DIGITAL HEALTH INNOVATION IN RURAL KENYA

Accessibility of technology has led to great innovations worldwide. Every sector has leveraged technology to advance itself. Kenya is no different; often referred to as the Silicon Valley of Africa, Kenya has made great strides in leveraging technology in the advancement of different sectors in its economy. In a world of advanced technology, Kenya has made incredible efforts to incorporate technology in the delivery of health services. The Government of Kenya, through the Ministry of Health, has made efforts to improve health care in underdeveloped areas. A bill in the Kenyan parliament was passed to enable this to happen.

Kenya Digital Health Act

This is an act of parliament, which is also referred to as the Kenya Digital Health Act 2023. The bill was introduced to give a framework upon which digital innovation works. One of the mandates is to promote innovation and the safe, efficient use of technology for health care. The bill aimed to bridge gaps in healthcare access, addressing challenges such as long wait times for specialist care and disparities in health outcomes. Since the bill came into effect, it has revolutionized how technology is used in the health sector. Many enterprises have come up with applications and technology that have made it easier to access health services. We are going to investigate government interventions and some examples of the health innovations in rural Kenya that have been caused by the implementation of this bill and its impact on the local population. We will also explore how Kenya's Digital Health Act improved healthcare access in rural areas.

Streamlined healthcare delivery and better data management; Data collected from different rural health facilities has enabled the government to get feedback about its delivery of services. This helps the government to know which services are in demand and which ones are not in demand. Resource distribution is guided by the information

obtained from such an exercise. Rural health care workers can access and update patients' information quickly, which ensures continuity of care for the patient.

Expansion of telemedicine services; Due to a shortage of doctors and nurses who can provide care, the increasing demand of patients, rural areas is greatly affected. The expansion had made sure that consultation and critical information could get to any patient in the rural environment. Doctors and nurses could easily get to know the conditions of their patients and give prescriptions. Services like Teams or Skype can help medical officers hold group meetings with patients easily from their homes. Constant updates from the patient would enable the medical officer to get to know how his or her patients are doing at any time.

Support for interoperable health information systems; Data sharing between the national government and the county government entity is crucial in service delivery. Diseases and epidemics could be easily surveyed and responded to quickly. The framework promotes an open, modular architecture for health systems that supports reuse and integration of existing data and services. This approach is designed to connect multiple health information system platforms used across national and county levels to support nationwide health planning and service delivery.

Empowerment of community health workers: Community health workers play a pivotal role in day-to-day health information dissemination to the community. Empowering them through training and equipping them with a linked gadget has helped in disseminating resourceful information to the community. They are found in rural health facilities and are always informed about the community. The government gets first-hand feedback about any disease from the community. This has prevented diseases or pandemics that would otherwise spread quickly

from being contained due to the flow of information. Most of the community health workers have been trained and given a linked gadget that they use in reporting real-time data to both the county government, which subsequently goes to the national government.

There are many successful examples of digital innovation in rural Kenya, and we are going to discuss them as follows;

M-TIBA: The mobile health wallet was launched in 2016 to help in financing health services to the communities. It was built by a network of over 500 participating health care providers. In a country where nearly every household has a mobile phone, M-TIBA aimed to provide a platform where one could send, receive, and pay for medical treatment through their phones. It has connected over 1 million Kenyans. M-TIBA enables friends and family to send funds to loved ones exclusively for health expenditure and provides proper feedback to the sender. Through the mobile app, patients could also easily save and access resources such as government subsidies and incentives from donors. M-TIBA was meant for the rural population where incomes are low, hence the application could accept small, irregular amounts. M-TIBA has been successful in the provision of health financing in rural areas. The model's success is due to incorporating lessons learned from the previous initiatives that didn't have the same success. *Linda Jamii* and *Changamka* were also some of the mobile wallets that had been invented, but they never got the success that M-TIBA enjoys due to factors such as unreliability in revenue streams, inefficiency in processing, in insecure cash management. The successful implementation of M-TIBA has come with its benefits to the rural communities. Financial institutions have used M-TIBA patient accounts when lending to patients especially in circumstances such as emergencies. It has also provided free training to the population, which is beneficial.

Conclusion

Digital Health Innovation in rural Kenya has had a great impact on the delivery of health services. A huge population that lives below the poverty line has had its lives transformed through such initiatives. Small amounts which would otherwise not be useful are put together, and over time, a family is insured and can access the health care services. Continuous information dissemination and feedback through the digital space has gone a long way in ensuring diseases and infections are monitored and contained. Data from the application has helped the Government in allocating resources since it is recent updated information's successes of the Digital Health innovations in rural areas have received major acknowledgments worldwide, which in turn has given access and rise to more donors and partners who have helped improve it, all to the benefit of the rural population.