

The Impact of the Lesotho Health Reform in the Re-structuring of the Village Health Workers Program



Afom T. Andom1 | Hannah N. Gilbert2 | Courtney M. Yuen2 3 | Mapoho Mokoroane5 | Melino Ndayizigiye1 | Mpopo Tsoele6 | Masebeo Koto5 | Retsepile Tlali1 | Makena Ratsiu1 | Joia S. Mukherjee2 3 4

1 Partners In Health – Lesotho, Maseru,2 Department of Global Health and Social Medicine, Harvard Medical School, Boston, MA, USA,3 Division of Global Health Equity, Brigham and Women’s Hospital, Boston, MA, USA,4 Partners In Health, Boston, MA, USA,5 Lesotho Ministry of Health, Maseru, Lesotho,6 Lesotho Prime Minister office, Maseru, Lesotho

BACKGROUND

Community Health Workers locally known as Village Health Workers (VHW) in Lesotho are key members of the primary health workforce, and has been playing a significant role in building primary health systems in many countries and they can fill significant gaps in human resources as low and middle income countries work towards universal health coverage in the era of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The 2014 Lesotho health reform restructured the VHW program to compensate, professionalize, and integrate VHWs into primary care services. We sought to document the ways in which the VHW program changed as a result of the health reform and the perceived impact of those changes.

METHODS

In 2018, we conducted a qualitative research study with an inductive content analysis approach in the four pilot health reform districts of Lesotho. We conducted 26 in-depth interviews with health workers practicing in the community and in primary health facilities, as well as district health authorities, and Ministry of Health and PIH officials.

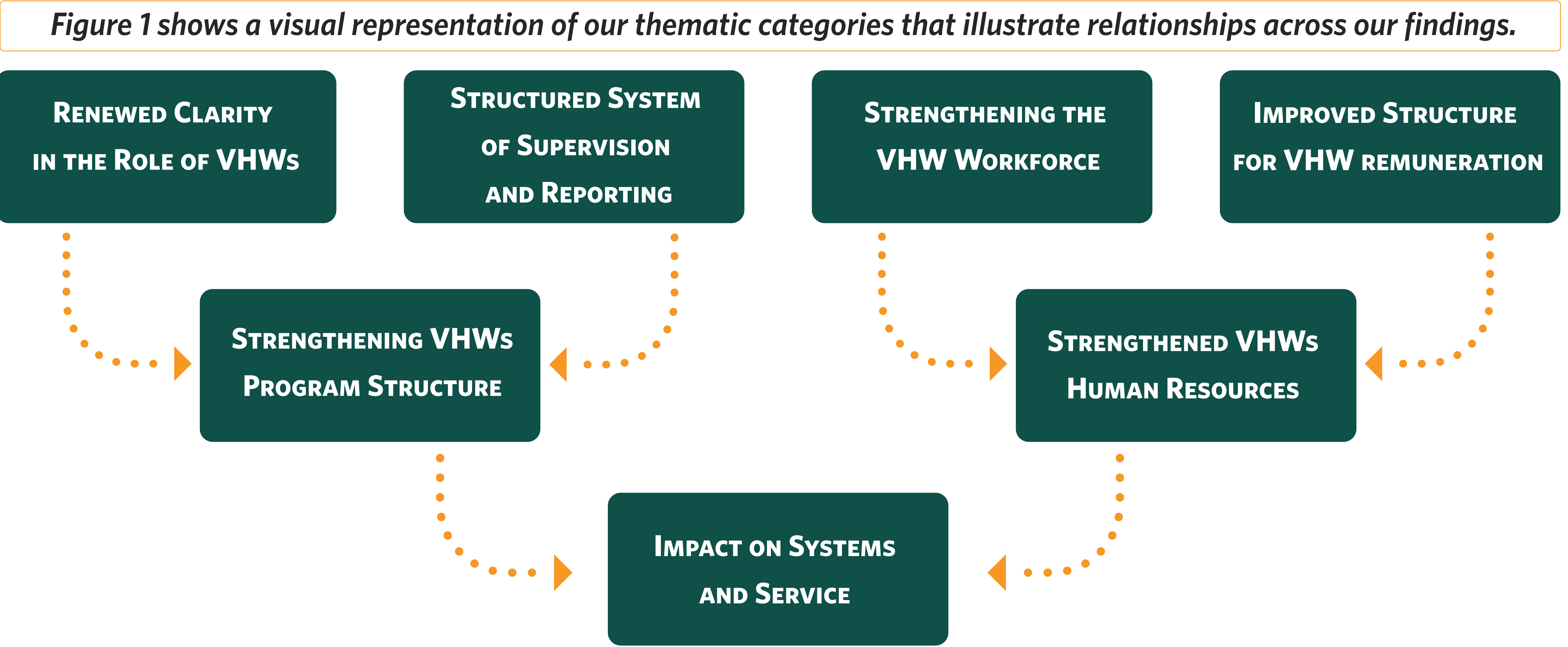


RESULTS

We found that the Lesotho health reform program was observed that it helped to professionalize the VHW program by introducing clear roles and responsibilities, regular monitoring, and supervision. The initiation of performance-based payment of VHWs and regular monitoring and reporting was thought contribute to overall improvement; in performance, strengthened links between communities and facilities, and promoted uptake of services.

TABLE 1 THEMATIC CATEGORIES WITH QUOTES

THEMATIC CATEGORY 1: STRENGTHENING THE VHW WORKFORCE			
UPDATE VHWS ROSTER	INCREASED COVERAGE	PERFORMANCE BASED INCENTIVES	ELECTRONIC PAYMENT DELIVERY SYSTEM
In the old village health worker model that we had, there were some members that were already inactive, but were still being paid by government. Some were even dead, but they were still getting the money. District Health Management Team member #10	They started by dividing VHWs into HIV/TB and MMR [maternal mortality reduction] cadres one could see that the division into these two cadres would help us achieve our rotation goal which was a Millennial Goal. Health center, Nurse #09	The incentive which was tracking some indicators, because their reports are based on the indicators in TB and HIV and maternal and child. It depends on what they are reporting, how they are reporting it, now they get their incentive. So the incentive [is] performance-based incentive actually is one of the things that has made it worthwhile. Central Ministry of Health official #15	Yeah, like I said, initially, we were paying them cash. But then we realized it wasn't safe. This is why now we introduced M-Pesa. Partners In Health staff member #04
THEMATIC CATEGORY 2: STRENGTHENING THE VHWS PROGRAM STRUCTURE			
RENEWED CLARITY IN THE ROLE OF VHWS	SUPERVISORS PROVIDE DIRECT OVERSIGHT	COORDINATORS COMPLETE THE COMMUNICATION LOOP FROM VILLAGE TO DISTRICT	
The village health workers have clear roles and responsibilities, have a monitoring framework in place, which actually can tell if a village health worker is active or not. In the past, we used never to have that. Central Ministry of Health official #15	Particular supervisor will supervise the VHWs in those villages to make sure that they do... their activities as expected. They can even do spot checks to assess whether they are still doing their activities as expected, they are ones who take the report from the VHWs they supervise. Health center, Nurse# 09	We bring reports to her [the Coordinator] and this makes the nurses jobs much easier because they get the reports from the different villages from the coordinator I think this is a success because there is no congestion brought about by bringing reports one by one.VHW #08	
THEMATIC CATEGORY 3: IMPACT ON SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT AND SERVICE UPTAKE			
VHWs have been introduced in different villages and have brought about a change because sick people are now able to come to the clinic for different services better than they did before. District Health Management Team member #07			



INTERPRETATION


The Lesotho Health Reform program was felt to be highly effective in re-structuring the VHW program in Lesotho, suggesting that when VHWs are well-incentivized, monitored, and supervised they can better fulfil their essential role as the backbone of the primary health workforce.

CONTACT

DR. AFOM ANDOM

CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER

PARTNERS IN HEALTH-LESOTHO

 aandom@pih.org