INFORMATION MANAGEMENT IN MALAWI & BEYOND: THE COVID-19 RCCE DASHBOARD

"Reporting and entering information to the dashboard is an organizing activity that brings partners together."
– **Blessings Mtuwa Nkhata**, UNICEF Malawi

CONTEXT

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, there were several organizations and government departments working independently on risk communication and community engagement (RCCE) in Malawi. As the focus on public health interventions increased, it became clear that RCCE activities were missing in some areas of need, being duplicated in other locations, and/or overlapping with the same target populations. Organizational partners of the Collective Service requested the assistance of the Collective Service's Information Management team to find a solution that would help partners make COVID-19 programming more efficient in Malawi.
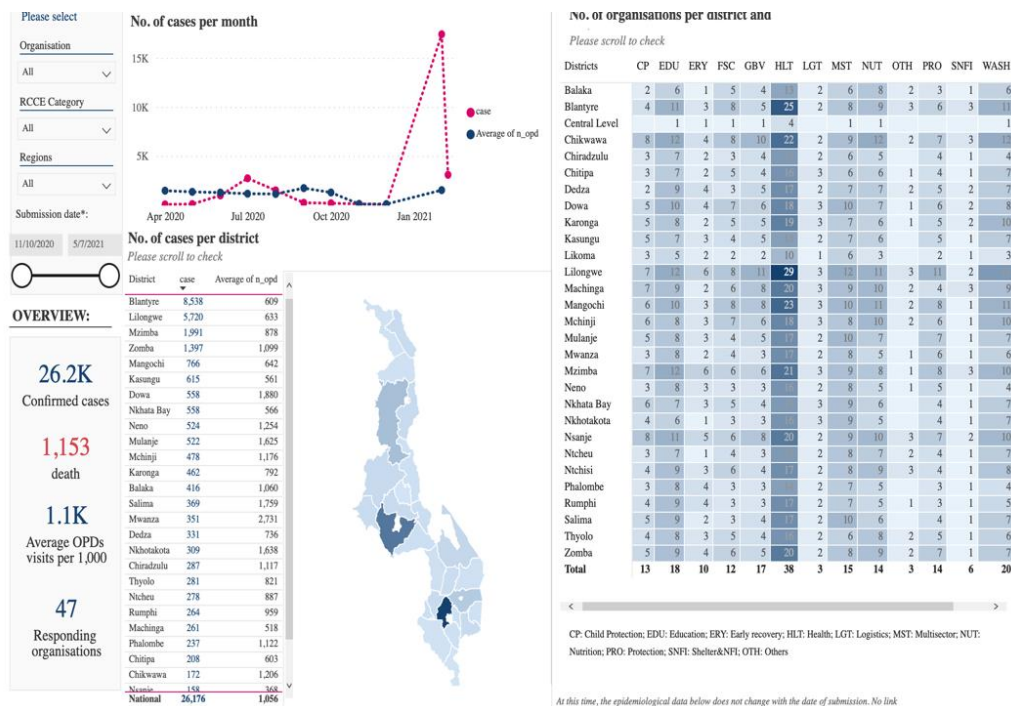
RESPONSE

"On the coordination side, the dashboard brought renewed energy to partners from COVID fatigue to rally around a common agenda." – Mr. Chikumbutso Mtumodzi, Director of Information, Ministry of Information Malawi

The Collective Service gathered feedback from implementing partners and government counterparts at the national and district level, deciding on a "Who is doing, What, When, Where" or "4Ws" dashboard that would map out the organization, location, type, duration, and target population of COVID-19 RCCE activities on the ground. Although there were some existing data platforms before the dashboard, it was hard to see how the data between platforms could be synthesized. Stakeholders therefore expressed the desire for one harmonized platform that could be decentralized and managed collectively. In addition, Collective Service partners and participating organizations wanted to visualize epidemiological data for COVID-19 alongside partner mapping inputs. This would allow them to clearly identify gaps and quickly deploy resources to areas in need.

The Information Management Team created a Power BI dashboard populated with a simple online survey tool (KOBO) that could be updated in real time. The team carried out an iterative process with stakeholders over the course of several months, ensuring a user-friendly interface and useful

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functionality in the dashboard. With the online survey tool and dashboard, organizations could input data regularly, read the visualizations in the dashboard without difficulty, and create an evidence-base for decision makers to adjust strategies and collaborate with other actors.

FEATURES

No. of cases per month

Please select — Organisation: All — RCCE Category: All — Regions: All — Submission date*: 11/10/2020 – 5/7/2021

Legend: case · Average of n_opd

X-axis: Apr 2020, Jul 2020, Oct 2020, Jan 2021

No. of cases per district

Please scroll to check

District	case	Average of n_opd
Blantyre	8,538	609
Lilongwe	5,720	633
Mzimba	1,991	878
Zomba	1,397	1,099
Mangochi	766	642
Kasungu	615	561
Dowa	558	1,880
Nkhata Bay	558	566
Neno	524	1,254
Mulanje	522	1,625
Mchinji	478	1,176
Karonga	462	792
Balaka	416	1,060
Salima	369	1,759
Mwanza	351	2,731
Dedza	331	736
Nkhotakota	309	1,638
Chiradzulu	287	1,117
Thyolo	281	821
Ntcheu	278	887
Rumphi	264	959
Machinga	261	518
Phalombe	237	1,122
Chitipa	208	603
Chikwawa	172	1,206
Nsanje	158	368
National	26,176	1,056

OVERVIEW:

26.2K Confirmed cases

1,153 death

1.1K Average OPDs visits per 1,000

47 Responding organisations

No. of organisations per district and

Please scroll to check

Districts	CP	EDU	ERY	FSC	GBV	HLT	LGT	MST	NUT	OTH	PRO	SNFI	WASH
Balaka	2	6	1	5	4	13	2	6	8	2	3	1	6
Blantyre	4	11	3	8	5	25	2	8	9	3	6	3	11
Central Level		1	1	1	1	4		1	1				1
Chikwawa	8	12	4	8	10	22	2	9	12	2	7	3	13
Chiradzulu	3	7	2	3	4		2	6	5		4	1	4
Chitipa	3	7	2	5	4		3	6	6	1	4	1	7
Dedza	2	9	4	3	5	17	2	7	7	2	5	2	7
Dowa	5	10	4	7	6	18	3	10	7	1	6	2	8
Karonga	5	8	2	5	5	19	3	7	6	1	5	2	10
Kasungu	5	7	3	4	5		2	7	6		5	1	7
Likoma	3	5	2	2	2	10	1	6	3		2	1	3
Lilongwe	7	12	6	8	11	29	3	12	11	3	11	2	
Machinga	7	9	2	6	8	20	3	9	10	2	4	3	9
Mangochi	6	10	3	8	8	23	3	10	11	2	8	1	11
Mchinji	6	8	3	7	6		3	8	10	2	6	1	10
Mulanje	5	8	3	4	5	17	2	10	7		7	1	7
Mwanza	3	8	2	4	3		2	8	5	1	6	1	6
Mzimba	7	12	6	6	6	21	3	9	8	1	8	3	10
Neno	3	8	3	3	3		2	8	5	1	5	1	4
Nkhata Bay	6	7	3	5	4		3	9	6		4	1	7
Nkhotakota	4	6	1	3	3		3	9	5		4	1	7
Nsanje	8	11	5	6	8	20	2	9	10	3	7	2	10
Ntcheu	3	7	1	4	3		2	8	7	2	4	1	7
Ntchisi	4	9	3	6	4	17	2	8	9	3	4	1	8
Phalombe	3	8	4	3	3		2	7	5		3	1	4
Rumphi	4	9	4	3	3	17	2	7	5	1	3	1	5
Salima	5	9	2	3	4		2	10	6		4	1	6
Thyolo	4	8	3	5	4		2	6	8	2	5	1	6
Zomba	5	9	4	6	5	20	2	8	9	2	7	1	7
Total	13	18	10	12	17	38	3	15	14	3	14	6	20

CP: Child Protection; EDU: Education; ERY: Early recovery; HLT: Health; LGT: Logistics; MST: Multisector; NUT: Nutrition; PRO: Protection; SNFI: Shelter&NFI; OTH: Others

At this time, the epidemiological data below does not change with the date of submission. No link

As a powerful tool that facilitates collaboration on-the ground, the dashboard provides a wide range of information including:

- ✓ COVID-19 case numbers compared across districts
- ✓ COVID-19 case numbers over time by district
- ✓ No. of organizations working in each district by sector
- ✓ No. of organizations implementing RCCE activities by activity type
- ✓ No. of organizations using communication channels by channel type (e.g. TV, radio, SMS, etc.)
- ✓ No. of organizations working with various target populations
- ✓ Organizations offering RCCE training
- ✓ Organizations requesting RCCE support and identifying present challenges

ACHIEVEMENTS

"The Dashboard became a unified, multi-sectoral approach that allowed us to leverage all our resources. We engaged faith leaders and other kinds of organizations, not just purely health-related organizations to fight COVID-19."
–Kenford Mayere, UNICEF Malawi

⇒ Effectively coordinates 41 organizational and government partners by creating a common activity that unites stakeholders in the fight against COVID-19

⇒ Leverages non-traditional public health resources, such as faith-based or educational organizations to fight COVID-19

⇒ Encourages evidence-informed decision making based on epidemiological data

⇒ Serves as a model for replication in other countries

⇒ Works as an excellent use case to engage organizations to work with the Collective Service to identify custom-fit Information Management solutions

⇒ Provided a platform to discuss and invest in the COVID-19 vaccine rollout

CHALLENGES

"We are committed to exploring sustainable solutions to the challenges in linking the dashboard to existing systems at the Ministry of Health."– Dr. Annie Chauma Mwale, Head of Epidemiology and Surveillance, Malawi Government

The biggest challenge with the COVID-19 RCCE dashboard is an ironic outcome of its greatest strength: identifying gaps and duplications. Once a gap or duplication is identified, it requires that everyone work together to find a common solution, negotiate the redirection of funds, and use one voice to move forward in speaking with communities. This can sometimes be a painful process and requires patience and diplomacy. Fortunately, the dashboard as an intra-organizational activity also generates a culture of solidarity and team spirit. With enough communication and understanding, addressing gaps and duplications can build even stronger bridges between partners.

Another challenge has been consistently linking the data collected by non-governmental partners with government systems, especially government-collected epidemiological data. To support this, The Collective Service has encouraged ownership of the dashboard within government and has

collected evidence on effectiveness and utilization of the dashboard to emphasize the value of this activity. This is an important challenge that must be overcome to ensure the sustainability of the dashboard.

LESSONS LEARNED

Coordination

- Inputting data into a country-wide dashboard facilitates coordination between partners by creating a shared goal/activity.
- Several agencies within the same government can overlap activities without being aware of each other's activities.
- All sectors, not just traditionally public health actors/organizations/government agencies, should be included in the dashboard activity. A multi-sectoral approach expedites the mobilization of resources and provides a holistic approach to public health events.

Accountability

- Mapping activities not only show gaps and duplications, but also reveal when colleagues are not following through on proposed activities.

- If proposed activities are not taking place, government partners can step in to ask for accountability or alert funding organizations that there is a discrepancy between what is happening and what is being reported.

Negotiation

- It is helpful to set up an RCCE committee with a wide range of actors such as faith-based leaders, local municipal leaders, and NGO/CBO staff to convene regularly and discuss the data that has been entered into the dashboard.

- The identification of the duplication of efforts requires patience and diplomacy to negotiate programming changes, especially with regard to funding mechanisms.

- Mapping exercises can bring up power struggles between and within organizations. It is helpful for the RCCE committee (see lesson #6) to help mediate programming changes.

- An effective way to keep partners on the same page is to remind them that the dashboard is about generating evidence for RCCE work. Keeping partners focused on the evidence creates a shared value to align the coordination of activities moving forward.

Sustainability

- Building capacity for all users of the dashboard will ensure wider and more frequent use of the dashboard and continue to create demand.

- It is essential to monitor how the dashboard is being utilized so that there is an evidence base to justify its continued use at the country level.

- To expand the types of data and make data more robust, it is best to create ownership within government for this activity.

NEXT STEPS

The dashboard continues to be showcased to other countries as an accessible tool for data visualization that helps organizations identify gaps and negotiate overlaps to improve the efficiency of programs nationwide. It is also a testament to the kind of innovative support that the Collective Service can provide through Information Management. The success of Malawi's dashboard has become a model for Eastern and Southern Africa (ESAR), with similar dashboards already being implemented in South Africa and Somalia, and underway in Kenya and Zimbabwe.

At present, the Collective Service is currently working to expand the dashboard to include qualitative community feedback data, and to hand over management of the dashboard to UNICEF. The Collective Service will continue to proactively monitor and document the ways in which RCCE dashboards are changing the landscape of inter-organizational coordination and programming in the ESAR region.

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