

Health Systems Strengthening with a focus on Reproductive Health

Strengthening the Public Health Institute of Malawi (PHIM)

The challenge

Malawi increasingly faces a dual burden of disease: high rates of communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis, and a rapid rise in non-communicable diseases (NCDs) linked to poverty, malnutrition, and climate change. With over 64% of the population under 15 and a significant rural demographic, the health system struggles with inadequate resources, high maternal and neonatal mortality, and limited access to quality services—especially in sexual and reproductive health.

The Public Health Institute of Malawi (PHIM) was established in 2013 to provide leadership in disease surveillance, public health research and generate evidence-based policy advice. However, it faces structural and operational challenges, hindering its leadership in evidence-based policy advice. These constraints undermine Malawi's progress toward Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Our approach

The project "Support to the Public Health Institute of Malawi (PHIM)" is a multi-donor action, jointly co-financed by the European Union and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) under the Team Europe Initiative (TEI) on strengthening National Public Health Institutes (NPHIs) in Africa and implemented by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH as part of the "Health Systems Strengthening with a focus on reproductive health" programme.

This project aims to support PHIM to improve delivery of core public health functions and build regional and international linkages. It strengthens PHIM's capacity in research, data management skills, evidence generation, policy advice, and digital health systems.

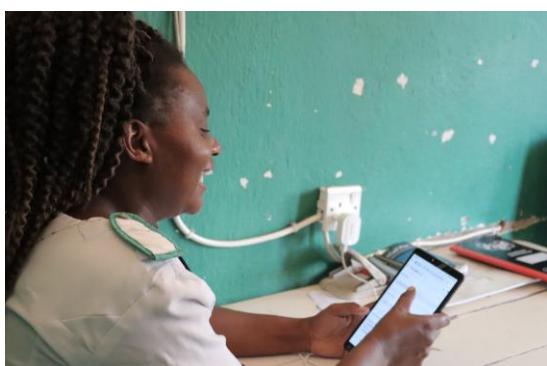
Promoting networking with African and European NPHIs and other institutions, peer support and mentoring are key approaches used to build capacity.

Activities include promoting gender-sensitive and human rights based public health research and developing a reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health monitoring and surveillance framework. A further key focus is on improving digital skills and infrastructure at PHIM to manage and use health data effectively. PHIM's journey to becoming a parastatal institution will be supported through efforts to enhance its governance and leadership in public health. Regular maturity assessments help track PHIM's institutional progress and guide the development of targeted action plans.



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Gender equity and reproductive health are cross-cutting priorities, which are integrated across the activities supported.



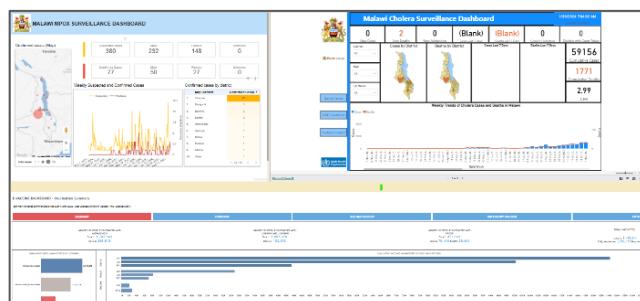
L. to r.: Data collection and technical committee meeting

The benefits

By strengthening PHIM, the initiative enhances the country's capacity to provide leadership and advice on public health issues. PHIM is strengthened to provide timely, evidence-based policy advice and improve coordinated research on prioritised topics. A more autonomous and capable PHIM will enable a proactive response to emerging health threats and play a central role in shaping national health policies.



The project's focus on data analytics and digital systems will enable PHIM to improve the collection, management, and analysis of large volumes of health data. This supports more informed decision-making and efficient allocation of resources, ultimately improving quality service delivery across the health system.



As PHIM's staff gain new competencies in research, gender-sensitive analysis, and digital tools, they will be able to highlight and identify health inequities more effectively—especially in the areas of reproductive, maternal, newborn, and child health.

Furthermore, by linking PHIM to regional and international networks, the project opens new opportunities for knowledge exchange, peer learning, and regional collaboration.

Results in figures

The TEI on strengthening NPHIs is implemented in 10 countries on the African continent. The project will have supported at least one additional formalised collaboration between PHIM and another African PHI plus one European Public Health Institute.



PHIM will have trained staff members in gender sensitive data analysis and research. A gender transformative monitoring framework for RMNCH monitoring and surveillance will be developed and operationalised. Furthermore, PHIM will have initiated three new research projects, conducted three structured policy dialogues and shared at least four evidence-based policy recommendations at high-level regional events.

And in stories

PHIM has begun to redefine its role as a national leader in evidence-based public health. We aim to improve PHIM staff capacity in digital health and data analytics, enabling more effective data use for RMNCH trends monitoring and surveillance. Data, previously siloed from numerous sources and entities has been brought together to be easily accessed in one place, enabling holistic and efficient analysis. Using the obtained analytical tools this data was analysed to identify hotspots for teenage pregnancy and through enhanced collaboration with the Reproductive Health Department in the Ministry of Health could then support tailoring community outreach programs and communication.

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