

# GDI CASE STUDY: HEALTENABLED

GDI incubated HealthEnabled, an Africa-based not-for profit that helps governments integrate proven life-saving digital health interventions into their health systems, on its path to sustainability and scale.

health.enabled



## THE CHALLENGE WE SET OUT TO TACKLE

There is enormous potential for digital technologies to save lives, extend the reach of healthcare services, and reduce costs. But while thousands of pilots have been implemented, many countries face persistent challenges in implementing sustainable digital health solutions at scale. HealthEnabled emerged in 2014 from the mHealth Alliance, a multi-stakeholder initiative that focused on convening the mHealth community for knowledge sharing around how technologies could improve health outcomes in low and middle-income countries. HealthEnabled's goal was to help fill the "know-do" gap and support countries to implement sustainable digital health solutions for bigger, bolder impact.

## GDI THROUGHOUT OUR GROWTH ENGINEERING PROCESS

GDI helped co-design a strategy with HealthEnabled, putting in place a supportive governance and operational structure along the way.



The mHealth Alliance's former executive director, Patty Mechael, together with Peter Benjamin, the director of the alliance's m and eHealth Expert Learning Program, launched HealthEnabled to continue supporting countries and large health implementers towards scale, impact, and sustainability. The team reached out to GDI to help **build a new organization** that could work with countries to develop and operationalize digital health strategies and cultivate a supportive enabling environment for the effective use of digital health solutions. In this stage, GDI **assessed and validated the need for such an organization** that could fill the empty space and **serve as a neutral actor** to partner with governments, implementers, and donors.

GDI worked with HealthEnabled to build on the mHealth Alliance's mission, but move from a focus on global mHealth to more integrated engagement in digital health at the country level. GDI **co-created HealthEnabled's initial strategy** with four key pillars, including raising the bar for digital health through a global index to guide and encourage all countries to mature – this pillar also allowed HealthEnabled to advance the field by going broad with its country support while going deep in a few countries. GDI then **worked with HealthEnabled to develop and refine a business plan** to understand how it could engage government and implementers and identify donors interested in funding the effort. GDI also **collaborated with the branding firm Emergence Creative** to strengthen HealthEnabled's messaging and positioning among decision-makers.

HealthEnabled **set up its headquarters in South Africa** with GDI support to accelerate the impact of digital health in the "Global South." To guide HealthEnabled on its path to sustainability, GDI provided a variety of support to the HealthEnabled team including the **development of a communications strategy and boosting the organization's thought leadership** to grow its influence among global health leaders. GDI also helped HealthEnabled **set up its governance systems, hire staff for key leadership positions, connect with funders, and manage major grants** during this phase. Beyond these specific areas, the GDI team served as **trusted advisors for HealthEnabled**, in particular offering a sounding board when the organization had to make tough decisions.

To ensure HealthEnabled would be ready to stand on its own in early 2018, GDI **equipped the organization with practical project management work plans and transferred all critical knowledge and assets** to the HealthEnabled team. To further expand digital health globally building on one of HealthEnabled's core strategic pillars, GDI and HealthEnabled **co-launched the Global Digital Health Index** in 2018 as an online resource that tracks, monitors, and evaluates the use of digital technology for health across countries.

## WHAT HEALTHENABLED IS TODAY

HealthEnabled is now an Africa-based not-for profit that helps governments integrate proven life-saving digital health interventions into their health systems.

HealthEnabled partners with national governments and other large health implementers to develop and operationalize their digital health strategies by 1) supporting policy development for digital health integration and acceleration, 2) building coalitions for effective and efficient digital health, 3) ensuring implementation through appropriate resource allocation and accountability frameworks, and 4) strengthening mechanisms for long-term capacity.

Through HealthEnabled's extensive experience in global health, and with staff representing some of the original pioneers in the field of digital health, the organization also acts at the global level to provide thought leadership and push for advancements in digital health.

## WHAT DID WE LEARN?

We learn something from every initiative we incubate, and apply lessons from both successes and challenges to our future work.

### SUCCESSES

- **A good plan early on goes a long way.** Getting strategy, governance, leadership, and communications right at the beginning is critical to getting social impact efforts off the ground and setting them up for success – even if it requires a “Phase Zero,” or long-tail of pre-work.
- **Shaping a field takes patience.** GDI helped HealthEnabled reach areas outside the mission of mHealth Alliance, and together GDI and HealthEnabled facilitated the development of the Global Digital Health Index as a public good to improve visibility into the state of digital health by and for countries as well as globally. Each step in this progression has played a different, and critical, role in shaping the digital health field and refocusing the global debate from testing mobile pilots to cultivating the enablers that generate greater impact at national scale.

### CHALLENGES

- **Our role in fundraising should not always be front and center.** We learned more about GDI's own role in fundraising for incubated initiatives through our time incubating HealthEnabled. We saw that while we can facilitate resource mobilization through introductions, pitching, and proposal development, ultimately funders want to fund the principal behind the organization itself – rather than working through an incubator.
- **Goodbyes are hard.** HealthEnabled was one of GDI's first initiatives to progress through our later stages of incubation and to eventually exit. We learned from the experience that we needed to do a better job of setting clear milestones, communicating expectations, and more effectively streamlining financial and administrative handoffs through this transition process.

## KEY PARTNERS AND FUNDERS

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