Tools for assessing utilization and sustainability of animal health resource centres in HEARD intervention districts

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Introduction

Animal health workers are frontline sources of information and knowledge for smallholder livestock keepers. Access to relevant knowledge and information is critical to improve animal health services. In Ethiopia, limited access to usable information and knowledge by animal health workers constrains effective provision of animal health services. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) play a critical role in facilitating rapid, efficient and cost-effective access to animal health information and knowledge. Advancements in ICTs provide an opportunity for harnessing and utilizing information and knowledge to improve the livestock development sector in the country.

The EU-supported Health of Ethiopian Animals for Rural Development (HEARD) project works with livestock development offices in Amhara, Oromia and Somali regions to establish animal health resource centres (AHRCs) to increase access and effective utilization of information and knowledge on animal health management. The AHRCs are basic knowledge infrastructure established to enable district livestock development offices to improve access to and use of new knowledge and information and effectively manage their organizational knowledge resources.

The AHRCs are equipped with basic furniture and digital devices such as computers, TV sets, digital cameras, LCD projectors, internet connections, tables, chairs and bookshelves. However, physical resources alone cannot guarantee the success and sustainability of the resource centres. It is important that user organizations have a clear outlook into the future and fully recognize how the resource centres can provide a unique opportunity to improve animal health services. Towards this, guidelines for the management of the resource centres have been developed as well as training and mentoring support provided to the resource centre managers and animal health team leaders, to promote the value proposition of the centres and develop strategic approaches to increase their utilization and sustainability..

Individual, organizational and system level factors can influence the management and utilization of the resource centres. A quick assessment of the status and level of functionality of the centres can help identify challenges and devise capacitation strategies to increase their use and sustainability.

Assessment objectives

- To identify the level of management and utilization of the centres

- To document stories of good utilization and management of the centres

- To identify opportunities and challenges for institutionalization of the centres within user organizations

- To identify strategies for sustainability of the resource centres beyond the project

Assessment approach and process

The status and sustainability assessment of the resource centres will follow a quick exploratory (monitoring and mentoring) approach to develop a general sense of the status (management, utilization, functionality) and challenges of the resource centres as the basis for developing a sustainability strategy beyond the HEARD project support. This will be done through a review of project reports, virtual interview/communication and field visits. In selected project sites, depending on accessibility, mixed-gender focus group discussions (FGDs) with AHRC users and key informant interviews (KIIs) with AHRC managers, animal health team leaders and livestock development office heads will be conducted using discussion checklists and semi-structured questionnaires.

Level of assessment and information requirements

Individual, organizational, and contextual factors can influence the utilization, effectiveness and sustainability of AHRCs.

Individual analysis

This level of analysis will engage AHRC managers and users to understand their motivation, information seeking and learning behaviour, and their perceptions of the usefulness and utilization of the centres.

KII checklist for AHRC managers

- Part-time/full-time.

- Educational level and specialization.

- Role clarity and skill sets: role description, motivation, skills (digital, interpersonal, lobbying, networking with other sectors).

- Promotion/awareness creation about AHRC services and facilities: approaches, activities, challenges, changes and lessons.

- Engaging with and gaining the support of supervisors: level of support, encouragement, subjective perception.

- Incentive and accountability system: encouragement and rewards from colleagues and supervisors/team leaders, role counted in performance assessment.

- Record-keeping of users: advantages, challenges (reactions of users), analysis of users, trends of use.

- Supporting and encouraging users: creating email accounts, browsing, and downloading resources, creating file folders, cleaning viruses, providing links to agricultural information websites.

- Learning and sharing habit/culture: exemplary use.

- Infrastructure and facilities: space (convenience, attractive, accessibility), facilities/equipment (types, adequacy, functionality, management, utilization), internet connectivity (subscription, reliability/speed).

- Type of AHRC services: face-to-face/virtual training, team meetings, mini library (reading and audiovisual aids), documentation , communication (sending and receiving reports and plans, disease reporting, etc.).

- Knowledge resources (hard and soft copies): availability, adequacy, and relevance

- Sustainability: business strategy, planning and budgeting process, networking, intersectoral resource mobilization and collaboration.

Semi-structured questionnaire for AHRC managers

Name and location of AHRC:

Name of AHRC Manager:

General:

1. Age

2. Sex

3. Education level

4. Work experience (years of service)

5. Digital literacy

Competencies	Poor	Fair	Good	Comment
Fundamentals of hardware and software				
Basic knowledge of hardware such as turning on/off and charging, locking digital devices				
Basic knowledge of software such as user account and password management, login, and how to set up privacy settings				
Information and data literacy				
Browsing, searching, and filtering data, information, and digital content				
Evaluating data, information, and digital content				
Managing data, information, and digital content				
Communication and collaboration				
Interacting through digital technologies				
Sharing through digital technologies				
Collaborating through digital technologies				
Digital content creation				
Developing digital content				
Integrating and re-elaborating digital content				

6. Ownership of smartphone: Yes   No

7. Functionality of AHRCs:

Assessment criteria	Agree	Somewhat agree	Disagree	Comment
Room size The AHRC has enough space for users.				
Light The AHRC is well illuminated.				
Ventilation The AHRC has enough air circulation.				
Location The AHRC is conveniently located and accessible which encourages regular use.				
Condition of AHRC room The AHRC room is clean and tidy with no cracks (walls, ceiling, floor, doors, and windows).				
AHRC facility handling AHRC facilities (e.g. audiovisual materials, reading materials, computers, etc.) are properly handled, dusted and covered.				
Reading and audiovisual materials The AHRC has adequate and relevant reading and audiovisual materials.				Please indicate type and source of materials and means of acquisition.
Job description of AHRC managers As AHRC manager, I know what I am expected to do and how well I am expected to do it.				
Demand and accountability system The livestock development office has developed guidelines to promote and regulate the use of the AHRC.				Please explain what it is, how it was implemented, and what its effect was.
Encouragement and feedback I feel that my work as AHRC manager is valued by my colleagues and the management. I regularly receive feedback on what I do well and what needs to change.				
Allocation of operational resources The AHRC is mainstreamed in the planning and budgeting process of the livestock development office. The necessary tools, equipment and supplies are available when and where they are needed.				
AHRC manager incentive and motivation My role as AHRC manager counts in job performance evaluations. I think that my work as AHRC manager is important or makes a difference.				
Knowledge and skills of AHRC manager As AHRC manager, I feel confident in my ability to perform the job successfully. I have the knowledge and skills I need to perform the job well.				

AHRC manager work I work full-time as AHRC manager.				
AHRC users The AHRC is open to all sector users in the district.				Please explain users by type and sector.
Utilization of AHRC facilities and services Generally, the AHRC facilities and services are fully utilized, and users are satisfied with adequacy and relevance of the services and facilities.				
Type of AHRC service use The internet is the most frequently used AHRC service.				Please also indicate other uses.
Use hours Most of the users use AHRC facilities and services during office hours.				

Monitoring of AHRC managers' training: knowledge retention and application

This AHRC managers' training follow-up monitoring aims to capture application of the training and identify new needs for training and mentoring.

1. Which of the following materials have you accessed? Circle all that applies.

    a. Animal health resource centres operation and management guidelines

    b. Training and coaching plan for animal health resource centre managers

    c. A report on animal health resource centre managers' training in the HEARD project

2. If yes, how do you assess their usefulness in your work?

3. Have you attended the training on management of AHRCs? Yes   No ___

4. If yes, what were the AHRC performance problems that you had hoped to address due to your participation in the AHRC management training?

5. Which of the AHRC management problems have been resolved due to the training?

6. To what extent have you been able to implement the following action plans you have developed by the end of the training?

Action plans	Did not try it at all	Tried it to some extent but no worthwhile results	Used it and achieved some results
Challenge analysis, strategy development and working with management			
Opportunity analysis, promotion strategy and mindset change			
Promotion strategies (brochures, meetings, seminars, and banners) at office and other places			
Revise and update recording and monitoring system for organized data and reporting			
Start writing and developing change stories			
Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, and Threat (SWOT) analysis of AHRCs			
Organize and manage different organizational knowledge resources (reports, manuals, training materials, etc.)			
Organize training for staff on the benefits and effective utilization of AHRCs			
Create ownership, accountable management system and intersectoral promotion activities			
Link AHRCs and development agents using tablets			

7. How have you used the knowledge and skills gained from the training to improve the performance of the AHRC in your organization? What changes or performance improvements have been done in the management or utilization of the AHRC in your organization?

8. How have you ensured that the benefits from the AHRC management training are sustained? What measures have you put in place to ensure that the actions taken to resolve the specific performance problems would be sustained?

Sustainability measures taken	Likely effect on supporting sustained performance improvement in the use and management of AHRC
1.	
2.	
3.	

9. What challenges or problems have you faced in implementing the action plans from the training? How do you think these challenges could be addressed?

Action plan implementation challenges	How the challenges have been addressed

10. What learning reinforcement or refresher training do you think is necessary to further enable you to manage AHRC effectively?

Reinforcement or refresher training needs	Reason for the refresher training	Expected utility of the refresher training

11. What is the most significant change that you have brought about in managing or utilizing the AHRC after the training?

Background information	Your name, position, name of AHRC, estimated number of users, name and location of organization
Problem situation	What were the challenges before the training?
Response	What have you done to improve the management and utilization of the AHRC after the training?
Results	What has changed due to your actions or response?
Evidence of change or result	What is the evidence for the changes you have made due to your actions after the training?
Sustainability	What mechanisms are in place to sustain the changes you have made due to your actions after the training? What still is needed to sustain the changes?

KII and FGD checklist for users (experts, supervisors and other sectors)

- Organizational knowledge resources: adequacy, diversity, relevance/usefulness, accessibility

- Learning culture and information seeking behaviour: demand for knowledge and innovativeness

- Incentives and challenges: reliable connectivity, positive attitude of supervisors, demand for innovativeness/ resourcefulness/result-orientation, learning culture and skills/attitudes and motivation, performance reviews, recognition

- Perception of AHRCs: internet café, knowledge centre, entertainment place

- Type of use of AHRCs: personal (social media, job sites, education, entertainment, news), work (agricultural information, reporting, email, meetings)

- Time of use of AHRCs: work, off-work, weekends, frequent/occasional, duration of use, usefulness

- AHRC services: types, awareness and accessibility, satisfaction

- Social support from colleagues and supervisors, knowledge and information needs, knowledge sharing culture and practices

- Factors influencing utilization of AHRCs and satisfaction: physical condition, accessibility (location, use hours, availability), support from AHRC managers, supervisor support (subjective norms), personal development goals and learning culture, gender differences

Organizational analysis

This level of analysis aims to identify organizational factors that influence the promotion, utilization, and sustainability of AHRCs.

KII checklist for supervisors/team leaders and office heads

- Needs (real, perceived, ascribed) for AHRCs: perceptions, outlook, potential.

- Promoting/creating awareness.

- Organizational: need (perceived, real), strategy (guidelines, regulation, incentive/reward system, resources, sustainability, partnership), leadership and ownership (encouragement/ support, attitude/perception of supervisors and colleagues, exemplary), learning culture, knowledge management practices, perceptions and expectations of supervisors and experts, demand, and accountability.

- Usefulness and utilization: service improvement, collaborative communication, capacitation.

- Perception of use and benefit: personal development and professional growth of experts, access to information and knowledge to keep up to date with their profession, develop computer skills and operation and management of audiovisual equipment, service quality improvement.

- Sustainability: business strategy, planning and budgeting process, networking, intersectoral resource mobilization and collaboration.

Contextual analysis

This level of analysis aims to assess the livestock extension environment and its influence on the learning culture of individuals and organizations.

KII checklist for livestock development heads and team leaders

- Livestock extension context.

- Orientation: demand, prescriptive, content availability, partnering and engagement capacity.

- Performance management: incentive and accountability system.

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Further reading

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