes, SATELLIFE and project partner Uganda Chartered HealthNet have been asked by the Ugandan Ministry of Health to expand a pilot health information and communications system nationwide.

Health providers in the districts of Rakai and Mbale have been using handheld computers and a unique, cellular phone-based communication network to send and receive news, treatment data, and continuing education programming for 18 months. This project, called the Uganda Health Information Network, has been recognized as a cost effective way of reaching remote health clinics. Plans are now underway with the Ministry of Health to provide health workers throughout Uganda with handheld computers to support in-service training and professional development. For most frontline clinical staff, this will be their first experience with technology and the first time they will have medical reference material at their health centers.



Healthcare workers learn how to use handheld computers to access treatment guidelines and drug databases.

Each of the 56 districts averages 160 health workers treating 25,000 to 100,000 patients. To pursue continuing medical education or to undertake library research, health providers must make the choice to leave their patients for days on end while they travel to the nearest medical college. Faced with causing great disruption to their clinics, many go without any access to current treatment news and updates. This nationwide expansion of the Uganda Health Information Network is designed to prevent health service disruption and save money and time by delivering training materials to healthcare providers at the point of care.



A community healthcare worker records symptoms on his PDA to determine proper treatment.

With a generous grant from The Overbrook Foundation, SATELLIFE has supported the creation of HealthNet South Africa, a sister organization based in Durban, South Africa, which like Uganda Chartered Healthnet, will collaborate with SATELLIFE on information and communications technology projects and be able to initiate and manage its own technology projects for health and development. There are many opportunities for HealthNet South Africa to initiate programs similar to the Uganda project to help South Africans collect, manage, and share vital health data and to contribute to providing its healthcare workers with access to the most current, reliable, and useful medical information to face epidemics of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, and other infectious and chronic diseases.

More details about the Uganda Health Information Network and information on other SATELLIFE information and communications technology projects can be found in a white paper published in August 2005. Readers may download the report at <http://pda.healthnet.org/download/pdapaper1.pdf>.

Building Health Sector Technology Capacity in South Africa

A nation of 46 million citizens, South Africa is a country where income disparities are among the most severe in the world. According to the World Bank, although 13% of the population lives in 'first world' conditions, a staggering 53% live in poverty. Among these, only 25% have running water and electricity, only half have primary school education, and over a third of the children suffer from chronic malnutrition. While Johannesburg, the financial heart of South Africa, is a city of great wealth, as much as a quarter of its 3.2 million inhabitants are homeless.

With want comes disease and poor health. In addition to the challenges to reduce poverty and address the world's highest unemployment rate, South Africa has more people living with HIV/AIDS than any other country and other health statistics are equally daunting. South Africa has the dubious honor of ranking high among all nations for the incidence of tuberculosis, malaria, influenza, pneumonia, and other communicable diseases.



Rural health clinics like this one will benefit from the access to information that HNSA will provide.

With one of the world's highest burdens of preventable diseases, and one of the lowest ratios of doctors to population, improving South Africa's national Health Management Information System (HMIS), enhancing the flow of public health information and data, expanding access to reliable, timely, and actionable medical information, and providing relevant in-service training to health providers are some of the vital elements required for improving health service delivery to the South African population.

To address the linked challenges of information poverty and the "digital divide", SATELLIFE has undertaken the development of a South African owned and managed non-governmental organization that will share our mission of delivering critical information to health professionals who are cut off from the knowledge resources they need to heal and save lives. With generous support from The Overbrook Foundation, SATELLIFE is collaborating with prominent South African public health specialists to create HealthNet South Africa (HNSA)

Dedicated to building a skills base to support the use of information technology within the health sector, HNSA will offer a range of services customized to meet local needs and respond to local variables. HNSA will build the capacity of its local, national, and regional partners and clients to cost-effectively acquire, efficiently use, and independently support multiple information technology (IT) tools. These tools, which may range from local area networks (LANs) to handheld computers or personal digital assistants (PDAs), will be selected based on the information and data needs of each organization, effectively providing access to a wide range of health knowledge resources that are not currently available.

To ensure long term sustainability, SATELLIFE is assisting HNSA in building a business model based on three types of revenue streams. Working in partnership with other NGOs, health facilities, and public and private agencies, HNSA will pursue grants and contracts from multilateral and bilateral funding agencies, foundations, and other donors seeking to improve communication, information access, and data collection and utilization within the health sector. HNSA will also provide services directly to clients and partners within the health sector, charging reasonable fees for service and ongoing support. SATELLIFE's key objective is to help HNSA build the skills and infrastructure needed to compete independently for such awards and contracts. Therefore, when SATELLIFE secures a grant or contract to implement a special project in South Africa, it will engage HNSA to conduct the field work. Serving as an implementing partner for SATELLIFE, HNSA will be invited to provide services in support of projects throughout southern Africa for which SATELLIFE has received grants and contracts.