About Vihara

Vihara Innovation Network is a social impact firm dedicated towards building and scaling innovations that enhance human health, well-being, and social equity. It has a deep commitment to human-centred systems design for impact, and has been involved in bringing innovation to social and public space for almost a decade now working on an array of topics: reducing maternal and child morbidity, neonatal morbidity and mortality, improving vaccine delivery, building healthy homes and resilient communities in rural India, building financial products for low-income groups and service providers, improving early grade reading abilities, enhancing classroom learning experiences, gendered-life-skills for adolescents, using blockchain for impact, exploring the future of mobile technology for livelihoods and productivity at the bottom of the pyramid, and many more. Its approach is ethnographically-driven, design-led, tech-enabled and market-oriented.

Context

The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated longstanding trends towards digital approaches in Global Health. The need to prototype and deliver contextually appropriate, evidence-based digital solutions has never been more apparent. Teams that can use the overall tools and approach of product management, to converge a deep knowledge and understanding of end user needs, ecosystem priorities and technological possibilities, are bound to bring accountability and deliver impact within global public health systems. At Vihara, we see it as our responsibility to articulate this challenge and to meet it in partnership alongside the network of organizations working in Global Health as well as private sector players at the forefront of digital technologies.

Approach

Digital health provides an avenue to accelerate and amplify health and well-being outcomes. The opportunities for scale and accountability that digital health solutions provide, can transform how people access services and achieve improved standards of health. Vihara's approach to digital health can be broadly classified amongst:

+ **Beneficiaries**: Our experience and work from early 2020 has shown us that physical distancing has meant an increased reliance on everything digital -- from home delivery of groceries to net banking to homeschooling and working from home online. The need for access to health services digitally has also been amplified, and direct-to-consumer interventions range from:

   >> Digital behaviour change content and curriculum;
   >> Health information and services;
   >> Trauma support, diagnosis and care;
   >> Personalised health management solutions;

+ **Healthcare Workers**: The shift to digital behaviors is not restricted to the professional classes -- our observation of Frontline Workers (FLWs) and their clients this year has shown that they are increasingly adopting video calls, audio messaging and similar means to provide care. Delivery of health services via frontline staff can be strengthened digitally by:

  >> Studying patterns of organic technology usage amongst FLWs;
  >> Tools to manage patients and provide targeted, person-centered care;
  >> Insight-based SOPs and simulations for capacity building;

+ **Donors & Policymakers**:
  >> Digitally enabled remote research;
  >> Monitoring and results-based financing;
  >> Systems for data-based decision making
  >> Performance management of healthcare staff

Strategy: In the past Vihara has worked with BBC Media Action to understand how mobile phones are now being leveraged with greater effectiveness, as a means of enhancing the work practices of frontline health workers. One of the solutions we developed was Mobile Kunji ('key' or 'guide'), our multi-media job aid, which comprises an Interactive Voice Response (IVR)-based mobile service and light, sturdy deck of laminated cards on a steel ring. Our recent, most ambitious digital health project is the 'Game of Choice, Not Chance', a USAID-funded serious game platform. Vihara has undertaken research, co-design, and prototyping to build a free-to-play, phone-based game wherein young girls and boys in Northern India can role play and explore the consequences of life choices, to prepare for positive reproductive health outcomes.

In considering that our participation in digital health is young, we hope to collaborate, learn and build our capability and expertise in an intentional manner so as to affect change in good time, in the following staggered ways:

+ **Support** - As we have in the past, we look to support existing digital health platforms and organisations with our localised user-based insights as well as our experience creating human-centered, behaviour change content, curriculum for capacity building and the development of future forward health management systems.
+ **Accelerate** - Developing un-conventional multi-stakeholder conversations, platforms and program consortiums within the digital health ecosystem in order to curate attention and resources toward solving specific challenges.
+ **Build** - Create our own digitally-enabled integrated service and knowledge delivery platforms that encourage results-based funding, help administrations make data-based decisions, monitor and promote learning and growth amongst frontline staff and provide direct and measurable benefits to end users.