

30th Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections (CROI)

February 19–22, 2023 – Seattle, Washington, USA



Josephine Ninsiima poses next to her poster at CROI

Since October 2020, the Uganda Ministry of Health (MOH), with support from the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) has been rolling out a screening program for Cervical Cancer (CxCa) with treatment of

precancerous lesions among women living with HIV (WLHIV).

It should be noted that 54 out of every 100,000 women in Uganda suffer from cervical cancer, making Uganda one of countries with the

highest burden of cervical cancer in the world. HIV-infected women are six (6) times more likely to develop CxCa, compared to women without HIV.

Josephine Ninsiima, a Technical Advisor at METS, attended CROI and made a presentation on the 'Implications of Cervical Cancer Screening and Treatment Program Roll Out in Uganda'.

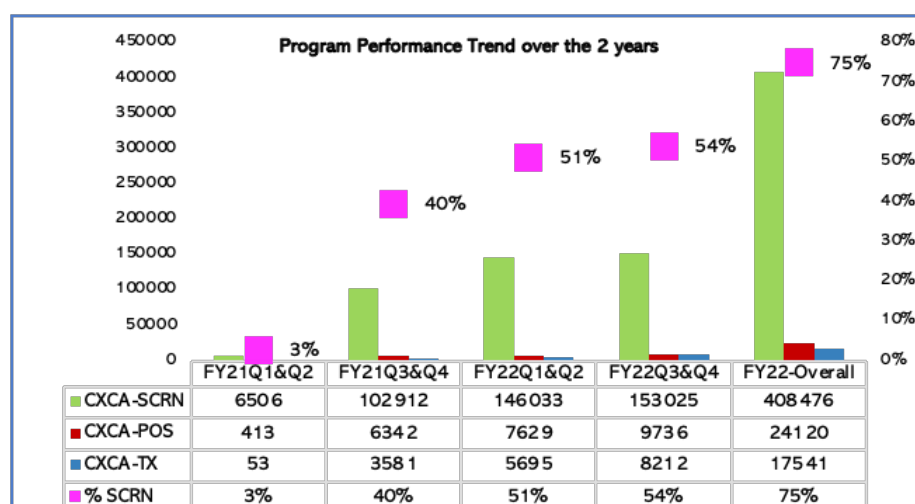
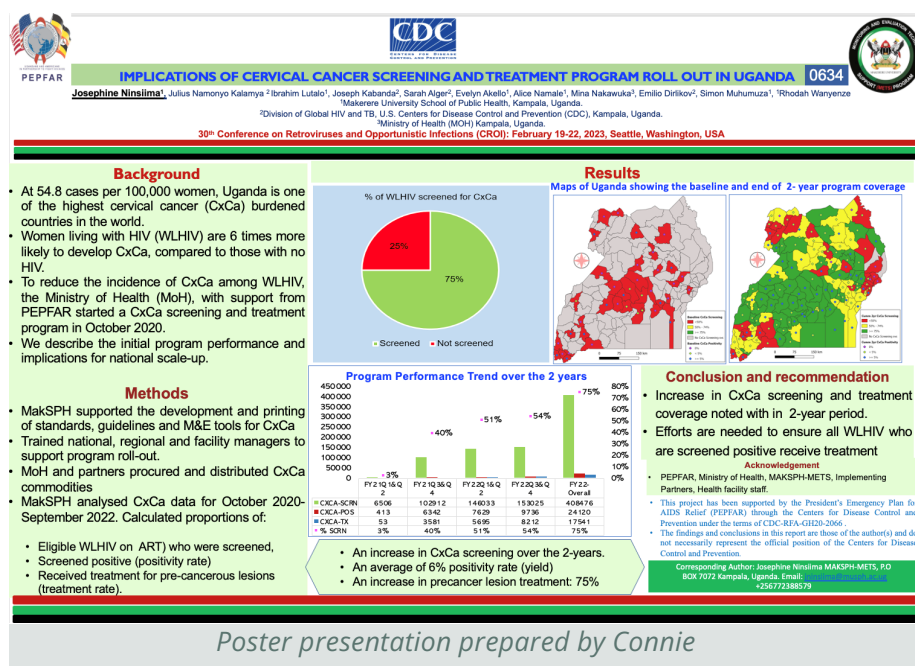
As part of the program roll out, supported the design, development and printing of standards, guidelines and monitoring and evaluation tools; and provided training to national, regional and health facility managers.

To assess program performance, METS performed a retrospective analysis of CxCa screening and care cascade data for a period of 18 months (October 2020 to March 2022).

Key findings include the following:

- Up to 6% of WLHIV screened positive for CxCa precancerous lesions
- Among those found positive, linkage to treatment increased gradually to 75% for October 2021–March 2022 compared to 54% for October 2020–September 2021.

There's an improving trend of screening (SCRN), treatment (TX) for CxCa among women living with HIV



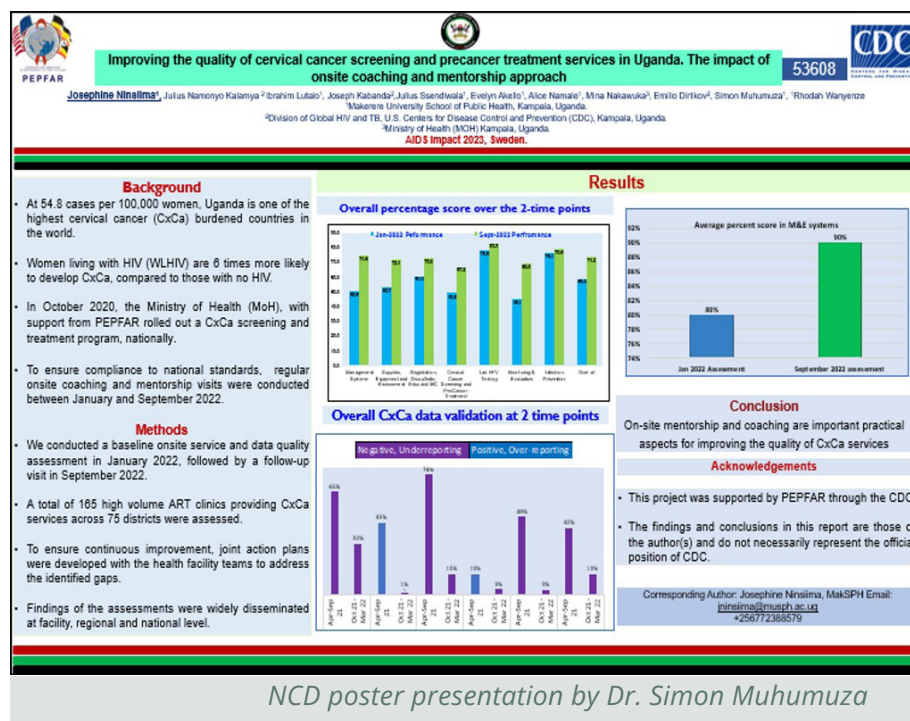
15th AIDS Impact Conference

12th - 14th June 2023 - Stockholm, Sweden

The AIDS Impact conference is a global event that focuses on HIV and AIDS. Experts, researchers, healthcare workers, and policymakers from all over the world attend to talk about prevention, treatment, and care for HIV and AIDS. They also share studies and ideas to help understand and address HIV in different situations.

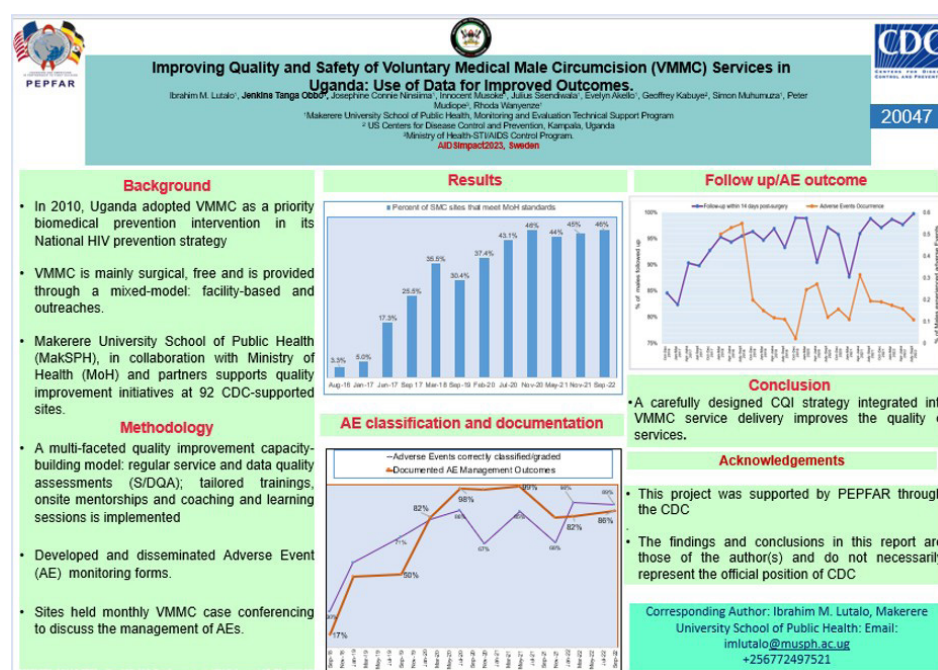
During the 15th AIDS Impact Conference held in June 2023, participants discussed challenges in HIV care including mental health, stigma, and discrimination, which make it hard for people to seek help. They also talked about how important counseling is before and after HIV testing and treatment.

METS presented the results of a pilot integration study that demonstrated that combining services for HIV and other health conditions can work well to provide



an all-rounded care package to patients, where health providers are equipped with the right support and training. For example, the study found that training healthcare 'teams' helped

improve the quality of cervical cancer services. This shows the importance of working together and supporting healthcare services to help people with



Jenkins Obbo, who presented a poster on "Improving the Quality and Safety of Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision (VMMC) services in Uganda" at the conference, said that he gained a deeper understanding of the challenges people living with HIV face when interacting with individuals in various societies. The conference emphasized the importance of addressing these difficulties through collaborative and empathetic approaches.

Poster presentation by Jenkins Obbo

Assistant Professor Sarah Stutterheim's presentation on recognizing and addressing HIV stigma had a significant impact on the conference discussions. It explored HIV and intersectional stigma processes and their effects. The interaction drew from interventions in both the global South and North, enhancing the theoretical and evidential aspects

of the research and guiding actions to reduce stigma and improve HIV prevention, treatment, and quality of life. These interventions when integrated in Uganda HIV healthcare will create more awareness, improve patient outcomes from tailored interventions, hence improving the quality of life for people living with HIV.

Jenkins also found his maiden Europe travel experience fascinating due to the longer daylight hours (midnight sun) and shorter night hours. However, he faced challenges with the food options at the conference location, which mainly consisted of vegetarian dishes, something unfamiliar to him.

DHIS2 Conference

One Community, 2 Conferences, 2 Countries, 3 Perspectives

12th – 16th June 2023, Oslo, Norway

3rd – 8th July, 2023, Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania



Group photo of Norway DHIS2 conference participants

METS, a Data Science and Informatics Implementing partner to the Ministry of Health (MoH), had the privilege of participating in the DHIS2 Annual Conference in Norway and the DHIS2 Tracker Configuration Academy in Tanzania. These global events brought together a diverse community of DHIS2 experts, including implementers, developers, ministry representatives, technical partners,

and donors from around the world.

DHIS2 is an open-source, web-based health management information system (HMIS) platform. In Uganda, DHIS2 serves as the foundation for eHMIS, acting as the central database for aggregated public health statistics since 2012. It plays a vital role in reporting health data to regional and international stakeholders and facilitates mobile

health data collection via SMS and smartphones. Additionally, DHIS2 enables the longitudinal tracking of patients enrolled in specific healthcare programs.

The conference and academy offered METS a unique opportunity to learn from other global implementers, gain insights into the latest DHIS2 developments and innovations, and witness

live demos from developers. The academy equipped attendees with skills needed to design, configure, and manage Tracker programs, and introduced data analysis concepts specific to Trackers. The events were a platform for sharing experiences, building connections, and fostering potential new partnerships and collaborations.

During the annual conference,

METS presented an abstract on the 'Underrepresentation of women in DHIS2', thus contributing to the collective effort to improve inclusivity and diversity in healthcare data management.

In this exclusive interview, we had the privilege of sitting down with three METS representatives - Moses Tushabe, Sharon Abowe, and Ausse Kalega. They graciously shared their

insights and experiences from their participation in two DHIS2 meetings. Our discussion delves into the meeting objectives and the unique perspectives these individuals bring, shedding light on the significance and impact of these gatherings. Let's explore the highlights of their journey and the knowledge they've gained in this informative conversation.



Group photo of Tanzania DHIS2 conference participants

1. What were some of the most memorable sessions or presentations you experienced at the conference? Could you share some key takeaways or insights from those sessions?

Sharon (Norway): The most memorable session for me was my presentation, Women in DHIS2, which was under the Equity and Inclusion category. This was the first time this category was featured at the DHIS2 Annual Conference and as such there was so much interest in what we had to say, and great, positive feedback from the audience. It was clear that it was an existing challenge that had not been pointed out before in such a manner.

Looking back and forth/what's next for DHIS2 was quite interesting too, basically looking at where DHIS2 began, the journey it has been on, the great strides leading to today and what is in store. This was very

insightful as it shows that we still have so much room for innovation, for example now DHIS2 is being used for education in some countries.

Ausse (Tanzania): My highlight was the session on "Program Rules" where more ideas were shared to allow creation and control of the dynamic behavior of the user interface in the Tracker Capture Application during data entry.

Moses (Norway): The presentations on the new features in the Android app stood out for me, because of the way it was presented in the form of an acted play skit and secondly because of the great improvements that have been achieved. The other presentations that stood out were the presentation on 'Integration of DHIS2 using Apache Camel' and the App competition presentations at the end of the conference.

2 How did attending the international conference benefit you professionally? Did you gain any new knowledge, skills, or industry connections that have been valuable to your work?

Moses (Norway): Professionally, it was an amazing experience. Given the years of experience I have in using DHIS2 and maintaining several instances at national level, It was a great thing that I got a chance to interact with some of the professionals that I always only met via mail and talk about experiences and discuss alternative solutions to some of the common challenges that were faced on a daily by some of the users that we support in the various institutions that we work for.

Sharon (Norway): I got to meet and interact with some great minds. There was so much spoken and showcased during the conference and most of these propelled us to think of our DHIS2 instances that we are running at METS and how we can make them better. One of the results of this is the upgrade of the DREAMS and the KP/PrEP trackers to the latest versions of DHIS2.

I was also privileged to meet some of DHIS2's technical and influential women leaders who are active contributors, like Professor Kristin Braa, the Director, HISP Centre, University of Oslo, and Marta Vila, the HISP Android Product Manager, University of Oslo, who not only greatly look forward to improving the representation of women in DHIS2, but also to help in improving their skill, through various initiatives.

Ausse (Tanzania): It has greatly impacted on my skills and experience and expanded my social network within the DHIS2 community. I was able to share my experiences and challenges and I was provided solutions and better perspectives on how certain issues are handled elsewhere.

3 Were there any emerging trends or advancements discussed at the conference that you found particularly interesting? How do you think these trends will impact METS mission in the near future?

Ausse (Tanzania): Yes, In Rwanda, the Non-Communicable Disease (NCD) DHIS2 Instance is Integrated with the National Population Registry for Auto Filling of client details during registration by use of the National ID. This makes data entry easier, avoids duplication of records and reduces errors during entry.

Sharon (Norway): There are opportunities for PHDs for those interested, METS DSI Team could benefit from this. I think that the DHIS2 App competitions are a good addition to the conference and METS could take part in the next one.

Moses (Norway): There were major advancements that have been made to the Maps feature of DHIS2, and of course this will impact how visualizations are done in the future using DHIS2.

4 As a result of attending the international conference, do you have any plans for implementing or incorporating new ideas, strategies, or initiatives into your work or organization? If so, what are some of the key changes you envision making?

Moses (Norway): Of course, I have already taken the technical team that supports quarterly reporting through the new indicator validation app. I am also working with my team to develop a mediator based on the FHIR standard and using Apache Camel to help make the process of integration with our DHIS2 instances easier.

Sharon (Norway): As a follow up on my presentation 'Women in DHIS2', there are ongoing discussions on how to avail DHIS2 opportunities to more women. We are working hand in hand with HISP Uganda and the Ministry of Health, to create Women in DHIS2 group, as we liaise with the University of Oslo, Norway. We are working on strategies to achieve more representation of women at DHIS2 academies.

5 Can you describe the overall atmosphere and networking opportunities at the conference? Did you have the chance to connect with professionals from different countries or organizations? How did these interactions enhance your understanding of the global landscape of the work we do at METS?

Moses (Norway): I had a chance to interact with a lot of professionals and shared with them some of the unique challenges that we face at METS since we deal with trackers that handle very large volumes of data. Through our discussions they came to know that some of the inbuilt solutions they provide in DHIS2 become ineffective when the amount of data exceeds certain limits. I presented to them some of the solutions I had created to address some of the challenges we were facing.

I also had a chance to meet the PEPFAR team (DATIM team) that I normally work with during the quarterly reporting periods. I discussed with them some of the challenges the team on our side was facing during indicator validation before report submission. We were able to set up alternative and easier ways of performing validation that the team on our side has been able to now set up and is ready to use during the next quarterly reporting.

Ausse (Tanzania): Yes, I connected with different experts from different countries who shared their experiences and use cases of DHIS2 in their health sectors. From these interactions, we have embarked on updating all our DHIS2 Tracker instances (mainly the KP and DREAMS Trackers) that I support to benefit from the new features that have been added in DHIS2.

6 How would you summarize the overall impact and significance of the conference in terms of advancing knowledge and fostering collaboration within your field? Would you recommend this conference to others, and why?

Moses (Norway): I would recommend the conference to others because it gives an opportunity to meet some of the great minds in the industry, have discussions with them, pick their thoughts on some of the challenges you might be facing that they have solved and have solutions to those challenges during the face-to-face interactions with them.

Sharon (Norway): I personally look forward to applying the knowledge and experiences gained from the DHIS2 Annual Conference to enhance healthcare data management in Uganda and strengthen our commitment to better healthcare outcomes for all. Together, let's continue our journey towards improved health information systems and ultimately, a healthier nation.

7 Are there any upcoming conferences or events related to the topics discussed at the international conference that you would recommend our readers to attend? What makes these events noteworthy or relevant?

Ausse (Tanzania): Android Configuration and Use Academy – this will be hosted in Colombo, Sri Lanka from 27th November - 1st of December 2023. This is important as it put into better use the DHIS2 Android Application for mobile services delivery and use of mobile devices in remote and hard to reach areas. DHIS2 Asia/Pacific Conference scheduled for 22nd – 24th November 2023 – is important as different experiences and ideas will be shared from users from all over the world and this could have a strong impact on our use cases in the country.

Experiences

a) How did the international aspect of the conference influence the discussions and perspectives shared? Were there any cultural or regional differences that stood out during the conference sessions or conversations?

Ausse (Tanzania): Some of the accents from the different presenters from the different countries were harder to understand during content delivery but we later adapted to them.

b) What was the travel experience like?

Moses (Norway): My travel experience was great apart from the 17 hours layover in the Netherlands on our return journey and the food poisoning on my last day in Norway.

Ausse (Tanzania): We realized that Ugandan Passports and the National IDs could not even be used to register for a sim card, otherwise it was an awesome experience!

c) What cultural shocks/differences did you experience?

Moses (Norway): It literally never gets dark, somehow you just find yourself dosing/sleeping when it is your normal sleeping time. But the longer days are good since you get a chance to visit some of the tourist attractions after the day's sessions.

I didn't quite enjoy the food of course because trying out new food doesn't come easy to me. Otherwise, nothing really was a shock when it comes to cultural differences.

Ausse (Tanzania): The food had too much pepper!

d) What did you like about the country you visited?

Moses (Norway): It was a very organized country especially their transport system. You can easily get yourself anywhere in the shortest time possible even if you have basic knowledge in map reading and a little common sense.

Ausse (Tanzania): The view of the ocean was spectacular!

Uganda Data Science, Surveillance, and Informatics CDC Uganda – CDC HQ Technical Exchange

22nd – 26th May 2023 – Atlanta, USA



METS was part of a technical exchange visit between Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Uganda Ministry of Health (MoH) in the areas of data science, health information systems and informatics that was held in Atlanta, USA. Other participants

included representatives from CDC Uganda and JPHIEGO. The main purpose of the meeting was to promote a technical exchange between the two entities.

The meeting reviewed available infrastructure and systems, ways

of building capacity of public health workforce to enable digital transformation and discussed partnerships to foster international coordination and global data networks in support of systems and programs that facilitate data sharing and decision making.



Discussions on “Infrastructure and Systems” focused on the methods used, and progress made by CDC in achieving a centralized data warehousing system to improve national data linkage, repository, and analytics. Further discussions were on scaling up availability and quality of data for public health decision making through public health data automation as well as how to improve public health.



A group photo of the team that visited the CDC Headquarters

Discussed plans include the implementation of the North Star Architecture, a groundbreaking initiative that sets the standard for flexible, interoperable, and secure digital tools. This sophisticated system is designed to benefit the CDC and esteemed public health partners across various levels.

The North Star Architecture offers a combined platform for reporting diverse public health conditions to the CDC. Additionally, it incorporates cutting-edge cloud-based technology, automating essential processes and streamlining data workflows. This empowers users to work more efficiently, from data collection to visualization.

Furthermore, this innovative architecture ensures that external partners at different levels can access the necessary data and tools in a shared but secure environment. It provides a collaborative space, called the Shared Analytics Zone (SAZ), where collective efforts can be channeled without compromising data integrity.

“ The North star architecture is expected to enhance data-driven decision-making, accelerate insights into health trends, and foster a more comprehensive approach to public health initiatives

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The team touring the CDC Emergency Operations Centre

2023 OpenHIE Community Meeting

1st – 5th May 2023 – Lilongwe, Malawi



Group photo of participants in the 2023 OpenHIE Community Meeting

In May 2023, the 10-year anniversary of the OpenHIE Community Meeting was celebrated in Lilongwe, Malawi. The meeting aimed to advance OpenHIE and promote country-owned and driven health information-sharing architectures. It served as a platform to showcase strategies for sustainable and standards-based sharing of health information to improve health

outcomes. Attendees included software developers, implementers, and government officials from over 33 countries.

The METS team, represented by Samuel Lubwama, Simon Peter Muwanguzi, Edward Bichetero and Evelyn Akello, participated in the meeting, and learned from other countries' experiences. The focus was on implementing a data warehouse for centralizing data, which provided valuable lessons for transitioning towards data centralization in Uganda.

Following the meeting, METS plans to work with the Ministry of Health in centralizing data using health information exchange standards to support disease surveillance, program

monitoring, and continuity of patient care. One crucial aspect identified was the need for a terminology service to interpret data from different systems and give it meaning. This service will be installed and configured to facilitate data exchange between information systems, drawing insights from experiences shared by other countries during the conference. A team of experts with diverse skill sets will be involved in implementing this service.

Overall, the OpenHIE Community Meeting provided a valuable opportunity for networking, knowledge sharing, and learning from successful implementations in other countries, contributing to the advancement of health information exchange and better health outcomes in the region.



Samuel Lubwama gets insights of the Malawi EMR POC system built by Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation (EGPAF)

GALLERY



Moses Tushabe at the DHIS2 Conference in Oslo, Norway

From the left: Martin Namutso/MSH, Commissioner Sarah Byakika/MOH-Ug, Evelyn Akello/METS, George Odongo/CDC-Atlanta share a light moment in Oslo, Norway



Evelyn (2nd L) and Sharon (R) with Commissioner Sarah Byakika (2nd R) MOH-Ug and a colleague from Rwanda in Oslo, Norway



Dr. Alice Namale (L) and Evelyn Akello (R) attending the US 4th of July celebrations at the Kampala US Embassy to celebrate 247th Anniversary of the Independence of the USA and 60 years of American Partnership with the Ugandan people



Women in OHIE at the meeting



Connie explaining her poster to a fellow delegate at CROI



Dr. Simon Muhumuza, the Senior Technical Officer, Health Systems Strengthening attended the 15th AIDS Impact Conference

DHIS2 PICTORIAL



Moses at the DHIS2 conference in Norway



Ausse Kalega receiving his certificate from Rehema Madenge, the Regional Administrative Secretary, Dar es Salaam.



L-R: Miriam Acheng, Systems Administrator MoH, Stephen Ocaya PM HISP Uganda, Sharon Abowe HIS Analyst METS, at University of Oslo. Ms. Acheng co-presented with Sharon on the "Women in DHIS2"

METSWATCH

**EDITORIAL
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