

Speech by Head of DFID Tanzania delivered on Monday 14 December 2009 at the signing of MoU with Ifakara Health Institute in Dar es Salaam

Thank you Dr Mshinda, for your welcome on behalf of the Board of Trustees, and to Dr Abdulla, the IHI Director, for your invitation to this MoU ceremony.

I'm very pleased to sign this MoU today and to confirm that the UK Government - through the Department for International Development - has decided to provide core funding to support the Ifakara Health Institute to implement its new strategic plan.

The Ifakara Health Institute has a strong track record in delivering policy-relevant evidence and information – and the activities set out in the strategic plan will help strengthen that role. This is an exciting programme of work.

Having good information about service delivery is important for a country's development particularly in the important area of health.

Let me give just three reasons.

- First, better information helps us create better plans – where are the real needs in Tanzania and what is the best way of addressing them? Information enables us to produce evidence-based policy.
- Second it helps us measure progress - what has worked well, and what hasn't? And how can that knowledge feed into the next round of planning?
- Third, information strengthens accountability – we are all accountable for how we spend our resources. Parliament and Tanzania's citizens need good information on what their government has delivered. We too, as development partners, are accountable through Ministers to our own Parliament. And we are under increasing pressure to demonstrate the impact our spending is having.

In the last decade, Tanzania has made great strides in delivering better information – particularly from household surveys. The Demographic and Health Surveys and the HIV and Malaria Indicator Survey give us a much better picture than we had in the 1990s.

But we still cannot see as clearly as we need to. Typically we only get updates every four years or so. Tanzania is desperately lacking more frequent data on nutrition, child survival, maternal mortality, and so on. It's also hard to get an accurate picture of how the health service is developing and how people are using it. And without that, it's hard to know what impact health policies are having. Is progress being made? Do policies need adjusting? In many areas we simply do not know enough.

That is why the proposed new work that the Ifakara Health Institute will do is so important. We are delighted to be associated with it and to signal our confidence in IHI. DFID has committed £4 million (TzSh 8 billion) to IHI over the next four years. This is in line with our strategy to increase accountability and to focus on results.

The new Health Observatories will provide much needed data on health service delivery. And it's particularly welcome that Ifakara will be working closely with the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare on that aspect – because there's now a real chance that this work will help improve the ministry's own management information data.

And the sample vital registration component will fill a key gap in Tanzania's data systems. For the first time we'll get regular national figures on births and deaths. That means we'll have annual estimates of child mortality – and better information on maternal mortality. Up to now we've scarcely been able to tell what the trend is in maternal mortality. When the sample vital registration is up and running we'll get regular and more accurate data. This is important for our understanding of where Tanzania is in terms of meeting the health MDGs.

But the supply of information alone is not enough. It has to be used. It has to make a difference. And that's why it's very welcome – and we've again heard it today – that Ifakara's plans go beyond simply generating data. The provision of policy briefs will take the data and make it intelligible; making it usable and relevant to decision-makers. The organisation of the annual Health Policy Symposium will bring the research and analysis to a wide audience. And the push on getting information into the media will reach even wider.

And the datasets themselves will be made widely available. From access via the Ifakara website for simple queries – to the raw data themselves being made available to outside analysts. If we can get other researchers using the data that will multiply the value of the data collection.

Overall this really does look like the kind of package that can make a significant difference. If Tanzania can get the information and analysis to develop strong policies and plans – to show what results are being delivered and what impact is being made – then that will play a large part in supporting progress towards Tanzania's Mkukuta goals. We're looking forward to working with the Ifakara Health Institute to play a part in that.