

Design for Health Network: Initial Scoping Report

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Introduction

The scoping visit to Uganda, funded by the UK Government Official Development Assistance programme (ODA) aimed to create a space for international dialogue between practitioners, academics, policy makers, technology companies and the wider community in order to facilitate knowledge exchange; build capacity and encourage collaboration around health, care and wellbeing.

The visit was hosted by the School of Public Health within Makerere University (MakSPH), a leading institution in Africa with existing partnerships across the world. Recognising the valuable knowledge and experience of design innovation for health, demonstrated through the extensive research activity of the Digital Health and Care Institute (DHI), the scoping visit offered an opportunity to explore perspectives of health and care in Uganda; to share insights and examples of best practice; and to develop networks and partnerships for future engagement.

Context

Identified as one of the least developed countries in the world, Uganda is facing a heavy burden of morbidity and mortality. With an average of eight physicians per 100,000 people, new models of health and care are required to address the challenges. The four key health challenges are: malaria; HIV; hypertension; and diabetes, highlighting the exponential growth of non-communicable disease. Similarly, a government focus on the role of mHealth within Uganda has created significant interest in the role of data for improved health and care provision. Given DHI's expertise in these areas, and indeed across digital health more broadly, Uganda offers an opportunity to expand the reach and impact, recognising the value of the DHI portfolio internationally and positioning DHI as leaders in the field and therefore a valuable asset to under-developed nations.

Engagements

During the scoping visit, a number of engagements with key leaders in health and care took place in conjunction with a number of site visits to health and care facilities. Key discussions took place with the Makerere University Dean; the Head of School; researchers and lecturers across the school of public health; Ministers from the governmental Ministry of Health; lead practitioners and Directors from two District Hospitals; health professionals from two Community Hospitals; and with the Director of a dedicated community health research site. These engagements offered an opportunity to learn more about the context within Uganda as well as generating interest in the work of DHI and GSA. In addition, I delivered a lecture to staff and visitors sharing existing research and potential opportunities for future collaboration and this was very well received.

Innovation Potential

The scoping visit proved to be valuable and discussions with key stakeholders highlighted significant potential for innovation across health and care. There was significant interest in the role of design innovation and interest in how co-design could support sustainable change in a region that has considerable experience of short-term and transient project work. There was also interest in exploring digital health in a context where this is just emerging as a potential route to delivering care. From the Ministry of Health perspective, there was a demand for research and innovation activity that could influence and inform policy development.

Initial Areas of Interest

An initial review of shared areas of interest highlighted a number of possible opportunities for future collaboration. These included:

Digital Health:

- Role of mHealth in training health professionals
- mHealth for community engagement and feedback
- Mobile data collection for NCD's
- How could data inform improved care for NCD's
- Data collection for sensitive communities (refugees, sex workers, women)

Understanding Health Contexts (from describing to innovating):

- Understanding the complexity of health interventions
- Knowledge translation and visualisation of health information
- Antibiotic Resistance challenges
- Current/future state mapping for particular communities

Innovation for Health:

- Scoping and linking the innovation ecosystem
- Early engagement of industry & new models of business
- How co-design could inform existing and future research activity at Makerere University

Next Steps

The next step of the scoping project (within its existing funding award) will see Dr Christine Nalwadda, a lecturer and researcher from MakSPH visit Scotland to better understand the Scottish context and create opportunities for further knowledge exchange. Makerere University have already indicated that they are keen to explore how a future collaboration might be shaped and how funding might be secured to continue knowledge exchange activities. If this is of interest to DHI, the next step would be to identify appropriate funding bids and generate a proposal that offers value to all partners involved.

