Jamii ni Afya
Zanzibar's National Digital
Community Health System

In Zanzibar, too many women and children experience poor health or die prematurely because of persistent barriers keeping them from getting the care they need. Digital technologies have an unprecedented potential to overcome these barriers and improve the access to and quality of essential health services for all Zanzibaris. Learning from over a decade of implementation with digital technologies to support frontline health workers and meaningfully improve health outcomes, Zanzibar's Ministry of Health launched Jamii ni Afya (Community is Health), a comprehensive, government-led, digital community health program connecting families, community health volunteers and the health system to ensure everyone has access to essential health services. In August 2021, Jamii ni Afya achieved full national scale, bringing digitally enabled healthcare to every household and making Zanzibar one of the first examples of a government-led, digital community health system achieving national scale anywhere in the world. The program has been written into national policy with strong commitment from the government to institutionalize and sustain it as a critical part of the broader health system, serving as a model for governments looking to scale-up similar programs around the world.

HOW JAMII NI AFYA WORKS

Jamii ni Afya formalizes the role of community health workers—called community health volunteers (CHVs) in Zanzibar—and equips them with digital tools to provide step-by-step guidance to deliver high-quality, standardized care based on government protocols, automate data collection and link referrals made in the community to primary health facilities. As a patient's care needs change, CHVs receive tailored guidance to provide the most appropriate and personalized care possible. For CHV supervisors, Jamii ni Afya provides valuable information to monitor and improve the performance of health workers and the coverage of health services. At the national level, data aggregated from the system also supports the Ministry of Health to make informed decisions based on a real-time understanding of the state of community health.

With a comprehensive digital system connecting communities, health facilities and the national health system, Jamii ni Afya helps women deliver in health facilities with skilled birth attendants, creates an effective referral system for mothers, children and adolescents to receive timely care and supports parents and caregivers to build nurturing home environments for young children—all proven changes we know can save lives and improve the wellbeing for thousands of people every year.

How does Jamii ni Afya Work?

Jamii ni Afya is a comprehensive digital system supporting CHVs and their supervisors with case management, decision support, referral coordination, work planning and performance monitoring.

Households

All individuals have access to a dedicated CHV who regularly visits their household using the Jamii ni Afya mobile app to provide comprehensive services tailored to each client's unique needs. The app walks the CHV through each step of care delivery and can initiate digital referrals so that families benefit from strong linkages to primary health facilities.

Health workers

CHVs are supported and motivated by digital tools to provide high-quality, respectful and personalized care that is well coordinated between the community and primary healthcare systems. Health and program data are collected in real-time, enabling supervisors to more accurately monitor service delivery and provide supportive supervision.

Health system

The system is integrated with government reporting, so health system managers can use data for evidence-based decision-making. At the highest level, ministers can use the data to inform national policies and budgets about what health services to provide and how to deliver them. At the district level, management teams can identify locations that are under-performing and intervene as necessary.

Jamii ni Afya incorporates proven principles and practices from effective community health programs around the world based on the Community Health Worker Assessment and Improvement Matrix (CHW AIM) Principles. Despite being labeled as "volunteers," CHVs in Zanzibar are trained by the Ministry of Health, receive routine supportive supervision and are fairly compensated for the services they provide.

CHW AIM PRINCIPLES

Accredited – CHW knowledge & skills are assessed prior to deployment
Accessible – Client/user fees should be avoided to ensure access & equity of care
Proactive – CHWs go door-to-door for active disease surveillance & early warning for danger signs Continuously Trained – CHWs receive ongoing training & medical education
Supported by a Dedicated Supervisor – CHWs receive routine supportive supervision and coaching Paid – CHWs receive fair compensation for their work
Part of a Strong Health System – CHWs must work as one part of a broader, well-resourced & responsive primary healthcare system
Part of Data Feedback Loops – CHWs should collect data & report directly to public-sector reporting mechanisms

RESULTS

Community Health Impact

- More than 90% of population enrolled in program, showing near-universal buy-in and acceptance and potential impact at national scale.

- 86% of pregnant women delivering in health facilities, a 28% increase over the national average.

- More than 95% of women and children who receive referrals to a health facility complete them within 3 days, more than 3x typical referral completion rate. 75% of community health volunteers meet performance targets due to strong, digitally enhanced supervision systems.

National Scale

- First-ever digital community health program scaled nationally by government as part of their formal government health system.

- Incorporated Jamii ni Afya into nationalpolicy through its inclusion in the MOH's National Community Health Strategy 2019-2025.

- Created Zanzibar's first-ever Digital Health Strategy 2020-2025 to bolster MOH digital health capabilities and governance.

"We are extremely proud that the Jamii ni Afya program is now serving every community and ensuring that every Zanzibari can access high-quality healthcare. This represents an important milestone in our long-term partnership with D-tree and a meaningful step toward achieving universal health coverage. With Jamii ni Afya, we are creating a foundation for transforming Zanzibar's primary health system. The Ministry is committed to leading Jamii ni Afya into the future and to continue increasing demand for health services, improving the quality of care provided and actively involving communities in the health system."

-Dr. Abdullah S. Ali,

Director General, Zanzibar Ministry of Health, Social Welfare, Elderly, Gender and Children

NEXT STEPS

With digitally enabled CHVs providing health services to every family in every village, Jamii ni Afya is a significant step towards achieving Zanzibar's pursuit of universal health coverage and has the potential to serve as the foundation for transforming the broader primary health system. Now that the program has achieved scale, D-tree is focused on supporting the government to sustain high-quality service delivery, optimize system efficiency and achieve full government ownership through in-depth sustainability planning.

We have also begun to support the government to leverage the potential of the population-level data routinely collected through the program and to apply data science to optimize the delivery of health services and improve health outcomes for the entire population.

Learn more and contact us to get involved in Jamii ni Afya's future
www.d-tree.org/jamii-ni-afya