

BetterHealthSystems Strategies that Work

Exploring the impact of Health Systems 20/20 worldwide

Organizational Capacity Building: Lessons to Strengthen Health Systems

AN ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT

Capacity building is an essential ingredient to strengthening any health system, especially for the organizations that support and make up the health system. There is now widespread recognition that country-owned and -led development requires local institutions in the public and nongovernmental sectors to have the capacity – that is, the skills, experience, and leadership – to carry out these development efforts. To encourage country ownership, the new initiative USAID FORWARD aims to increase the amount of funding that goes directly to local institutions. Consequently, these organizations must have the technical and management capacity to plan and implement activities and also to account for the resources they receive.

In broad terms, capacity building has three levels of intervention.

1. Individual level - aimed at developing the knowledge and skills of specific individuals at an organization through training, mentoring, and coaching.
2. Organizational level - focused on building the overall capacity of a single organization.
3. System level - multi-organizational in nature and involves the procedures, institutional arrangements, and coordination mechanisms required for institutions, both public and private, to work together towards a common end.



“As a result of Health Systems 20/20’s assistance, one of the greatest things we have achieved is cohesion in the network. Without the governance assistance, as well as the development of some fundamentals, it is highly likely that the network would have crumbled in the first year. We have different institutions, different cultures, and different ways of doing things and yet we have maintained cohesion. I attribute a lot of that to the assistance of Health Systems 20/20.”

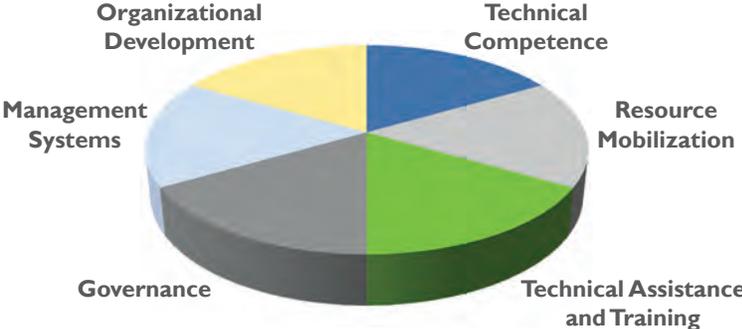
David Mukanga, Executive Director of the African Field Epidemiology Network

Health Systems 20/20's capacity-building focus has been on the organizational level. Our vision has been to strengthen key regional and country level organizations that are essential to strengthening health systems. We distinguish between the organizations that strengthen the health system and the network of health facilities that constitute the health system and deliver services.

Health Systems 20/20 has worked with a range of key organizations, including national government agencies that play a stewardship role, NGO and consulting firms that provide technical assistance and training, research institutions that provide the evidence on which health systems strengthening interventions are based, and institutions that train public health and health system leaders.

To the extent possible, Health Systems 20/20 has worked to develop capacity in the full range of organizational competencies-organization development (e.g., leadership and management, strategy and planning, team effectiveness, organizational structure), management systems, resource mobilization, governance, resource mobilization, and technical competence (see figure 1).

FIGURE 1: CORE COMPETENCIES



BUILDING CAPACITY WORLDWIDE

Since 2006, Health Systems 20/20 has strengthened the capacity of 24 organizations in 18 countries, including four regional organizations (see table). In all of these cases, capacity building was the primary purpose of the activity. Because of its inherent cross-cutting nature, capacity building also occurred in dozens of other Health Systems 20/20 activities. Many of the organizational capacity-building activities have been comprehensive and multi-year in nature. Others have focused more narrowly on developing technical capacity in one specific area. Together, these activities provide a rich database from which to determine lessons learned.

Generally speaking, our capacity-building activities fall into three broad types:

- Comprehensive building of core organizational competencies;
- Activities aimed at strengthening the capacity of central government agencies; and
- Activities aimed at building organizational capacity in a specific technical area.

EXAMPLES OF INSTITUTIONS STRENGTHENED

Central government agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Health (MOH) HIV/AIDS office (Democratic Republic of the Congo) • National AIDS Commissions Secretariat (Liberia) • MOH Health Economics and Financing Directorate (Afghanistan) • MOH Health Information Systems Directorate (Namibia)
Technical assistance providers (NGOs, consulting firms)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • African Field Epidemiology Network/AFENET (regional) • PROSALUD (Bolivia)
Research or academic institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health Strategy and Policy Institute (Vietnam) • Regional School of Public Health (Benin) • Institute for Health and Development (Senegal) • Health Economics and HIV/AIDS Research Department (S.Africa) • African Centre for Management Studies (Senegal)
Training institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kinshasa School of Public Health (DRC) • National TB and Leprosy Training Center in Zaria (Nigeria)

When looking across all these activities, some key generalizations can be made:

- Almost all of these activities were multi-year in nature.
- In most activities, the team leader used an approach grounded in the principles of organizational development.
- The organizations strengthened were both new and well established, and of differing sizes.
- The activities cover a wide range of settings, including post-conflict and low-resource settings, such as Liberia and Afghanistan.

LESSONS FOR SUCCESS

Based on Health Systems 20/20's extensive experience partnering with different types of organizations, we have learned valuable lessons about the best approaches for building capacity. Below are 13 important lessons to consider when working with institutions to improve their ability to strengthen their health systems. These lessons are drawn from a longer report, *Lessons Learned in Organizational Capacity Building for Health Systems Strengthening*, which Health Systems 20/20 will publish in the spring of 2012.



Role of organizational capacity building in health systems strengthening

1. Aim capacity building at organizations whose role is to strengthen the health system – those that play key roles in stewardship, provision of evidence for decision-making, technical assistance, and training.
2. Build both the overall management and technical capacity of those organizations. Without management capacity to set direction, plan and implement activities, and manage resources, technical capacity building will have limited impact.

Targeting of organizational capacity building

3. Select the right partner for targeted organizational capacity-building activities. Partners must have functional management systems, leadership commitment, a viable business model, and adequate pre-existing technical capacity.
4. Targeted capacity building in health systems strengthening tools and approaches requires a willingness by the partner organization to engage and learn, a strong learning-by-doing component, and close oversight at each stage.

Design of organizational capacity-building activities

5. Take a holistic and comprehensive approach to organizational capacity building by addressing the full range of organizational competencies. Health systems strengthening interventions are implemented through organizations. If these organizations do not have both technical and management capacity, they will not be able to use any technical expertise they have gained.
6. When creating a new organization, ensure it has a viable business model that will generate revenue from the services it provides and take into account both the revenue it generates and the expenses it incurs.
7. Design capacity-building activities so the client organization has the incentive to participate in the capacity-building process. These incentives can include tangible improvements such as information technology or IT improvements, increased potential for business opportunities, and enhanced attractiveness to funders.

8. Define benchmarks for success and milestones for measuring progress at the beginning and monitor on an ongoing basis. By linking measures of progress directly to the intervention plan, the technical assistance provider and client organization can share a common definition of success.

Practice of organizational capacity building

9. Build a partnership with the host organization by developing trust and a collaborative engagement. Trust is built over time through open dialogue, using a client-centered approach, working side-by-side, and focusing on tangible outcomes.
10. Maximize the use of local consultants and organizations but provide close oversight and supervision.
11. Ensure buy-in and commitment from senior leadership of the client organization. Organizational change cannot occur without the commitment of senior leadership.
12. Be flexible and adapt the approach and interventions to emerging needs and changing context. As the client organization becomes more self-aware and the consultants understand the organization better, other needs will be identified. Addressing these needs builds credibility for the overall capacity-building process.
13. Tailor all interventions to the country context, the size and sophistication of the host organization, and the resources available. Interventions must be designed so they can be sustained over time, both financially and managerially.

OVERALL CONCLUSION

Should donors be investing in organizational capacity-building activities? Our experience strongly indicates that these are essential investments. Further, the interest shown by USAID missions and the receptivity of client organizations underscore the support for these investments. Many of Health Systems 20/20's capacity-building activities were designed for one year, but nearly all were extended because of their perceived value. While more attention is needed to document the value of these investments, the experience of Health Systems 20/20 strongly supports continued investment in this important part of health systems strengthening.

“The biggest change is that people feel like a team, have a sense of ownership and commitment to the school. This is the most important accomplishment.”

Patrick Kayembe,
Dean, Kinshasa School of Public Health

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 for HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, reproductive health, and maternal and child health care.

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 remains 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.

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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.

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