

UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF PRIMARY HEALTH CARE IN MOZAMBIQUE

COVID-19 PROMISING PRACTICES

The **Vital Signs Profile (VSP)** is a measurement tool to provide policymakers, donors, advocates and citizens with a sense of how the primary health care (PHC) system is functioning. VSPs provide an innovative snapshot of PHC systems at the national level, shining a light on where systems are strong and where there are opportunities for improvement. VSPs are structured around the most critical aspects of PHC, including financing, capacity, performance, and equity.

VSP EXPERIENCE

- Mozambique completed its VSP assessment in 2020, providing critical insights into both strengths and areas for improving PHC in the country.
- The Mozambique government is dedicated to PHC measurement and improvement. PHC sits as a central component to the country's health systems strengthening initiatives and high-levels of government support contributed to a successful VSP assessment.
- This commitment to PHC was especially salient during COVID-19 as the Ministry of Health (MISAU) continued to support the team completing the VSP in the midst of the global pandemic. MISAU involvement provided for a transparent and accountable assessment process, allowing for the creation of a VSP that accurately reflects the current state of Mozambique's PHC system.
- Data from the VSP assessment are being used as evidence to inform an array of PHC strengthening strategies and initiatives. These uses include the formulation of health sector priorities and policies, as well as the investment plans for the Global Fund and Global Financing Facility.

PHC CONTEXT



Population: 30.36 million
GDP/Capita: \$503.57 USD
Human Development Index: 0.456
Life Expectancy at Birth: 60.16 Years

- PHC in Mozambique is principally delivered at local primary health centers, but services are also available at district, rural, and general hospitals.
- In 2016, Mozambique established its National Plan for the Development of Human Resources for Health 2016-2025, with the goal of equitable distribution of a qualified healthcare workforce.
- Mozambique has invested in and is rolling-out an electronic health information system for monitoring and evaluation (SISMA) to improve decision making and accountability.
- VSP assessment results are being used by MISAU to develop the 2020-2024 Strategic Plan for the Health Sector.

THE ROLE OF PHC IN MOZAMBIQUE'S COVID-19 RESPONSE



As of 31 Mar 2021

67.5K

TOTAL CONFIRMED CASES

56.4K

RECOVERIES

775

DEATHS

20 MAR 20

1ST CONFIRMED CASE

30 MAR 20

DECLARATION OF NATIONAL STATE OF EMERGENCY

7 SEPT 20

TRANSITION TO STATE OF PUBLIC CALAMITY

As COVID-19 swept across the country, Mozambique's pandemic response strategy built upon strengths and made adaptations to address gaps identified in the 2020 VSP. **Mozambique leveraged existing proactive population outreach structures and empowered the community health workforce and facility staff to make them central components of the response strategy. Existing alignment in performance indicators across health facilities was supplemented with the rapid development of new targeted COVID-19 surveillance capacity within SISMA to ensure that critical data were flowing to decision makers.** Taken together, these approaches enabled Mozambique to mobilize a COVID-19 response at the community level thereby preventing debilitating hospital surges.

To support continued access to essential PHC services during the pandemic, MISAU and donor partners prioritized the continuity of maternal and child health services. Looking ahead, MISAU plans to continue investing in the PHC system to improve the availability of critical supplies and essential medicines, expand the reach of the SISMA electronic health information system, and expand the health workforce.

LEVERAGING PHC SYSTEM STRENGTHS AND IMPROVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR AN EFFECTIVE COVID-19 RESPONSE

INSIGHTS FROM INTERVIEWS WITH DR. CHADREQUE MULUANA AND DR. CAROLINA OMAR

Dr. Chadreque Muluana currently works for Mozambique's Ministry of Health as a part of the Directorate of Planning and Cooperation (DPC). Within the DPC, Dr. Muluana serves as the head of the Department of Monitoring and Evaluation. Dr. Carolina Omar is a specialized doctor of public health with substantial experience working in Mozambique's health sector including with the WHO and Global Fund. Most recently, Dr. Omar served as the country consultant for PHCPI and focal point for Mozambique's VSP process.

Leveraging Existing PHC System Strengths

As identified in Mozambique's Vital Signs Profile

Proactive Population Outreach: In the context of COVID-19, MISAU promoted the education, identification, and treatment of people in their homes. Mozambique's ability to engage citizens within the comfort of their communities enabled COVID-19 surveillance and care provision at the local level without overwhelming limited hospital capacity. Proactive outreach also proved to be vital for the continued delivery of essential health services.

Performance Measurement & Management: All health facilities in Mozambique have performance goals that align with district, provincial, and national targets. Facility goals are periodically analyzed to understand progress. This system and culture of shared accountability was an important asset to MISAU for organizing and monitoring the system-wide response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Adapting to Strengthen PHC System Gaps

As identified in Mozambique's Vital Signs Profile

Community Health Workers (CHW): Identified as a nascent service in Mozambique's VSP, MISAU quickly mobilized CHWs to play a critical role in the pandemic response at the community level. CHWs were trained to identify, report, and isolate COVID-19 cases, and make appropriate referrals to higher-level facilities for acute patients. CHWs used contact-tracing to spot high-risk individuals to recommend 14-day quarantines or direct them to "COVID-counter" test sites at local health centers.

Drugs, Supplies, and Facility Infrastructure: Mozambique's supply chain budget was insufficient to respond to elevated needs driven by the COVID-19 pandemic. The donor community rapidly unlocked \$600 million in March 2020 to address supply shortages. However, as in most countries, insufficient supplies of personal protective equipment (PPE) remained a major challenge resulting in elevated provider infections from March to May 2020. In an effective response, the government and donor partners adjusted policies to allow health centers to purchase PPE directly from local private markets to mitigate shortages.

Information Systems: SISMA provides surveillance and essential services data at all levels of the health system. Implementation of the electronic system to lower level facilities is incomplete and analytical capacity is limited, resulting in poor data quality. While higher level facilities operate using digital records, most local health centers are still utilizing paper records that are sent to the district level where data are aggregated and manually transcribed into SISMA. To help address data quality issues during the pandemic, a novel surveillance system was rolled-out at the health center level to capture symptoms suggestive of COVID-19. Local focal points were appointed to capture and transcribe COVID-19 indicators into SISMA, thereby providing more timely and complete data for decision-making at higher levels.

PHC in Mozambique Beyond COVID-19

Understanding PHC system's strengths and gaps highlighted by the VSP helped the Government of Mozambique and MISAU to develop an effective COVID-19 response and adaptation strategy. Further investments in Mozambique's PHC system will be critical for building the country's resilience to future shocks and to accelerate movement towards global targets such as the Sustainable Development Goals. Mozambique has demonstrated a strong political commitment to PHC development, making PHC a priority in the time of COVID-19 and beyond. The National Plan for the Development of Human Resources for Health 2016-2025 will strengthen the community health workforce, and results from the VSP are informing policy development and action plans to enhance the public health supply chain system.

Key informants identified that leadership and management at all levels of the health system were critical to Mozambique's COVID-19 response, but more progress is needed to hold stakeholders across the ministry, private sector, and civil society accountable for collaborating on common targets and initiatives. This includes increased multi-sectoral action to achieve targets on essential health care access, poverty eradication, and sanitation among other social determinants of health. Informants recommended that additional priorities in a post-COVID world include improving community engagement in the health sector through the creation of a community health subsystem, and strengthening the health system for future emergency response. Keep an eye out on ImprovingPHC.org for the upcoming publication of Mozambique's VSP results.