Health System Strengthening

A Technical Workshop Hosted by The World Bank, The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria, and The GAVI Alliance
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Introduction

Strong and effectively functioning health systems are considered a prerequisite to scaling up cost-effective interventions for reducing disease burden and for achieving the health MDGs. Substantial financial support has been committed by the international donor community to strengthening health systems in developing countries. Based on analysis still being finalized, in the 72 poorest countries supported in common, the GAVI Alliance, Global Fund, and World Bank are the largest external investors in health systems. Globally, during 2006 to 2008, Global Fund commitments for health systems exceeded $1Billion. The GAVI Alliance systems support amounted to $946M since it began, while the World Bank’s IBRD/IDA thematic commitment to “health systems performance” was around $1.8Bn from 2004 to 2008. Commitments to the 49 low income countries were $810M from GAVI, $848M from Global Fund and $1.23Bn from the World Bank*.

Health Systems Strengthening (HSS) also enjoys strong political support in high-level fora such as the G8 and H8 1,2,3, such that a High Level Taskforce on Innovative International Financing for Health Systems has been set up “to contribute to filling national financing gaps through mobilizing additional resources, increasing the financial efficiency of health financing, and enhancing the effective use of funds”4.

The importance of HSS in achieving better health outcomes, including the health MDGs, is stressed in the strategies of leading global health financing institutions and donors. For example, the World Bank Health, Nutrition and Population Strategy in 2007 identified HSS as a key priority5, as did the UK DFID strategy launched in 2007 which stressed that DFID would “continue to support multilateral approaches to national health initiatives, as long as it strengthens national health systems”6. The Global Fund revised its HSS funding framework enabling countries to request funding for cross-cutting HSS activities in addition to requests as part of a disease-related application7,8. In 2008, GAVI commissioned an analysis of its HSS experience for producing actionable, evidence-based recommendations to improve the HSS application process, HSS funding framework, and technical assistance provision9,10.

In early 2009, the Chief Executives of the Global Fund and GAVI informed the Taskforce on their intention “to begin jointly programming GAVI Alliance and the Global Fund resources towards health systems strengthening”11. In March 2009, the Global Fund, GAVI and the World Bank, with technical support from WHO, launched inter-agency consultations on aligning HSS funding frameworks with the aim to pilot in 2009, and to expand from 2010 onwards a common HSS investment strategy.

This support to HSS has created a strong impetus for global health partners to more clearly define the scope and attributes of HSS, and to focus on measurement and better coordination of their HSS investments to achieve improved health outcomes.

* Source: WB, GAVI, Global Fund’s internal estimates
Conceptual Frameworks for Health Systems
A range of conceptual frameworks exist for health systems\textsuperscript{12,13,14,15,16,17}. However, there is lack of a commonly accepted framework for health systems strengthening.

**Box 1: Health Systems -- Conceptual Frameworks**

- Actors framework (Evans 1981)
- Fund flows and payment framework (Hurst 1991)
- Demand-supply framework (Cassels 1995)
- Performance framework (WHO 2000)
- Control knobs framework (Hsiao 2003)
- Reforms framework (Roberts, Hsiao, Berman, Reich 2004)
- Building blocks framework (WHO 2007)
- Systems framework (Atun, Menabde 2008)

An illustrative list of conceptual frameworks for health systems (adapted from Atun R, Menabde N. Health systems and systems thinking. In Coker R, Atun R, McKee M. Health Systems and the Challenge of Communicable Disease)

The availability of an array of conceptual frameworks arguably provides an opportunity to use different approaches when identifying country-specific health systems challenges. However, this conceptual diversity, and a lack of a common health system strengthening framework, also hinders effective operational harmonization of programming at the country level\textsuperscript{18,19} In order to facilitate harmonization of scope and attributions of HSS interventions and operational alignment of these at the country level, the global health community needs to arrive at a common understanding of four important issues:

- What constitutes health system strengthening and how do different national and global health actors relate to HSS?
- What elements are needed to contribute to progress towards success in health systems strengthening?
- How can health system strengthening be measured? Which indicators are practical and valid to use?
- What are the roles of capacity building and leadership development for health system strengthening? What strategies for capacity building are needed to strengthen health systems?
Workshop Objectives†
The purpose of this workshop is to engage the various stakeholders and key partners in technical discussions in order to build consensus around a harmonized approach to HSS. The technical workshop will explore health system strengthening strategies, interventions used, including capacity building strategies, and methods for measuring HSS progress and results.

Expected Outcomes and Deliverables
The expected outcome of the meeting is a shared view on the following four questions posed: (i) What constitutes health systems strengthening? (ii) What elements are needed to contribute to progress towards success in health systems strengthening? (iii) What are the roles of capacity building and leadership development for health system strengthening? What constitutes an effective capacity building strategy for HSS? and (iv) How can HSS actions and results be measured?

The workshop’s deliverable will be input to a joint position paper outlining a conceptual framework for health systems strengthening. Subsequent meetings, to be held later in 2009 will build on the developed common HSS framework, and will focus on developing better coordinated funding strategies, programming, implementation and M&E.

Invited Participants‡
Decision-makers, practitioners and researchers from:

- Multi- and bi-lateral donor and technical agencies, including: the World Bank, Global Fund, GAVI, WHO, EC, UNAIDS, UNICEF, USAID, PEPFAR, DFID, and others;
- Country representatives, including ministries of health, the NGO community, implementing partners, and academia;
- Key international institutions and technical experts including universities, think-tanks, and consultants.

† Proposed agenda is provided in Annex A
‡ An illustrative list of participants is provided in Annex B
References:

1. Source: WB, GAVI, Global Fund’s internal estimates
4. Videoconference Note-for-the-Record: International Health Partnership and Related Initiatives (IHP+) Meeting of WHO’s Director-General and Development Partners. IHP+, 2008
8. The Global Fund's Strategic Approach To Health System Strengthening Background note 4 for July 30 - 31 2007 Consultation