Scaling-up experimental project success with the community-based health planning and services initiative in Ghana

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Abstract

The Community-based Health Planning and Services (CHPS) initiative in Ghana is an example of a strategy for scaling-up a field trial to become a national programme. Representing a response to the problem that research projects can inadvertently produce nonreplicable service delivery capabilities, CHPS develops mechanisms for expanding national understanding and use of research findings to serve the health service needs of all Ghanaian households. This paper describes strategies for introducing and developing community health services that were successfully tested in a Navrongo Health Research Centre trial and validated in Nkwanta District for a national programme of reorienting primary health care from clinics to communities. Nurses, once confined to clinical duties, are relocated to community-constructed clinics where they live and work. Volunteers support their services by mobilizing traditional social institutions to foster community support. Strategies for decentralized planning ensures that operational details of the programme are adapted to local circumstances. Strengths and limitations of the programme are reviewed and discussed.

Keywords: Community-based health services; health sector reform; scaling-up; planning; innovation; Ghana
Introduction

Clinic-focused services remain the mainstay of primary health care in Africa, despite several convincing demonstrations that community-based operations can enhance the accessibility, efficacy, and sustainability of essential health services (World Bank, 1994). While reforms are often proposed for changing national programmes from a clinic to a community-based focus, implementing such change requires a complex process for developing new structures, policies, resources, and plans at each organizational level where change must be instituted. In the Republic of Ghana, policy commitment to achieving community-based care is not new (e.g. University of Ghana, unpublished document, 1979). Deliberations on health sector reform began in the early 1980s but were given impetus in the 1990s by a continuous and growing role for research. The expanding influence of evidence-guided approaches was motivated by research showing that several large-scale national schemes for addressing the need for accessible primary health care had been fraught with serious organizational problems and resource constraints (Amonoo-Larsen et al., 1984). By 1990, achieving accessible primary health care had been a central pillar of policy for over a decade; yet, specific means of achieving this goal remained the subject of continuing discussion and debate.

This paper reviews a national programme for reorienting and relocating primary health care from sub-district health centres to convenient community locations known as the Community-based Health Planning and Services (CHPS) initiative. The programme is grounded in evidence from a field trial of the Navrongo Health Research Centre showing that simple, low cost, and community-engaged services can significantly reduce fertility and childhood mortality. The Navrongo Centre is well equipped to engage in health policy research. Located in Ghana’s most impoverished and remote region, the Navrongo Centre is a research unit of the Ministry of Health with a mandate to investigate the health consequences of poverty and feasible means of addressing them. CHPS is a national initiative of the Ministry of Health that translates lessons from Navrongo research into national implementation of the longstanding Alma Ata goal of “Health for All.”
Phases in the scaling-up process

From the onset of planning for the Navrongo experiment, the project was an instrument of the health sector reform process rather than a discrete research study for generating scientific results. The sustained partnership between researchers and policymakers is portrayed in Figure 1 as a four-phased process guided by successive generations of research questions, approaches, and products contributing to national health sector reform.

Figure 1. Phases in the scaling-up process
Phase I: Policy debate and pilot

In Ghana, extending the coverage of basic and primary health-care services to all has been the major objective of the Ministry of Health since Independence in 1957. Two general goals have guided primary health-care policy: 1) the need to expand public sector health facilities, under the assumption that convenient facilities providing low cost care will benefit the poor, and 2) the need to shift resources from curative institution-based care to community-based preventive public health services. Although action in response to these goals produced notable results (Ministry of Health, 1995 and 2001; International Monetary Fund, unpublished document, 2002) impact of strategic change among the poorest segment of the population had been disappointing (Ministry of Health, 1998).

Shortcomings in health service delivery were exacerbated by adverse worldwide economic shocks and domestic economic problems of the 1980s. While external support increased owing to a proliferation of donor-led vertical health initiatives, the health sector was failing to meet the need for improved health-care coverage.

Launched in 1993, health sector reform in Ghana has aimed to increase access to services, improve health service quality and efficiency through decentralization of planning and management, foster partnerships between providers and communities, and expand health-care resources. Despite consensus on these goals, there has been longstanding debate on how to achieve them. Elements of this debate could not be resolved without a rigorous controlled trial of policy options. A 1991 order from the Director General of Medical Services created a task force to govern research and

Figure 2. Kassena-Nankana District in the Upper East Region and Nkwanta District in the Volta Region relative to the other 108 districts and eight regions of Ghana
strategic decision-making. Chaired by the Director General, the task force was comprised of the Director of Maternal and Child Health, the Director of the Health Research Unit, the Director of Public Health, and the Director of the Navrongo Health Research Centre. A study protocol was drafted specifying scientific goals, activities, endpoints, and mechanisms to ensure that evidence generated would guide large-scale reform. The approach was guided by international experience of linking innovators with policymakers and sustaining evidence-based scaling-up, even during periods of political and administrative change (Akosa et al., 2003; Simmons & Shiffman, this volume).

Task force debate focused on the relative efficacy of two possible resources for implementing and governing accessible and affordable community health and family planning care. A view, represented by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)-sponsored “Bamako Initiative,” emphasized the potential contribution of volunteer health providers and supporting cultural resources, such as chieftaincy, lineage, and social network systems (Knippenberg et al., 1990). In this perspective, vibrant traditional institutions for defining social structure, building consensus, and establishing opinion leadership that are often ignored by health programmes could be utilized for developing sustainable volunteer health services. However, practical problems with implementing and managing volunteer programmes had been documented in the past (Agyepong & Marfo, unpublished report, 1992; Agyepong, 1999). In response to these problems, proponents of primary health care emphasized the potential impact of relocating under-utilized community nurses to village locations (Amonoo-Larson et al., 1984). The task force prepared a protocol calling for a factorial trial to assess the relative childhood survival and fertility impact of marshalling two existing, but under-utilized resources for community health care. One arm of the study mobilized the health service capabilities of traditional leaders, social networks, and volunteers; the other arm relocated under-utilized community nurses from clinic locations to resident community health service delivery roles. Since strategies could be implemented independently, jointly, or not at all, the design implied four cells, with the comparison condition representing the existing clinic-focused system of care.

The trial was to be conducted by the Navrongo Health Research Centre in Kassena-Nankana District of the Upper East Region (Figure 2) where high rates of
malaria, respiratory disease, diarrhoeal disease, nutritional adversity and reproductive health morbidity produce high infant and child mortality. Fertility in the locality is high owing to gender stratification, low rates of literacy, extreme poverty, and traditional beliefs that constrain the introduction of family planning services (Adongo et al., 1997).

Phase I involved a pilot trial as well as social and operations research to clarify how the two experimental arms of the four-celled protocol could actually be implemented in such a challenging setting. In keeping with international experience in strategic planning, focus groups in three villages were convened to gauge opinion about the design of health and family planning services (Korten, 1980; Simmons, Phillips & Rahman, 1984; Simmons et al., 1997; Simmons, Brown & Díaz, 2002). Particular attention was directed to seeking guidance from women about their needs and advice on family planning service strategies. Activities emerged from these discussions that were implemented in a micro-pilot in three locations, focused on practical strategies for implementing the two experimental dimensions. Pilot activities were directed to developing guidelines for approaching chiefs and elders to engage their support and involvement in programme management, subordinating health leadership to the traditional system of community governance. Traditional leaders were oriented to the tasks of securing volunteer commitment to constructing community clinics, backstopping the daily living needs of nurses, and supporting programme supervision and logistics operations. Pilot activities developed procedures for defining coverage areas of nurses, field methods for supporting nurse operations and training protocols for instructing nurses in community diplomacy. The pilot trial also focused on problems that applied to all experimental cells. For example, dialogue with community members aimed to identify ways to address gender problems, engage the support and participation of men in the programme, and sustain worker accountability to the communities served. Quarterly focus group sessions gauged worker and community reactions to strategies, permitting project scientists to revise operations in response to advice imparted (Nazzar et al., 1995). After 18 months of trial and error, and participatory planning, the task force launched Phase II.
Phase II: The Navrongo trial

To implement Phase II, the four sub-districts of the district were randomized into the cells of a factorial design (Binka, Nazzar & Phillips, 1995). Comparison of cells provided answers to questions about the relative merits of mobilizing traditional social institutions and volunteerism versus relocating community health nurses from clinics to communities. Results demonstrated that comprehensive community-based care not only was possible to achieve, but also improved immunization coverage, service accessibility, and the quantity of maternal and family planning care (Debpuur et al., 2002; Phillips et al., 2003). Putting a trained nurse in the community lessened parents’ reliance on traditional healers when their children are sick (Nyarko, Pence & Adongo, unpublished report, 2004) and reduced childhood mortality by more than a third (Nyarko et al., 2005). As the project progressed, community trust in nurses grew noticeably. Volunteers had no impact on parental health seeking behaviour, however, because parents saw little distinction between the capabilities of traditional healers and volunteers (Nyarko, Pence & Adongo, unpublished report, 2004). Nonetheless, volunteers played a crucial role in building the participation of men in family planning and developing gender outreach activities. In the final analysis, Navrongo was successful for all parameters examined, but child survival success was related solely to the performance of nurses, and family planning success was conditional on the joint work of community leaders, volunteers and nurses. Thus, the combined community nurse and volunteer cell was suggested and eventually adopted as the model for national policy.

Phase III: The Nkwanta validation initiative

A National Dissemination Conference was convened in 1998, to disseminate preliminary Navrongo Trial results. Participants included all senior health officials from national, regional and district levels. Debate ensued over the relevance of Navrongo to the national programme. Some participants argued that the unique institutional resources of the Navrongo Centre were responsible for project success and that these capabilities could not readily be replicated in rural settings that lacked resources for research. Others
asserted that the process of observing workers, measuring results, and interacting with communities had subtle and nonreplicable effects arising from the tendency of participants to view research activities as tantamount to supervisory oversight. Evidence of programme impact in Navrongo alone could not mobilize the political will essential for scaling-up. Thus there was a need to validate the Navrongo success story in other cultural and ecological zones of Ghana, using routinely available resources and mechanisms of the Ghana Health Service.

Early in 1998, the Volta Regional Health Administration initiated a field trip for orienting district directors to the Navrongo Trial and expressed interest in testing the transfer of innovations to the relatively ‘normal’ resource-constrained service setting of Nkwanta District. To build staff consensus, the Nkwanta District director of medical services, the public health nurse, two sub-district supervisors, and community nurses visited Navrongo to observe the project firsthand. The team-building role of the field trip was crucial because Ghanaian social norms place a high value on collective decision-making. Field work permitted open and frank discussion of nurses’ concern that community posting would disrupt family life and social relations. In addition, supervisors had been clinic and office workers who seldom faced the rigors of community work. Since volunteers are not permitted to provide antibiotic therapy, some Volta Region medical officers expressed concerns that involving volunteers in health services would divert health seeking behaviour from comprehensive primary health care to the relatively ineffective clinical syndromic regimen that volunteers are allowed to provide. Anticipated administrative problems were also a source of concern. The logistics required to launch community services seemed daunting, particularly because community care would add to supervisory workloads rather than replace or restructure existing functions. The notion of mobilizing communities was perceived by some to be risky, since expectations might be aroused for non-sustainable levels of service intensity.

These apprehensions and concerns were addressed through direct exchange between individuals in the Navrongo team who had developed ways of solving them, and peer counterparts from Nkwanta seeking practical guidance. Field demonstration of service operations thus assured the Nkwanta team of the feasibility of restructuring health service delivery based on the Navrongo model. Nurses, in particular, welcomed
exchanges with Navrongo community nurses. The success of this exchange showed that transferring the Navrongo model to other districts is appropriately pursued by demonstration rather than by didactic classroom training. After a week of joint service delivery, Nkwanta staff members began to plan a two-community pilot that would adapt the Navrongo model to local circumstances and set the stage for within-district peer exchanges where pilot teams would orient counterparts elsewhere in Nkwanta District. Nkwanta established the value of pilot adaptation of the Navrongo model, as opposed to mechanical replication of its operational details. The training programme subsequently developed by CHPS for district teams seeking to implement community-based care therefore focuses on methods for implementing pilot trials rather than procedures for implementing district-wide operations.

Results from the pilot demonstrated that the Navrongo model could be implemented with Nkwanta administrative systems and resources. Nkwanta is typical of the poorest localities in Ghana where contraceptive practice is rare and high childhood mortality results from high prevalence of measles, malaria, and other communicable diseases and is compounded by the inaccessibility of health facilities and low rates of childhood immunization (Awoonor-Williams et al., 2004). A large and isolated district spanning over 5,500 square kilometres, Nkwanta has a subsistence economy based on agriculture and fishing. Ranking among the most impoverished districts in Ghana, Nkwanta lacks paved roads, communication infrastructure, and pipe-borne water. Educational attainment is low, particularly among women. Health services are rudimentary. A single physician serves 187,000 district residents and when community health care was launched in 1999, there was no district hospital. Health staff typically were deployed to sub-district clinics located far from most communities, and outreach services were sporadic and poorly managed. Replicating the Navrongo model in such a setting, with the usual resources of a district management team, would represent a powerful endorsement of the relevance of the model to impoverished districts elsewhere in the country.

Though similar in development constraints and health problems, Navrongo and Nkwanta differ fundamentally in their cultural and ecological settings. Whereas Navrongo has two ethno-linguistic groups, each residing in dispersed settlement areas of
geographically contiguous zones, Nkwanta settlement patterns are clustered by hamlet, each with multiple ethno-linguistic groups. As many as five languages may be spoken in a single village, with each group led by its own chieftaincy and lineage system. This linguistic diversity presents unique challenges for communication about behaviour change. Whereas Navrongo could rely upon councils of chiefs and elders for building community participation, the Nkwanta team relied upon respected non-traditional leaders and groups, such as teachers, elected officials, and faith-based organizations to build consensus for the programme among traditional leaders. Finally, while Navrongo has extensive resources for equipment and logistics support embedded in its research protocol, Nkwanta’s less sophisticated institutional capacity is more typical of district health systems in other rural districts of Ghana. The Nkwanta team developed management information procedures for tracking births and immunizations that could be implemented without computer technology.

The validation exercise in Nkwanta demonstrated that implementing community-based services would require substantial changes in the health-care system (Table 1) and identified the operational details of phasing in community health services community-by-community over time. Steps developed in Navrongo for changing operations from clinic-focused to community-based services were clarified, documented, and validated by the Nkwanta District Health Management Team, resulting in the following six major sequential milestones: 1) Preliminary planning, which involves grouping communities into service zones, specifying where each nurse is assigned to provide care, identifying community leaders and planning optimal location of the facilities to be used as service points for community-based health care (health compounds); 2) Community entry, which includes conducting meetings and diplomacy with village leaders, convening public gatherings, known as durbars, for communicating plans and activities to communities, and constituting health liaison committees for providing daily support to the programme; 3) Health compound construction which utilizes volunteer labour and community resources to develop the dwelling unit where nurses live and work; 4) Procurement of essential equipment, such as motorbikes, bicycles, and clinical equipment; 5) Posting nurses and providing them with technical refresher training and orientation to communities where they are assigned; and 6) Volunteer recruitment which involves
engaging health committees in designating health volunteers to assist with community activities in child health, family planning and other reproductive health services. At least 20 specific component activities have also been identified, although their sequence of implementation differs from locality to locality.

The process of transfer also demonstrated ways in which the strategy for expansion could improve upon the Navrongo model. Changes in the Navrongo approach to community mobilization were introduced to respond to ethnic diversity, which is common in southern Ghana, but rare in the northern regions. Moreover, volunteers were deployed as community health organizers rather than as frontline service providers, in response to Navrongo research showing that child health is not improved by volunteer service delivery (Nyarko Pence & Adongo, unpublished report, 2004; Nyarko, et al., 2005).

Surveys conducted in 1999 and 2002 suggest that the validation effort had succeeded. In the 1999 baseline survey, family planning usage in Nkwanta District was estimated to be less than 4% (Awoonor-Williams et al., 2004). By 2002, prevalence was 14% in communities exposed to the programme, representing three times the prevailing rates in the rest of the district. Similarly, the odds of knowing at least one method of family planning were 2.2 times greater than among other district residents. Health indicators were also affected. The odds of having received antenatal care were more than five times greater among women residing in service communities than for others. Postnatal care odds were four times greater, and the odds of receiving both antenatal and postnatal care were greater as well.
Table 1. Milestones in establishing community-based services by type of operational change required in the scaling-up process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Milestone</th>
<th>Type of operation in the existing clinic-based system</th>
<th>Type of operation in the community-based services</th>
<th>Implementation tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Planning</strong></td>
<td>District Health Management Team; office-based planning</td>
<td>Defined community service areas, termed zones; traditional leaders; community nurses</td>
<td>Community mapping and enumeration; outreach to traditional leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community Entry</strong></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Community leadership support for health services; community health committees for governing operations</td>
<td>Community awareness building, liaison with leaders; community health committee selection; training of community nurse for community entry; community leadership training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community Health Compound</strong></td>
<td>None  (sub-district health centre and hospital services)</td>
<td>Community constructed or refurbished nurse service and dwelling units; community ownership of primary service point</td>
<td>Community mobilization for facility development; community support for maintenance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Essential Equipment</strong></td>
<td>Four-wheel vehicle for bi-weekly outreach clinics (rarely available); sub-district and district hospital equipment</td>
<td>Bicycles or motorbikes for continuous outreach by nurse; basic clinical equipment for community health compounds</td>
<td>Procurement of bicycles, motorbikes, and basic community clinical equipment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nurse Posting</strong></td>
<td>Nurses resident at the sub-district or district level; sub-district health centre based services; passive (facility-focused); bi-weekly/monthly outreach clinics at fixed locations</td>
<td>Community resident nurses providing static services based in community health compound augmented by active (client-seeking) outreach to families in their homes</td>
<td>Supervisory provision of fuel for household visitation activities and supplies for clinical work; supervisory community backstopping of nursing operations; community support for operations; in-service training for nurses; motorbike rider training and maintenance capacity building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Volunteer Deployment</strong></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Selection by traditional leaders and community health committees; supervision by community health committees; training by district health management team</td>
<td>Train community leaders in volunteer recruitment and management; train community health committees to select and supervise volunteers; train volunteers</td>
</tr>
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Scaling-up health service delivery: from pilot innovations to policies and programmes
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Nkwanta had not only validated Navrongo effects, but exceeded Navrongo levels of impact on several health indicators (Awoonor-Williams et al., 2004). However some elements of the Nkwanta service delivery system did not achieve the same degree of success. Service components that benefit from sophisticated technical operations like those found in Navrongo are not easily replicated with routine service statistics. For example, childhood immunization services benefit from accurate and timely data on pregnancy and delivery, since the timing of immunization in infancy is crucial to the efficacy of each modality. Non-computerized procedures in Nkwanta have yet to fully achieve the precision and efficiency of the Navrongo system. While active outreach should result in higher immunization coverage than passive fixed posts or mobile clinic approaches, the Nkwanta experience demonstrated that vaccination coverage was not enhanced for all antigens, suggesting that impact is contingent on improved management information systems that support the prioritization of activities and correct timing of immunization for each infant served. In response to these findings, Nkwanta has developed a new information system for immunization that will be more appropriate for other districts than the Navrongo system.

Nkwanta was crucial for initiating the national scaling-up process by demonstrating that: 1) Transfer of the service model from a research project to a district health service operation is possible, even in a challenging setting; 2) Adapting and refining the underlying service model in a demonstration district is both necessary and feasible if low-cost research tools are used to generate evidence; 3) Scaling-up involves a transfer of the service model to new districts through peer training for pilot teams followed by subsequent pilots and peer exchanges within implementing districts. In response to this success, the Ghana Health Service utilizes Nkwanta as a demonstration district for building CHPS implementation capacity.

Phase IV: Nation-wide expansion

A 1999 National Health Forum focused on the Nkwanta experience. Practical guidelines for implementing community services were presented and discussed, and
consensus emerged that national implementation of the Navrongo service model was feasible. A consensus document, approved by acclamation at the Forum, led to the launching of the Community-based Health Planning and Services initiative in 2000, a programme for scaling-up based on lessons from the Navrongo and Nkwanta experience. Three over-arching features of CHPS govern its strategic design: policy, evidence and action.

**Policy.** Meetings, staff conferences, field exchanges, policies, plans, and directives from headquarters catalyze and legitimize nation-wide expansion at all levels of the Ghana Health Service system. CHPS-sponsored field exchanges have been designed to build consensus and commitment for action. Newsletters from Navrongo and Nkwanta communicate to all district teams practical lessons and experience so that district plans benefit from advice from the field. National policies, in turn, legitimize the process of operational change, producing budgets and manpower assessments that respond to the requirements of a highly decentralized programme of action. Manpower shortages represent the key challenge to national health plans, and expansion of the community nurse workforce is now a major Ghana Health Service priority. Strategies are in the offing for new training schools, new approaches to training, and in-service training activities. Ghana Health Service commitment to the initiative ensures that resources will be marshalled to support manpower expansion, and that the overall quality of health-care delivery will be improved as community services are scaled up as a national programme.

**Evidence.** The programme marshals evidence to evaluate whether strategies developed in Navrongo and Nkwanta can be scaled up with replicable levels of success. Regional and national staff meetings and Annual National Health Forum Conferences provide mechanisms for discussion of monitoring and evaluation results among health managers at all levels in the Ghana Health Service. In this manner “bottom-up” and “top down” communication systems integrate evidence into routine management decision-making. The generation of the following three types of evidence ensures that no one type of data, source of learning, or research paradigm dominates.

First, a programme of qualitative research, involving focus-groups with community leaders and members, front-line workers, supervisors, district managers, local politicians and administrators, elicits perceptions of progress and problems at each level.
of service delivery. Sessions are conducted by Regional Health Administration study teams, with technical support from the Policy Planning Monitoring and Evaluation (PPME) Division of the Ghana Health Service. This approach sacrifices an element of objectivity but sets the stage for dissemination of results at senior Ghana Health Service managers meetings.

Second, district CHPS implementation checklists record the coverage, content, and pace of programme expansion in quarterly reports from each of the 110 districts in Ghana. Data are managed by the PPME Division, and quarterly reports to all district, regional, and national health officials provide maps of progress, data on the status of implementation, newsletters, and all existing diagnostic research reports (see www.ghana-chps.org). The monitoring system generates national planning data as well as information that inform stakeholders about progress for all implementation indicators.

Third, survey data record impact statistics in districts where CHPS implementation is advanced. Geographic variation in community health service coverage permits the PPME Division to conduct surveys that demonstrate the potential contribution of CHPS to health development in Ghana (see for example Antwi et al., 2004; Kuffour, Antwi & Nyonator, unpublished report, 2004). These studies, which are dispersed in all regions of Ghana, have determined that Nkwanta results are evident in every setting in Ghana where CHPS has been implemented (Nyonator, Phillips & Vaughan-Smith, 2005c).

**Action.** Each region has established a demonstration district where the approach is put to a test and adapted as needed. “Guided diffusion” stimulates operational change offsetting some of the resource requirements of scaling-up. (Glaser, Abelson & Garrison, 1983; Rogers, 1995; Mintrom, 1997). The exchange process of transferring Navrongo learning to Nkwanta pilot teams and subsequent community exchanges within Nkwanta District provided a model of peer training which guides national expansion.

Peer training involves posting district teams to counterparts for two weeks of collaborative field work, problem solving and planning. Nurses working with nurses, and supervisors working with counterparts, are introduced to all practical steps so they are aware of the elements of operational change inherent in implementing the six milestones (see Table 1). Typically, trainee teams are composed of the implementation hierarchy
required for starting a two-zone pilot: the District Director of Health Services, the Public Health Nurse, the District CHPS Coordinator, one or two sub-district supervisors, and Community Health Officer (nurse) from the pilot sub-district. In this approach, structured interaction between district teams breaks down isolation, confusion, and ambivalence about the initiative, while interaction among community leaders within implementing districts facilitates learning once the change process has been launched.

Sites for Nkwanta-like orientations are being expanded through Population Council-sponsored competitive grants to district teams that have demonstrated advanced CHPS implementation capabilities. Small grants fund the evaluation of innovations to the programme and the cost of orienting visiting district teams in implementing innovation elsewhere. Thirteen districts have received awards, each providing funds for training teams from six other districts.

Peer training has been augmented with technical training for developing service quality, referral services, and supervisory support. A Ghana Health Service technical training team conducts quality assurance field appraisals and in-service training, as needed. New manuals, protocols, and procedures have been developed for ensuring technical standards in community health nursing.

Peer training commences once technical training has been completed. Pilot work zones are used for orienting neighbouring community leaders to the programme. Durbars are used to build public awareness about the benefits of the programme. Awareness typically spreads to neighbouring communities, and political commitment to the initiative grows. This sometimes leads to District Assembly commitment of development revenue for community health compound costs (Antwi et al., 2004).

In national policy documents, CHPS is viewed as a mechanism for integrating activities of the formal health sector into traditional institutions that define community leadership, foster consensus building, and sustain collective action. Research reports provided highly credible evidence supporting policy commitment to this model. Such evidence has been a determinant of successful scaling-up elsewhere (Simmons & Shiffman, this volume).
Constraints to scaling-up

The CHPS initiative has made considerable progress. Only 22 of 110 districts reported implementing activities at the beginning of 2001. Eighteen months later 87 districts had taken steps to launch the programme. By mid-2004, 105 of the 110 District Health Management Teams reported having undertaken preliminary planning activities. Although nearly every district in Ghana has joined the scaling-up process, a number of obstacles have emerged. The pace of launching programme planning has progressed more rapidly than the pace of implementing community-based services. Although approximately two thirds of the districts report having completed community-based planning, relatively few have actually launched services. At the beginning of 2003, only 42% of the districts had completed the process of community entry in at least one service zone, even though community entry is a low-cost and simple-to-implement strategic component of the programme. A greater proportion of zones had completed Community Health Compound construction or renovation, suggesting that facilities are being developed without community involvement, and that community posting of the nurse or volunteer development lags behind all other milestones. This commitment of district resources for construction, without resource leveraging from communities, represents a departure from the CHPS model of community engagement that deprives the programme of community resources for facilities and community ownership of the programme itself.

Qualitative systems appraisals show that communities which mobilize resources for the programme develop a sense of ownership of its services. Constructing facilities without community engagement is tantamount to by-passing social support for CHPS in general.

Staff engaged in the programme tend to be supportive of CHPS, but workers who are not familiar with the initiative resist its introduction (Nyonator et al., 2005b). Three general themes explain this reluctance:

*The knowledge gap.* CHPS continues to mean different things to different stakeholders despite the considerable effort that has been directed to training, policy directives, conferences, and reports. In its simplest distortion, the programme is viewed as a means of putting nurses in communities, and little else. Because health workers at all levels are accustomed to clinic-based work routines, instructions to relocate nurses to
communities get interpreted through the prism of clinic management experience. Frontline workers often amplify managerial concerns about the feasibility of shifting operations from clinics to communities. Nurses who are relocated to communities must leave behind the relative comfort of sub-district assignments, where work is routinely supervised, and technical demands are minimal. Nurses express concern about the challenge ahead and managers are anxious about embarking upon changes that may be complicated to manage. Many of the key staff involved in decision-making have responsibility for clinical roles and little extra time for organizing community health care. While the potential difficulties of launching CHPS are anticipated, compensating benefits are not readily understood. By contrast workers actually participating in the programme express satisfaction about their contribution to health service improvements and their appreciation of the support that communities render (Sory et al., 2003).

**The resource gap.** Resources for primary health care in Ghana are severely constrained. Increasing the coverage of community health services expands demand for health care that translates into higher costs of pharmaceuticals, fuel, equipments, and supplies. Health Sector Reform has conferred authority on district health management teams, but not the necessary resources for implementing the general health service agenda. In the absence of earmarked donor or government funding for CHPS, incremental start-up costs severely constrain efforts to launch the programme. Given the financial and manpower constraints confronting districts, many are understandably reluctant to engage in “community entry” activities that will arouse public interest in services they are ill-equipped to launch and sustain.

**The technical gap.** District health management teams often are reluctant to launch a programme that they believe will require technical skills not yet in place. Management information systems, logistics systems, and community outreach operations lack essential tools for ensuring that quality services will be maintained and that community health-care delivery will adequately respond to community needs. Community nurses often are ill equipped to make independent clinical decisions, having grown accustomed to the continuous technical supervision that sub-district health centres afford. Once they are deployed to communities they immediately confront major technical challenges. For example, communities typically expect arriving nurses to have midwifery skills that few
are trained and equipped to provide. CHPS requires new training protocols and procedures that are not yet in place.

**Responding to constraints**

What is being done to address these problems? Contrasting the responses of leading districts with those slow to implement operational change suggests possible solutions:

*Responding to the knowledge gap.* As the Nkwanta experience demonstrated, peer exchange resolves conceptual confusion by exposing participants to the practical requirements of changing operations. This type of training, originally provided in Nkwanta and Navrongo, is being extended to other advanced CHPS districts. A more extensive field demonstration programme is under development that will provide each of the regions with at least one Nkwanta-like demonstration district. In the past, technical training has been provided through workshops for individual nurses that were unconnected with field demonstration activities for district implementation teams. The CHPS demonstration programme will be augmented with a new in-service technical training component for upgrading clinical skills that are needed for service provision, referral, quality assurance, and community-based health management. The integration of nurse training with team demonstration will ensure that scaling-up improves rather than dilutes service quality.

*Responding to resource constraints.* CHPS implementation follows the principles of the diffusion of innovation. Districts are administrative units that foster interaction of workers within district boundaries, but also constrain interaction among workers of different districts. Therefore, scaling-up spreads within districts once the initiative gets started in one or two zones, but spreads slowly across district boundaries (Nyonator et al., 2005a). Catalyzing the diffusion process requires investment in trials in pilot zones that demonstrate CHPS within districts and set the stage for community-to-community diffusion of innovation. Experimentation with these mechanisms remains nascent, but they involve constituting all milestones of the CHPS programme in pilot areas, and inviting leaders from neighbouring communities to participate in durbar, observe service...
operations, and witness community commitment. The Nkwanta experience showed that such exchanges fostered the spread of health action and volunteerism, offsetting the costs of developing and sustaining the programme.

Moreover, districts progressing with scaling-up have developed creative ways of solving resource constraints. Two districts have marshalled district assembly support and development funds for augmenting programme revenue. Others have raised donations through community activities and faith-based organizations. One district has developed creative ways to solve manpower problems with “private practitioners” – paramedics who are community financed rather than salaried Ghana Health Service employees. Field investigation consistently shows that rapidly advancing districts have developed innovative strategies for solving resource constraints.

There is reason to doubt that community commitment alone can fill the resource gap, however. The “Common Fund” of Health Sector Reform commits only $6.80 per capita per year to district revenue, and this commitment covers the full range of preventative and ambulatory services. If CHPS is to progress, added revenue will be required, at least for financing pilots that get operations started. In Navrongo, $1.92 per capita per year is required, over and above routine district revenue. Nkwanta has cost less, but even in that district, scaling-up would not have started without the catalytic contribution of two Navrongo motorbikes and $12,000 worth of supplies and equipment from a faith-based charity. At the very least, a commitment of this magnitude will be required to launch and sustain pilots that enable district teams to get CHPS started without delay, mobilize community support for the programme by demonstrating its potential, and build staff understanding of how to make the programme work. Just as CHPS demonstrates that communities will finance a community-based programme, its slow pace of expansion demonstrates that well placed development investment is essential to accelerating the scaling-up process.

**Responding to manpower and technical gaps.** Evidence suggesting that nurses often fear community deployment have raised fundamental questions about manpower policy. Community Health Nurses are trained in one of four national training schools, fees are paid by the government, and graduates are deployed to sub-districts by central order. Much of the concern that nurses express about community deployment derives
from the obvious fact that they are not from communities where they will live and work, may not speak the local language, and may be compelled to live separately from families and kin. To address these problems, Navrongo has launched a “community engaged” approach to decentralized training. Communities select nurse trainees, who are sent to a local training centre where fees are paid by the districts and communities to be served by the trainees. Upon graduation, nurses return home, rather than to a post in a distant location. Evidence from this trial has generated new policies for the national nurse training programme. Ten new decentralized schools are being opened; ten more are planned with the goal of scaling-up the availability of trained manpower and improving the quality and social relevance of CHPS manpower policies. This experience attests to the importance of continuous investigation and revision of scaling-up policy as initiatives mature.

Conclusion

Despite the challenges that have been identified, the CHPS initiative has begun to introduce health-care reform in every region of Ghana. Much remains to be accomplished, but concepts guiding the initiative have been tested in Navrongo and shown to be fundamentally sound. Various principles of scaling-up have been demonstrated by this experience: In Ghana, scaling-up has been a process of organizational change and development that required phases that were guided by evidence. The role and type of research shifted as the programme progressed, not only guiding the continuous process of programme expansion and development, but also identifying problems with the programme and permitting strategic change and programme improvement as scaling-up has progressed.

Scaling-up in Ghana has derived particular benefit from replication and validation studies. Nkwanta validated the notion that the Navrongo approach could work elsewhere, and demonstrated that the Navrongo model is less a prescription for replication than a generic process for adaptive development of appropriate health care that could work in other areas of Ghana. Further replication initiatives have confirmed and legitimized the rationale for programme expansion. Scaling-up the programme beyond Nkwanta required
specific guidelines on components of the clinical programme that required change, steps required in the process of operational change, and procedures for monitoring whether organizational change was actually taking place. While replication projects have strengthened commitment to CHPS, sustaining Navrongo has provided a continuing resource for demonstrating the model, promoting its worth, and documenting the evidence on which the national scaling-up initiative is based. If the Ghana Health Service had abandoned Navrongo when CHPS was launched, scaling-up would have lost the wisdom, commitment, and capabilities of its founding implementation team. The Ghana example demonstrates not only the value of replication projects, but also the continuing value of the founding project in dissemination, training, and advocacy.

Large-scale programme expansion in Ghana has been guided by multiple sources of evidence and sustained by complementary strategies for communicating results to stakeholders. Monitoring activities record both qualitative information on programme problems and quantitative data on the spread of programme activities. Evidence gathered through a range of activities and experience with the initiative has fostered decentralized planning, training, and adaptive development of strategies to local circumstances and needs. The accumulation of evidence has been combined with communication activities for ensuring that results are put to use. Newsletters document community and worker experience with the programme. Conferences, demonstration exchanges, and staff meetings build consensus and understanding of the initiative and sustain the scaling-up process.

CHPS is thus a complex story. Its core strategy is based on a complex experiment, multiple replication efforts, and diverse sources of evidence. But, its core agenda is quite simple for stakeholders to understand and embrace. If CHPS succeeds, it will have demonstrated mechanisms for bringing health services to every Ghanaian doorstep by aligning health sector policy, evidence, and action with vibrant social traditions of community leadership, communication, and volunteerism.
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