

C2P IN PRACTICE

"Supervision alone is not always sufficient. What often matters most is what happens after the supervisory visit."

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SUPPORTING HEALTH WORKER PERFORMANCE in **RESOURCE- CONSTRAINED SETTINGS**

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1 A reality that shapes our work every day

Throughout my work in immunization and health systems strengthening, one reality has consistently influenced our efforts in Mali: the shortage of qualified health workers.

According to available estimates, Mali has approximately six qualified health workers per 10,000 inhabitants, well below the World Health Organization (WHO) benchmark of 23 per 10,000 population. In such a context, ensuring that health workers receive adequate support to deliver quality services remains a persistent challenge.

Discussions on health system performance often focus on mobilizing additional resources. However, our experience suggests that it is equally important to strengthen the performance of the workforce that is already in place.

The challenge is not limited to the number of health workers available. It also concerns the capacity of the health system to support them effectively. In Mali, shortages of qualified personnel, their uneven distribution across the country, and security constraints in certain areas place additional pressure on supervisors and program managers. These challenges reduce the system's ability to provide continuous support to frontline health workers and to ensure regular follow-up after supervisory visits.

2 What happens after supervision

Looking back, one lesson stands out clearly to me: the main challenge was not conducting supervision itself.

Supervision activities were already part of routine program practice. The real challenge was sustaining improvements over time once a supervisory visit had been completed.

In many cases, recommendations were provided, but opportunities for follow-up, coaching, and ongoing support remained limited. This led us to reflect on alternative approaches that could better support performance improvement.

In resource-constrained settings, supervision alone is not always sufficient. What often matters most is what happens after the supervisory visit. Without continuous support, even the most relevant recommendations may struggle to translate into lasting change.

Mali at a glance

6
qualified
health workers
per 10,000 population

23
WHO benchmark
per 10,000 population



Focus
Supporting health
worker performance
through continuous
accompaniment

3 Looking for a different way to support health workers

At the same time, the immunization program was facing additional concerns. The issue of zero-dose and under-immunized children was receiving increasing attention, while discussions continued on how to strengthen the performance of actors involved in the Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI).

These reflections, combined with assessments conducted with partners, led us to explore approaches that could provide more continuous support to health workers beyond periodic supervisory visits. It was in this context that performance coaching attracted our interest.

For me, the primary value of performance coaching lies in the transition from episodic supervision to continuous support. While supervision primarily serves to assess a situation at a specific point in time, coaching promotes regular interaction between supervisors and health workers. It creates opportunities to identify challenges, provide tailored support, strengthen competencies, and monitor progress over time.

"Health workers do not only need to be assessed; they also need to be supported throughout their improvement journey."



4 Learning before leading change



Introducing a new approach is never a simple process.

One of the most important lessons I learned from this experience is that any innovation must first be understood by those responsible for implementing it.

During the early stages of deployment, our own coordination team needed time to familiarize itself with the approach and the tools before being able to effectively support other stakeholders.

This experience reminded me that successful change depends on patience, learning, and collective commitment. Change cannot simply be imposed; it must be accompanied.

In many programs, we place significant emphasis on training others. Yet sustainable change often begins with our own willingness to learn, adapt, and build confidence before expecting others to do the same.

5 Turning information into action

One experience that remains particularly meaningful to me comes from the district of Kolondiéba.

Through the coaching process, several needs expressed by vaccinators were identified, particularly in the areas of data management, vaccine logistics, and the management of adverse events following immunization (AEFI).

Once these needs had been clearly identified, local experts were able to organize targeted capacity-building activities to address them.

What I find most valuable about this experience is not simply the identification of challenges. Health workers are generally well aware of the difficulties they face in their daily work. The real added value came from having a structured process that linked those needs to concrete actions and appropriate support.

This experience illustrates a fundamental principle: *information only becomes truly useful when it leads to action.*



6 The importance of partnership

Another important lesson concerns the role of partnership.

In my view, digital tools alone do not create change. They can facilitate processes, improve data visibility, and support decision-making, but sustainable improvements depend above all on people, institutions, and collaboration.

Throughout this experience, technical assistance, capacity strengthening, data analysis, and continuous support played an important role in helping national and subnational actors adopt and use new approaches. The added value did not lie solely in the availability of a tool, but also in the collective effort required to integrate the approach into routine practice.

This experience reinforced a conviction I have developed over the years: sustainable change is never driven by technology alone. It is built through trust, collaboration, and a shared commitment to strengthening capacities.



7 Looking ahead

I am convinced that performance coaching will continue to evolve in the years ahead.

Health systems will increasingly require approaches that are data-driven, responsive to field realities, and better integrated into existing health information systems.

Greater interoperability with platforms such as DHIS2 and other national systems could strengthen decision-making and improve programs' ability to respond to challenges in real time.

In addition, the principles of performance coaching could be applied beyond immunization and contribute more broadly to improving health workforce performance across the health sector.

I also believe that discussions about performance improvement must go beyond tools and systems alone. Attention should remain focused on the people who deliver services every day and on how best to support them in often complex operating environments.



8 A lesson I will carry forward

If there is one lesson I take away from this experience, it is that strengthening health systems begins with strengthening the women and men who sustain them every day.

In many countries, including Mali, resource constraints will remain a reality for years to come. Under such circumstances, improving performance cannot rely solely on supervisory visits. It requires continuous support, opportunities for learning, and mechanisms that enable health workers to translate recommendations into concrete action.

When health workers are equipped with the means to strengthen their skills, address the challenges they encounter, and improve their performance, the benefits extend far beyond a single program or intervention. They contribute to building stronger, more resilient health systems that are better prepared to meet the needs of the populations they serve.



Health system performance does not depend solely on increasing the number of health workers. It also depends on our ability to effectively support those who are already on the front line.

