

Harnessing digital tools to better connect health system actors

A new responsive, people-centred health initiative in Tanzania.

16-08-19



Dit is de omschrijving

The Institute of Tropical Medicine (ITM) in Antwerp is participating in Afya-Tek, a digitally-enabled, responsive health system initiative in Tanzania that brings together health actors at the community level via new technologies. Afya-Tek is a consortium of partners across sectors and is funded by the Fondation Botnar in Basel. ITM is responsible for the monitoring and evaluation of the integration of the digital tools into the healthcare system.

The key actors in Tanzania's health system at the community level are insufficiently connected, which results in information leakages and barriers to timely access to care. Afya-Tek will work to link community health workers, front-line health facilities, and private community-based drug vendors to improve decision-making and quality of care along the continuum of care, helping to ensure patients' prompt access to care and reduce unnecessary referrals. By 2021, it aims to improve the wellbeing of children, adolescents, and their families in the Kibaha district through this digitally-enabled approach that results in better case management by coordinating public and private healthcare providers at the community level.

"This project involves both operational partners and research partners; we've got local implementers and anthropologists, tech-innovators, and health systems researchers, says ITM researcher Nandini D P Sarkar, co-investigator of the project. "At ITM, we're excited to use both formative research and especially realist evaluation as part of this project. We will not only be asking "Does the co-created digital health intervention work?" but also "How or why does this digital health intervention work, for whom, and in what circumstances?" By doing so we hope to understand how to best develop a digital solution which can improve the referral services and continuity of care for patients in Tanzania."

The initiative is the first of its kind to harness emerging digital tools to better connect the health system actors, including predictive analytics and biometric identification, and will begin to assess the feasibility of integrating artificial intelligence-enabled health assistants in the future.

Digital technologies and their application to healthcare have the potential to improve efficiency, lower overall costs, and streamline the workload of health facility staff. Digitising the flow of information can increase the coordination between the different levels and providers in the continuum. This can then bring preventive and curative care closer to communities, strengthening the overall health system in Tanzania.

Professor Koen Peeters is the principal investigator of the project from ITM's side: *"Afya-Tek is an innovative digital health programme, working hand-in-hand with the people of Tanzania. Through the use of complexity-driven research and evaluation, we hope to generate universal learnings regarding the promise of digital health solutions in improving health systems and health outcomes in Tanzania and beyond."*