For more than 40 years, PATH has utilized a human-centered design (HCD) approach to create sustainable, impactful health solutions. HCD enables the global health community to shift from prescribing solutions according to a perception of people’s needs, to co-creating solutions that actually meet their needs. Building on this work, Living Labs was established in 2019, to advance health equity and embed this expertise in our country offices, alongside the users.

**Inclusive innovation**

PATH’s Living Labs accelerates the pace of health innovation by co-creating with users such as health care workers, community members, and government stakeholders to rapidly design, test, and scale solutions to their long-standing challenges. In combining HCD that prioritizes listening and empowering users with a process led by in-country experts who understand the local health care system and users, we are able to mobilize from rapid ideation and prototyping to iterative testing in weeks instead of months or years. The outcome is increased use and uptake of solutions that strengthen health system capacity and resiliency.

“HCD is a problem-solving process that understands the human factors and contexts surrounding a particular challenge and we value this partnership with PATH that promises to advance health equity.” — Dr. Andrew Silumesi, Director Public Health, Zambia Ministry of Health.

Living Labs engages users from a place of deep empathy, generating many ideas that address their challenges. Often solutions can be inexpensive or a simple prototype. We use a “4D” approach to co-creation: **discover** the problem and the needs of users; **define** the key themes and insights shared by users; **dream** with our users about possible solutions and prioritize concepts to test; **design** with our users, build a prototype, and keep iterating until a version is accepted.

**The Living Labs difference**

The Living Labs difference is characterized by our team, relationships, approach, and partnerships.

**Multidisciplinary team:** Over 85 percent of Living Labs team members are based in PATH’s Kenya and Zambia country offices with capacity expanding into other geographies. Our design and innovation specialists have diverse backgrounds ranging from product engineers, health systems design professionals, material designers, behavioral scientists, clinicians, quantitative modelers, and market access specialists.

**Network of co-designers:** Our broad network of over 1,000 users co-design solutions to raise acceptability and feasibility in the most relevant contexts, lowering risks and overall investment costs.

**Deep insights:** We curate diverse and deep qualitative insights, paired with quantitative data, spanning borders and health challenges to bring new solutions into emerging markets with speed and agility.

**Trusted partnerships:** We advance partnerships with governments, health facilities, and community organizations, building on PATH’s reputation as a trusted partner with global health expertise.

**Impactful solutions**

The Living Labs portfolio includes a range of health areas including maternal health, immunization, diabetes management,
Identifying solutions to prevent postpartum hemorrhage

In Kenya, Living Labs worked with county-level officials to prioritize interventions to prevent postpartum hemorrhage and then build costed national action plans. The design team used multiple HCD approaches including empathy-focused interviews, storytelling, and empathy maps to immerse themselves with health workers and other health system actors to understand and analyze their stories and ideas to inform possible solutions. For example, they linked quantitative data and qualitative insights related to referral experiences to model ways to mitigate postbirth referral risk by encouraging the use of higher-level health facilities in birth planning. The Ministry of Health (MOH) and stakeholders convened during a national validation workshop to review insights from nine counties and prioritize interventions to be included in a national costed roadmap for the MOH to implement improvements to reduce maternal deaths. Learn more.

Finding solutions to improve immunization workers motivation

In Kenya and Zambia, Living Labs worked with frontline immunization workers to understand factors that leave them feeling overworked and under motivated. Through deeply engaging with individuals, we uncovered that immunization workers felt that small solutions, such as integrating tea breaks into their day or receiving a signed appreciation letter from a county official during an awards event, would increase their motivation and job satisfaction. Simple changes like these that can increase health worker productivity and retention cannot be identified without gaining the trust of and deeply engaging with health workers themselves. Through this project, we have co-created storyboards for hundreds of concepts, and are testing prototypes of the most promising solutions along with quantitative modeling of possible impact. In Zambia, Living Labs integrated national and provincial members of the MOH as part of our project kick off and HCD workshops. Through this effort, we have initiated the process of building awareness and understanding of the importance of design thinking within country counterparts. Learn more.

Testing the universal COVID-19 vaccine label

Living Labs used HCD methods to gather health care worker feedback on proposed labels for COVID-19 vaccine vials and cartons in Kenya and Zambia. A well-designed label can help ensure proper vaccine handling, dosage and safety, and increase health worker and community confidence in the new vaccine. Health care workers interacted with the labels and made recommendations for vaccine manufacturers for future batches. Living Labs design experts gathered additional insights related to the support and training health care workers requested to feel confident in administering the COVID-19 vaccine. Findings informed training guidance for health workers and updates to label designs for future batches of vaccines produced by manufacturers. Learn more.

A bundled approach to sustainable diabetes self-care

PATH initiated HCD work in Kenya to explore bundling options for diabetes care supplies (“CarePak”). PATH utilized a three-phased approach to obtain feedback from people living with diabetes as the primary users of the products, as well as local pharmacy shop owners, health care providers, patient association and support groups, government personnel, and private sector companies. Living Labs engaged these users through interviews, focus groups, and surveys to develop co-created solutions to increase patient access to insulin and other supplies in a bundled diabetes CarePak. Through this work, our team highlighted key individual- and system-level challenges about diabetes self-care and management. People living with diabetes, health care workers, and stakeholders across the non-communicable disease ecosystem were involved in co-creating a CarePak prototype that is currently undergoing user-testing in Kenya. The Living Labs team is currently expanding this work to other countries in Africa. Learn more.

Learn more

Living Labs continues to expand our portfolio with new projects, new partnerships, and in new geographies. We currently work with several funders, other design agencies, and governments to bring these impactful solutions to life.

To learn more about Living Labs, visit our website or contact us at LivingLabs@path.org.