



HEALTH SYSTEMS STRENGTHENING

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Health systems strengthening (HSS) research comprises a diverse collection of questions, approaches, and methods that examine all influences on and the effects of health policies and system performance on health outcomes. The results from HSS research are used to stimulate creative solutions to problems that constrain system performance and the achievement of an optimal state of health. HSS research at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) aims to build the evidence base to inform better decision-making by policymakers in low- and middle-income countries.

Goal 1: Identify practical solutions through applied research

In Malawi, researchers are applying an assessment tool to assess the quality of care of patients with febrile illness and to inform a new collaborative approach for addressing the systemic issues and clinical gaps in care. Lessons learned will help institutionalize capacity to examine and improve quality of care in Ending Preventable Child and Maternal Deaths (EPCMD) countries. Initial field-tests identified clear gaps in diagnosing malaria using rapid diagnostic tests; incomplete and inaccurate record keeping; lack of trust in results; lack of records for follow-up of a negative test result; and inconsistent performance of procedures.

In Gujarat, India, researchers are evaluating community actions to strengthen people-centered services and improve accountability to maternal healthcare and responsiveness of health services. This research will enhance the understanding of how governance initiatives affect accountability in the health system and how marginalized groups use priority services. The study found evidence of improved awareness of maternal health entitlements, utilization of antenatal and delivery care, and monitoring and review of service delivery performance.

Researchers in Senegal are investigating the barriers to and opportunities for using mobile money in performance-based financing schemes. The case study will contribute to global learning about improved quality, accessibility, and affordability of health services by enabling access to mobile-based savings, insurance, and credit. Preliminary results suggest that the performance-based financing program would realize modest benefits from transitioning to mobile money payments, particularly for distribution of individual bonuses within participating clinics. Benefits include improved transparency regarding payments and increased beneficiary trust and engagement in performance-based financing program activities.

Evidence from health systems strengthening interventions involving pharmaceuticals reveal the importance of ensuring that essential drugs and other medical inputs are affordable and available to patients when needed.

HEALTH RESEARCH GOALS

1. Identify practical solutions through applied research
2. Synthesize, share, and promote the use of evidence
3. Develop, refine, and test tools and frameworks

PRIORITY COUNTRIES

- Afghanistan
- Bangladesh
- Democratic Republic of Congo
- Ethiopia
- Ghana
- Haiti
- India
- Indonesia
- Kenya
- Liberia
- Madagascar
- Malawi
- Mali
- Mozambique
- Nepal
- Nigeria
- Pakistan
- Rwanda
- Senegal
- South Sudan
- Tanzania
- Uganda
- Yemen
- Zambia



K. BHADARI/RTI

Evidence from HSS interventions, such as health worker trainings designed to improve service delivery, shows a positive impact on quality of care and uptake of healthy behaviors.

Researchers in Uganda are investigating the overall effectiveness (including cost), field implementation processes, and provider acceptability of different knowledge management methods used to improve the quality of care related to safe male circumcision. End-line data are currently being cleaned and analyzed. Results are expected in 2016.

Goal 2: Synthesize, share, and promote the use of evidence

USAID commissioned and published a ground-breaking review of the evidence on the Impact of HSS on Health (see right). The review identified 13 types of HSS interventions with positive, quantifiable effects on health status (morbidity, mortality, etc.) and health system outcomes, including improved service provision or quality, increased service utilization, uptake of healthy behaviors, and financial protection. The findings of the report document the value of investing in HSS.

A landscape analysis was conducted on the development status of Essential Packages of Health Services for the 24 EPCMD countries to determine their progress

toward universal health care and explore how government policies contribute to service, population, and financial coverage of the package. Findings indicate that all EPCMD countries have defined essential packages; however, these packages do not always include all interventions of global health priority programs, and do not always translate directly into financial protection and equitable access.

Goal 3: Develop, refine, and test tools and frameworks

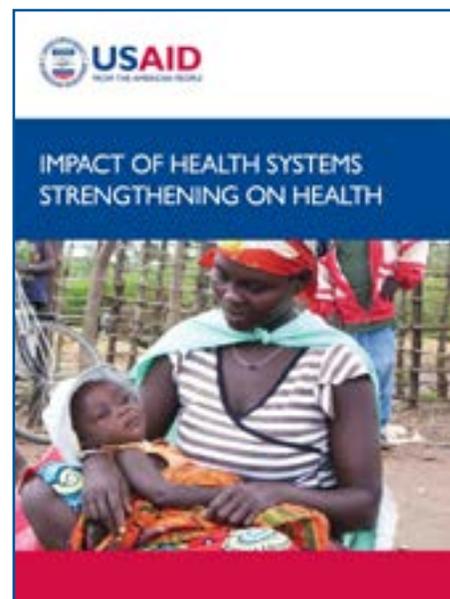
Analysts are designing an operational framework to measure pharmaceutical system performance. The analysts will pilot the framework in selected EPCMD countries to make refinements, test indicators and data collection tools, and develop a manual. The framework will be used to identify priority areas for investment and to measure and demonstrate progress over time.

USAID is collaborating with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to model the link between HSS and lives saved by developing and vetting an impact matrix, which summarizes the quantitative evidence from a comprehensive review of the literature on HSS effects on mitigating health system performance bottlenecks. In the future, this vetted matrix will be incorporated into "UNICEF's EQUIST" tool and be applied at country level. The tool will provide the data and evidence to help policymakers and advocates articulate and quantify the health impacts of HSS activities, contributing to more evidence-based HSS investment decisions.

There is a growing need to better understand health financing and domestic resource mobilization. In the area of domestic resource mobilization, USAID is collaborating with WHO on institutionalizing national health accounts, which involves the development and use of norms, standards, and measurement tools to track health resources, as well as estimate the economic consequences of illness, the cost and effects of interventions,

financial catastrophe/impoverishment, and social exclusion. These health accounts will continue to provide information regarding financial flows within the health system, which is vital for decision-making and public administration reform.

USAID is also determining how to effectively incorporate basic improvement competencies into medical education by building upon an improvement training syllabus developed in Kenya with the Ministry of Health, and by drawing on a Quality Improvement Competency Framework for pre-service education and in-service training. This work is complementary to the Medical and Nursing Education Partnership Initiatives. Products and lessons learned will be shared broadly via a virtual global forum with EPCMD countries.



This report presents a significant body of evidence linking HSS interventions to measurable impact on health for vulnerable people in low- and middle-income countries (www.hfgproject.org/impact-hss-health/).