USAID FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

HEALTH SYSTEMS 20/20 better systems, better health

Better Health Systems
Strategies that Work

A series of briefs exploring the impact of Health Systems 20/20 worldwide

Eight Strategies that Strengthen Health Systems Worldwide

Countries need strong, resilient health systems that are able to provide high-quality health services to their citizens, especially the most vulnerable. Since 2006, Health Systems 20/20, USAID's flagship project for health systems strengthening, has partnered with governments and local organizations in more than 50 countries to improve people's access to and use of priority health services.

According to the World Health Organization, a health system is composed of all the organizations, people, and actions whose primary goal is to promote, deliver, restore, or maintain the health of a population. When a country's overall health system is weak, however, then massive investments in specific programs may have only limited or short-term impact. Similarly, without adequate and well allocated financing for health, people may forgo treatment. Without well trained, fairly paid health workers, there may be no one to deliver quality care. Without competent, transparent governance, health care financing and operations may be inefficient, inequitable, and unresponsive to citizens' needs.

Health Systems 20/20 collaborates with our counterparts to develop lasting solutions to strengthen their health systems. For the countries where we work, USAID, and the global health community, Health Systems 20/20 is the change agent that leverages data-driven insights with deep expertise to build strong, sustainable health systems that deliver the health care people need.

By following eight strategies to improve the governance, operations, financing, health management information systems, and capacity building components of health systems, the project enables USAID-partner countries to move closer to their health goals. The new *Better Health Systems: Strategies that Work* series will explore these strategies, why and how they work, and their impact worldwide.

"When HIV care and treatment were being introduced into the public sector around 2004, my colleagues and I started clinics for mothers who had been diagnosed HIV positive. Since then, things have changed and systems are better, but many challenges remain, including sustainability."

Dr. Irene Mukui, **Program Manager, Kenya's National AIDS and STI Control Program**. She helped write a Cabinet memorandum outlining ways to raise funds for HIV programs based on Kenya's HIV/AIDS Program Sustainability Tool (HAPSAT) analysis.

Story page 3

1. BUILDING THE CAPACITY OF HEALTH SYSTEMS TO DELIVER

Our capacity building strategy focuses on strengthening specific organizations that are essential to improving health systems. Health Systems 20/20 follows a "whole of system" approach to strengthen these organizations, which can include key government organizations, such as national AIDS commissions, as well as research institutions and national-level NGOs that provide technical assistance and training to health professionals and students.

By using this comprehensive approach, Health Systems 20/20 improves the full range of organizational competencies, including leadership and management, resource mobilization, organizational governance, coordination, management systems, and technical expertise. Health Systems 20/20 draws from the best practices of organizational development, starting with an assessment to identify organizational improvement needs and ending with an organization-specific plan to sustain these improvements. This comprehensive process builds ownership and commitment, both of which are essential to achieving sustainability and better organizational performance, and ultimately, stronger health systems.

A rapidly growing regional organization of 12 member countries, AFENET provides field epidemiology and laboratory training programs to a new generation of public health officials. The African Field Epidemiology Network (AFENET) is one of our key partners in Africa. Ministries of health and international organizations rely on AFENET to address significant public health issues, such as avian influenza, zoonotic infections, and noncommunicable diseases.

In the past four years, AFENET's staff has grown from three to 29 and its annual revenues have jumped from $750,000 to $10 million. Health Systems 20/20 supported AFENET to create a strategic plan, strengthen financial management capacity and resource mobilization capacity, improve the team effectiveness of the secretariat, revise the governance structure, and develop a human resources plan. To learn more about AFENET's success and expanding leadership in the region, visit www.afenet.net.

2. BALANCING COST AND SUSTAINABILITY

How much would it cost to provide health, nutrition, and education support to 880,000 orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) in Haiti? Financial, monitoring, and evaluation data are usually collected for health programs, but they are often presented and used separately. By working with our partners to combine and thus harness the power of their data, Health Systems 20/20 helps stakeholders determine how much it costs to deliver a particular health service, and then use this information to allocate limited resources and improve service delivery. In the process, our partners can also identify inefficiencies as well as efficiencies.

In the face of shrinking funding for HIV/AIDS, many countries are concerned about the sustainability of their HIV/AIDS programs. To meet this challenge, Health Systems 20/20 created the HIV/AIDS Program Sustainability Analysis Tool (HAPSAT). The HAPSAT examines the financial and human resources required for delivering major HIV/AIDS services, such as HIV testing, antiretroviral treatment (ART), care and support for people living with HIV, and OVC. The HAPSAT engages stakeholders in an intensive process to analyze and compare the feasibility of various policy scenarios and to address program sustainability concerns.

Guyana, for instance, faces a severe shortage of human resources for health. The national HIV program is using the HAPSAT report to reexamine the number, distribution, and tasks of HIV counselors and redistribute them based on clients' needs. The program is also developing plans to ensure that clinics are open eight hours a day in order to make full use of available staff.

Sustaining Kenya's Response to HIV/AIDS

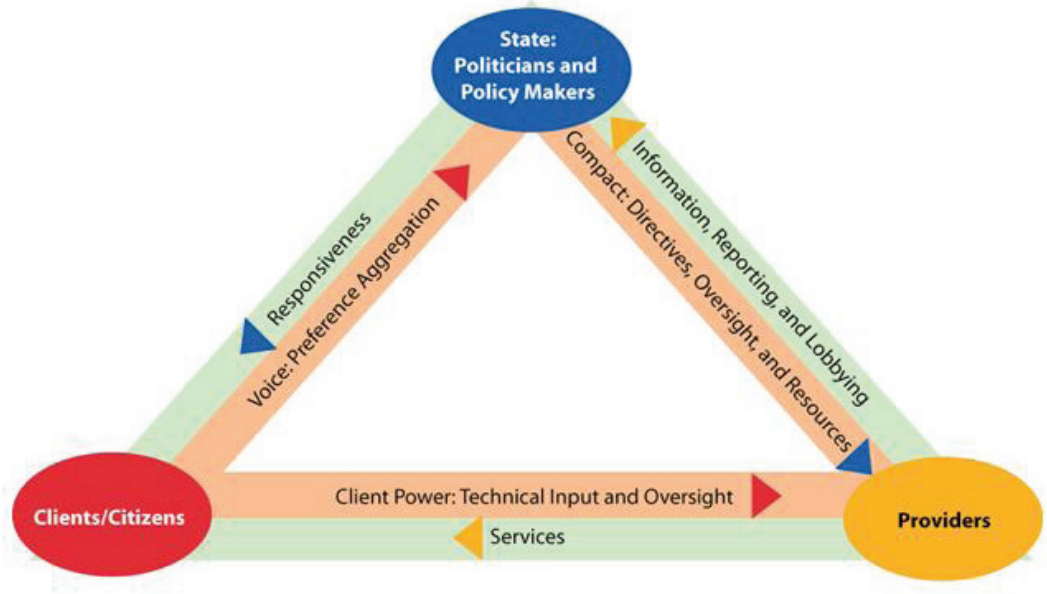
"I got engaged with HIV work not long after graduating from medical school. When HIV care and treatment were being introduced into the public sector around 2004, my colleagues and I started clinics for mothers who had been diagnosed HIV positive. The experience was sobering. We met young mothers with HIV, dealing with social-cultural issues and stigma. We had little resources at the time. It was sad," recalls **Dr. Irene Mukui**, **Program Manager for Kenya's National AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI) Control Program.**

"Since then, things have changed and systems are better, but many challenges remain, including stigma and sustainability. Systems to ensure that people living with HIV are cared for are still not optimal and new infections still remain unacceptably high. No other disease, in my opinion, carries as much stigma and social-cultural bearing as HIV. This is why I work to see that life becomes better for those infected and affected."

Earlier this year, Dr. Mukui helped to write a Cabinet memorandum outlining ways to raise funds for HIV programming based on findings from Kenya's HAPSAT analysis. "The Cabinet memo proposes not only increased local resources for HIV, and hence less reliance on external funding, but also offers sustainable solutions such as using the National Health Insurance Fund to finance HIV services. With time, out-of-pocket payments would decrease and the national HIV response would be more sustainable."

3. IMPROVING HEALTH GOVERNANCE

Health governance encompasses the many rules and regulations put into place to achieve a health system's goals. The governance problems affecting health systems, however, are often vaguely defined and poorly understood. Health Systems 20/20 provides the tools and strategies to diagnose such problems, evaluate options, and develop lasting solutions. Solutions should tackle both the demand and supply sides of governance. The demand side entails working with citizens and oversight entities inside and outside of government to increase their ability to voice their needs and ensure accountability. On the supply side, interventions should strengthen the Ministry of Health's and other health sector actors' incentives and ability to share information, incorporate external input, and deliver performance.



In the Philippines, Health Systems 20/20 supported the establishment of facility-based governance committees that focus on improving the quality of health services. Through a grant to a local NGO, Health Systems 20/20 supported a pilot effort to establish facility-based Quality Assurance Partnership Committees or QAPCs.

Three QAPCs in Mindanao bring together local leaders and government officials, health service providers, and community representatives to address the access, availability, and quality of maternal and child health services. The committees, which still are active after the pilot's completion, are giving citizens an important voice in their health care. As a result, facilities and staff are now more responsive to their community's needs and preferences.

4. PROTECTING PEOPLE FROM FINANCIAL RISK

Unexpected illness, such as severe malaria or a complicated delivery, can push a family into poverty. To protect families and ensure they have access to the health care they need, Health Systems 20/20 supports governments and in-country organizations to establish and strengthen a variety of mechanisms to cover health costs, including health insurance, community-based prepayment schemes, voucher programs, and conditional cash transfers. Health Systems 20/20 educates policymakers and their partners about the pros and cons of these different financial protection mechanisms, helps implement the appropriate mechanisms correctly, and collaborates with international partners to expand financial protection.

Mali, for example, has a long tradition of community-based health insurance schemes, such as mutual health organizations or MHOs. Community groups organize MHOs by recruiting individuals or households to pay regular contributions that cover a set of health care benefits at specified government or private providers. When the government decided to expand insurance coverage to the informal sector, Health Systems 20/20 partnered with Malian organizations, the World Bank, and the Ministerial Leadership Initiative to develop a national community-based health insurance policy, as well as an operational plan and a line-item budget.

The government overwhelmingly approved the policy in early 2011, and began rolling out MHOs in three of Mali's eight regions in October 2011. In addition, the government agreed to subsidize premiums to make health insurance available to lower-income households and expand their benefits package, making Mali only the third country in Africa to subsidize community-based insurance.

5. MEASURING AND MONITORING HEALTH SYSTEMS PERFORMANCE

When it comes to assessing a health system's performance, the biggest challenge is often not a lack of information, but incomplete, nonstandard data from too many disparate sources. Distinct and competing reporting requirements can overwhelm health systems, with the greatest burden often falling on the lowest levels. At the national level, information is frequently presented in formats that create information overload rather than clear guidance on policy decisions. The Health Systems 20/20 strategy is to provide and maximize the use of established and innovative tools to promote standardized measurement.

Specifically, the Health Systems 20/20 strategy entails conducting Health Systems Assessments (HSA) to provide a comprehensive overview of key system functions organized around the six WHO health system building blocks (www.who.int/healthsystems/topics/en/). HSAs serve as the basis for national health strategic plans, recommendations for targeted technical assistance, and inputs to international funding requests.

The HSA has been successfully adapted to the Vietnamese context by the Health Strategy and Policy Institute (HSPI). In 2008, HSPI piloted the HSA in Ninh Binh and Can Tho provinces with Health Systems 20/20 oversight, expanded to six more provinces in 2009, and then conducted 16 more HSAs in 2010. As HSA data collection expanded, HSPI's dependence on Health Systems 20/20 shrank. HSPI is now fully capable of conducting HSAs without outside assistance, and is also well placed to use the findings to inform national health policy development.

Health information systems (HIS) tools, such as geographic information systems (GIS) and HSAs, can also identify trends that inform program planning and decision-making and link service delivery with better health outcomes. The HIS and GIS activities across the project have largely been country-specific. In Kenya, extensive work over four years resulted in the web-based Master Facility List (MFL), which allows each health facility to be uniquely identified and districts to maintain the list contents. The Ministry of Health describes the MFL as the "glue" that will allow for a comprehensive, integrated national HIS to link service delivery, disease program, human resource, financial, and other systems together.

6. PAYING FOR RESULTS CAN IMPROVE A HEALTH SYSTEM'S PERFORMANCE

Patients and facility and district health teams respond favorably to financial incentives, whether to change their behavior to improve their own health or to improve the health care services they provide to their clients. Performance-based incentives (PBI) or pay-for-performance (P4P), is a strategy that links payment directly to better health results.

PBI describes any program that gives performance incentives, such as money or vouchers for food, to patients when they seek health care, such as having children immunized, or to health care providers when they achieve performance targets, such as immunizing a certain percentage of children. Incentives are carefully designed to encourage behaviors that increase demand for and use of health services while also improving the quality and availability of those services.

Numerous developing countries are piloting and scaling-up PBI programs to improve health outcomes and make progress towards achieving the health Millennium Development Goals. PBI, however, is not a solution for all problems in the health system. Rather it is a complement that enhances the impact of many other health systems strengthening investments.

To guide the decision-making process, Health Systems 20/20 developed the Performance-Based Incentives Primer for USAID Missions. The primer outlines how to support PBI programs, whether through technical assistance to an existing program or direct funding of a pilot or of national program scale-up. It also offers an introduction to PBI and its potential to strengthen health systems and boost health outcomes.

7. TRACKING EXPENDITURES THROUGH THE HEALTH SYSTEM

Governments and international development partners rely on timely, accurate expenditure data to assess the past performance of health policies and programs as well as to guide future budget decisions and strategic planning. In much the same way as a family plans its household budget, a government needs accurate spending data to plan realistic budgets to meet its priority health needs. Health Systems 20/20 assists partner countries to use internationally standardized frameworks, such as National Health Accounts (NHA), and customized tools like the Health Resource Tracker to collect and analyze data on the flow of resources through their health sectors for improved resource allocation.

To achieve country institutionalization of health resource tracking, Health Systems 20/20's approach emphasizes capacity building. We provide technical training and assistance to country teams to undertake health resource tracking studies, set up sustainable systems for routine resource tracking, and apply data on health spending to policy analysis and communication.

Additionally, the project developed the NHA Production Tool to guide country teams through NHA estimations and expedite NHA estimations, saving appreciable financial and human resources and allowing low-income countries to be less dependent on donor financial and technical assistance. These innovations have produced significant progress in achieving NHA institutionalization in Afghanistan, Botswana, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Liberia, Malawi, Namibia, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Vietnam.

8. ALLOCATING HUMAN RESOURCES FOR HEALTH

Will Ethiopia be able to provide newly trained medical and nursing students with sufficient opportunities and incentives to remain in country? How can Lesotho determine the proper mix, skills, and distribution of health providers to address high rates of HIV/TB? In many countries, the lack of health care providers is a serious bottleneck to providing quality HIV prevention, care, and treatment services as well as services for other serious prevalent infectious and non-infectious health conditions. Health Systems 20/20 works with its partners to strengthen three key human resources for health (HRH) components – workforce planning, workforce development, and workforce management.

Egypt, for instance, has a high density of health workers, but there are significant imbalances in its health workforce. In partnership with the Ministry of Health and Population, Health Systems 20/20 adapted WHO's Workload Indicators of Staffing Need (WISN) methodology to Egypt. Local experts defined clinical and nonclinical activities and developed activity standards. These standards were combined with estimates of available working time and data on the actual volume of services at a hospital or primary care facility to estimate numbers of workers needed by type and specialty. The pilot at 30 hospitals in three governorates – Assiut, Gharbia, and Luxor – showed a clear deficit of skilled health workers in emergency care, neonatal, and other selected specialties, and a surplus in OB/GYN and pediatrics. In response, facility directors redistributed staff within their facility and are negotiating with other facilities to second a staff person when needed.

Looking Ahead

In more than 50 countries, Health Systems 20/20 has partnered with governments and local organizations to build better health systems. We recognize that each country's story is unique. Our staff combines expertise and flexibility to craft solutions that strengthen individual health systems and eliminate barriers to the use of priority health services, such as HIV/AIDS services, tuberculosis treatment, reproductive health services, and maternal and child health care.

At this time of global economic uncertainty, health systems need to be even more efficient and increasingly must provide more services with fewer resources. To meet these challenges and build sustainability, Health Systems 20/20 collaborates with our partners to assess their health system, identify its strengths and weaknesses, and then choose the most effective strategies and tools to build a more effective health care delivery system.

Strengthening health systems is a process, not an outcome. Since 2006, Health Systems 20/20 has worked hand-in-hand with our partners to cultivate and grow the next generation of health leaders in their countries. While each country will progress at its own pace depending on its health care needs, resources, and leadership, our goal is the same everywhere – healthier men, women, and children.

About the *Better Health Systems: Strategies that Work* Series
The Better Health Systems *briefs explore Health System's 20/20 strategies and tools, why they work, and how they contribute to better health systems. Collectively, the series will distill valuable lessons learned in an effort to share the project's wisdom with our partners and colleagues. For more information, please visit www.healthsystems2020.org.*

Recommended citation: *Health Systems 20/20. November 2011. Eight Strategies that Strengthen Health Systems. Brief. Bethesda, MD: Abt Associates Inc.*

Photo credit: *Health Systems 20/20 staff and Photoshare*

About Health Systems 20/20
Health Systems 20/20 is USAID's flagship project for strengthening health systems worldwide. By supporting countries to improve their health financing, governance, operations, and institutional capacities, Health Systems 20/20 helps eliminate barriers to the delivery and use of priority health care, such as HIV/AIDS services, tuberculosis treatment, reproductive health services, and maternal and child health care.

Abt Associates Inc. leads a team of partners that includes:
| Aga Khan Foundation | Bitrán y Asociados | BRAC University | Broad Branch Associates | Deloitte Consulting, LLP | Forum One Communications | RTI International | Training Resources Group | Tulane University School of Public Health

www.healthsystems2020.org
info@healthsystems2020.org

Abt Associates Inc.
www.abtassociates.com
4550 Montgomery Avenue,
Suite 800 North,
Bethesda, MD 20814