The Cellphone App in a City Bureaucracy

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Abstract

In 2012 the city of Lahore, Pakistan gave smartphones to its field supervisors to prevent a Dengue fever outbreak. The smartphones were equipped with an app that allowed supervisors to post time stamped pictures with GPS location of Dengue prevention activities undertaken by city workers. Since 2012 more than 2 million activities have been posted by more than 1500 city employees. City managers and public health officials view the data on an online dashboard comprising maps and tables. Using Dengue mosquito larvae location (geo tagged by supervisors in the field), temperature, rainfall and humidity data the dashboard identifies possible high risk localities in the city. The app is optimized for usage in cheap low end smartphones. Skeptical and untrained city supervisors have been brought around to using the app through repeated refresher training sessions. The sessions not only provide supervisors an opportunity to give feedback on improving the app but also emphasize the worth of data collected by them. Access to real time data has allowed city managers to hold frequent performance review meetings and make necessary course corrections well before time. Because the app allows city workers to share pictorial evidence of their efforts on the ground it has helped in reducing the trust deficit between managers and workers.

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