Supporting Niger's Digital Health Transformation

Background

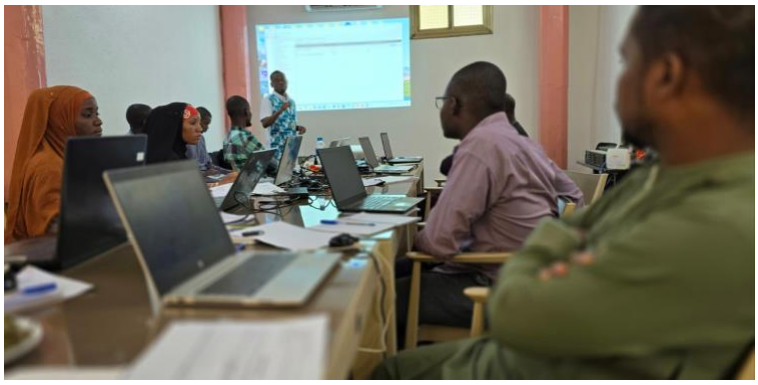
Lamine Bachir knows how critical sharing data is for patient outcomes. As the head of the Applications and Database Division at Niger's Ministry of Public Health, his division oversees the integration of health care applications to ensure both data accuracy and security. Lamine and his colleagues also work to address interoperability challenges, ensuring that information systems in different institutions can exchange data smoothly and securely. This is a critical aspect of aligning technology with clinical needs, enabling healthcare professionals to make informed decisions and continuously improve patient care.

Niger, like many countries in Africa, faces challenges managing and improving the efficiency of its health care system. Fragmented digital infrastructure limits access to reliable and timely information, essential elements of evidence-based decision-making and quality healthcare service delivery. The lack of real-time information can lead to disjointed care and have serious consequences for patients.

Aware of these challenges, the Ministry of Public Health, through the planned Digital Health Directorate (DHD), launched an ambitious digital transformation plan aimed at modernizing and digitizing the national health information ecosystem, with the support of the USAID-funded Country Health Information Systems and Data Use (CHISU) program.

Steps Taken

Beginning in 2022, CHISU began a phased approach to achieve Niger's digital transformation goals, focusing on critical areas such as data governance, technical infrastructure, and deploying appropriate digital health solutions.



This approach began with advocacy. CHISU highlighted numerous non-integrated health applications for the Minister of Health, demonstrating the fragmentation in the health information system. Seizing on the planned creation of a Digital Health Directorate (DHD), CHISU helped

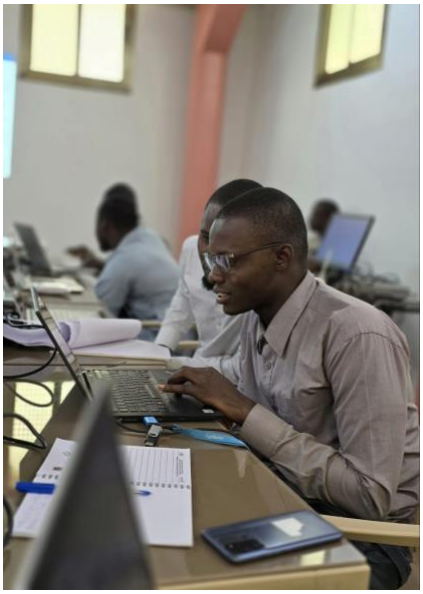
accelerate its launch and supported the development of its divisions and job descriptions to align with digital health standards. CHISU also led the development of a comprehensive national digital health master plan, outlining actionable priorities, timelines, and responsibilities to guide the sector's digital transformation.

CHISU organized specialized training sessions for digital health professionals on skills such as interoperability and business continuity planning, all skills needed to manage and use digital health systems effectively.

Lamine saw how these sessions could transform Niger's health system to provide better patient care. "The training on system interoperability helped me to understand how different applications can communicate with each other, he said, "This improves our ability to share crucial data, which is essential for monitoring patients and coordinating care."

Results

CHISU's partnership with the Ministry of Public Health has helped advance Niger's digital transformation. Niger now has:



- A comprehensive **national digital health strategy** and action plan detailing priorities, deadlines, and budgets.
- An IT maintenance plan and a business continuity plan to ensure the **resilience of the health information system**, safeguarding against disruptions and ensuring continuous access to vital health information for decision-making.
- A **technical guide for interoperability**, defining standards for data exchange and integration of healthcare systems, complemented by team training.
- A practical **guide for setting up hospital information systems**, with recommendations tailored to different levels of care and pilot implementations in several hospitals.
- **Steering committees and technical working groups** to oversee and coordinate digital transformation in the healthcare sector, fostering a culture of accountability and continuous improvement.

Through this work the CHISU program in Niger gained key insights into digital health transformation. Establishing a Digital Health Directorate and securing government ownership proved essential for coordinating and sustaining transformation efforts while steering committees and interoperability guidelines standardized data exchange, fostering cohesion within the health information network. Training health professionals boosted system adoption and facility self-sufficiency, critical aspects of durable digital systems.

These lessons provide valuable guidelines for future digital health initiatives in Niger and similar contexts.

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