

CCA Applied Technology Forum on HIV/AIDS and Healthcare Delivery

Wednesday, March 9, 2005
8:00 am – 4:30 pm

MEETING SUMMARY

ICT can play a critical and catalytic role in accelerating growth, eradicating poverty and promoting sustainable solutions for developing and transitioning economies, facilitating country integration into the global economy. At the same time, the experience of developed countries has proven that indiscriminate investment in ICT often results in large-scale waste. For developing and transitioning economies to benefit from the lessons learned and to avoid disinvestments and capture benefits, appropriate institutional partnerships and sector arrangements are necessary. Opportunities are not without risk and consequently require coordinated and concerted action at the national and international levels and across the public, NGO and private sectors.

Issues related to the following key themes were discussed and debated at the CCA March 9 ICT Conference:

“Stove Piping”

- We need to avoid the creation of programmatic stovepipes. Don’t replicate the mistake of paper systems: one system for every program.
- However some stovepipes will always exist, thus establishment of a communication systems or language among information systems (public & private, health management, clinical and laboratory systems) must be established
- In addition, there is a need for communication and a common system/language among stove pipes on various levels (i.e., donor, public/private, disease reporting and country levels)
- Shared bandwidth among stakeholders (private hospital, remote clinic, village kiosk, local NGO, mobile clinic, donor-driven health point, and government clinic) is a potential solution to reduce costs and increase communication across stovepipes.

Involvement of Local Partners

- Partnering with and use of local implementers/private businesses is essential.
- Identify in-country partners whose work will benefit from ICT. Many may already be using technology.

End-user Input

- Consider every user in the system. What information do they have? What information do they need? What is their incentive?
- Integration of technology into people’s daily routines is essential – technology must be appropriate: i.e., don’t add additional tasks to the daily work of an already over-committed health worker. Any change in the way people do their work requires careful attention to process and personal issues and must be managed.

- Young people play an integral role in ICT implementation because they have the capacity and willingness to learn how to use technology, and can then provide IT-support to health informatics applications and services.

National/Country Level Involvement

- The national government must be engaged and involved willing: National system = national training = national exposure = national capacity
- Work with the national and government sectors to identify opportunities for pilot projects and for scaling up existing activities.
- Politics of information ownership must be addressed with the national government.

Investment Opportunities for the Private Sector

- The widespread adoption of cell phones throughout Africa is an indication of the potential consumer market.
- Investment opportunities for the private sector in “SmartCard” technology

Communication between Public & Private Sectors

- Private, public and NGO sectors all bring attributes/strengths and weaknesses to the table, but the dialogue/communication between the public and private sectors must be improved in order to capitalize on these strengths.
- Each stakeholder must accept the other as potential partners.

Sustainability

- Focus on connectivity solutions and end-user appropriate solutions rather than just delivery of technology with the expectation of end-user uptake and efficient use of the technology.
- Systems must be sustainable and scalable– we can’t just do pilot projects forever. To be sustainable, projects must focus on creating infrastructure and “back-ending” the program to ensure stability, local sustainability and appropriate scale.
- A mix of short-term and long-term solutions must be implemented to address the range of issues from acute to chronic.
- Look for opportunities to build healthcare delivery or healthcare systems beyond HIV/AIDS requirements or consider solutions that extend existing health or information systems to encompass HIV/AIDS requirements.
- Training and ongoing technical support are crucial, for handheld technologies as well as the application of a variety of technological solutions and the creation of end-user demand for technology and data that it creates.
- Reliable connectivity is an issue and a variety of ICT solutions are currently available to address this obstacle.

Role of Donors

- Donors are most effective when employing a results-oriented approach to project funding, design and implementation. Donors must be more stringent in holding countries and implementers accountable for effective and efficient use of funds and be results driven.
- Need for increased conversation between donors and the private sector

Role of Business/Private Sector

- Business must step up to the challenge and must be accepted as a development partner

Some Examples of Applied Technology Solutions in Place

- ARV and other drug inventory control, monitoring and evaluation: RMTG
- Identity (patient and provider) and confidentiality control: JSI SmartCard
- Data management & performance indicators: Voxiva: SmartCard technology
- Telemedicine: monitoring of patients on ARVS, side effects, and vital signs.
- I-LINX: use of handheld technology to address: limited access to relevant, current information; and growing demand for data for decision-making, paired with limited capacity to collect, analyze, and share data
- ICT applications for an array of information based needs of patients, pharmacists, doctors, and health workers.

Key Discussion Topics:

(Q: question, R: response, C: comment)

Q: Does the country-level donor funding strategies exacerbate fragmentation/stove piping? Do different standards across countries make it more difficult for the private sector and other organizations to penetrate the market?

R: Instead of trying to harmonize the entire continent in terms of standards, use the regional coalitions as additional avenues to engage several countries at one time. There already exists a mechanism for coordination here, which should be tapped.

C: In order to leverage the private sector to successfully develop economies of scale, the donors and the private sector must communicate. The private sector entrance into this market could translate into benefits for local enterprises as well.

C: Some key stakeholders are not represented at the conference: the local African NGO and civil society organizations, as well as the local small and medium size business sector. These players are essential in that they understand the dynamics on the ground and, in many cases, are already successfully implementing projects that are sustainable using local capacity, but need support for scale-up.

C: Donors or some entity should coordinate on-going projects within a specific country. Implementers need to communicate, and project developers should have a context of existing projects for the country in which they are working.