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The Health Systems Funding Platform

Developed by the following Health Systems Funding Platform partners: GAVI Alliance, The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, World Bank and World Health Organization

Stronger health systems the key to achieving greater health impact

Countries, partners, global health initiatives and funding agencies increasingly recognize that weak health systems are an absolute impediment to better health for all people. This is especially true for vulnerable, marginalized and underprivileged populations in poor countries – which are the focus of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)¹ and of health development in general.

With five years remaining to the 2015 deadline for the MDGs, progress is still off track in many countries, particularly for health-related goals. Increased investments are urgently needed to improve health services and systems in poor countries and to accelerate progress towards MDGs 4, 5 and 6. Cost-effective and evidence-based interventions are not enough – the focus must now be on how these interventions can be delivered to everyone who needs them.

The Health Systems Funding Platform (the Platform) was established in 2009 on the recommendation of the High Level Taskforce on Innovative International Financing for Health Systems. It is intended as a mechanism to accelerate progress towards the MDGs, and specifically to: “...coordinate, mobilize, streamline and channel the flow of existing and new international resources to support national health strategies.” The Platform is being developed initially by the GAVI Alliance, the Global Fund and the World Bank, and facilitated by the World Health Organization (WHO), in consultation with countries and other key stakeholders, including civil society. It is based on the principles of the International Health Partnership Plus (IHP+)², in line with the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, to promote: national ownership; alignment with national systems; harmonization between agencies; managing for results; and mutual accountability among partners, donors and countries.

Putting "harmonization and alignment" into practice for health

The Platform will enable countries to use new and existing funds more effectively for health systems development. It will also help them to access donor funds in a manner that is more aligned to their own national processes. Platform partners will do this by coordinating, mobilizing, and channeling health resources – from both domestic budgets and international aid – to comprehensive, integrated, country-driven health plans and strategies.

Through the Platform, countries will benefit from international development funding for health systems strengthening that is:

- Better aligned with country priorities and processes;
- More harmonized in terms of planning, reporting, and financial management (i.e. decreased administrative burden and using time and energy more effectively)
- More predictable over the course of a country's planning cycle

In practice, this will work differently from country to country. However, the overarching aim is to streamline significantly the way health financing is provided, so as to get “more health for the money.” For example, countries that have completed a Joint Assessment of National Strategies (JANS)³ will have the option of submitting a funding request based on their jointly assessed national health plan. In terms of existing funding, the Platform encourages development partners to find ways to simplify planning and financing, and procurement and monitoring procedures, with the aim of reducing transaction costs and duplication. Improvements might include agreeing to a



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common reporting system and a common set of indicators (including those that reflect MDGs 4, 5 and 6) and establishing common processes for financial management, such as joint audits and simplified procurement systems.

Work has already begun among a number of countries and Platform partners to establish baselines, benchmarks and indicators that better align health planning and programming with national priorities and existing processes, including health information management systems. A joint proposal form for GAVI Alliance and Global Fund support to strengthen health systems is being developed for countries to use starting in 2011.

Countries making progress

1. Nepal

Nepal has made significant progress in maternal and child health and is on track to meet many of the health MDGs. The Nepal Health Sector Program II (NHSP II) is supported by a number of development partners and seeks to overcome the remaining challenges – in particular by reaching out to marginalized, remote and poor populations. The NHSP II sets out objectives, results and targets to be achieved in service delivery, health systems strengthening, equity and social inclusion. Its work is based on the principle that health systems should be responsive to the needs and expectations of people.

The collaboration around the Platform in Nepal was agreed in consultation with the government, civil society and development partners to fit the country's priorities and context. In Nepal, high transaction costs, imposed by multiple externally funded programs, have been identified as a real burden, which the Platform is seeking to address through a focus on results and value for money.

As a first step, Nepal's Ministry of Health and its development partners conducted a JANS to revise and strengthen its NHSP, and merged the assessment with project reviews produced by the World Bank, DFID and AusAid. Following this, the leading aid donors (DFID, the World Bank, the GAVI Alliance, USAID, UNFPA and UNICEF) agreed to sign a joint financing agreement (JFA).⁴ This indicated their commitment to a single framework for financial management – with one report and one audit – to support the NHSP, as opposed to the burden of multiple, agency-specific reports and audits.

This JFA, signed in August 2010, was one of the first steps to implementing the Platform in Nepal. It brings together donors (the World Bank, DFID and the GAVI Alliance) that are able to "pool" their development funds in support of the government's health programs with others (such as USAID, UNFPA and UNICEF) that provide on-budget resources but do not pool their funds. The Platform will provide a focus for joint ownership of, and support to strengthen systems around agreed objectives and targets. It will also foster improved collaboration and communication around health-system issues, and has encouraged development partners to ensure that their programs and grants fully support Nepal's own health-sector program.

2. Cambodia

Here, the GAVI Alliance, the Global Fund and the World Bank are reviewing current funding agreements, and exploring options to harmonize support for health systems strengthening. A first joint-country mission (with representatives of the GAVI Alliance, the Global Fund, the World Bank and WHO) took place in early June 2010. Consultations focused on country procedures and possibilities to harmonize institutional processes in four areas:

1. Financial management
2. Pharmaceutical management systems
3. Performance frameworks
4. Technical support



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The Ministry of Health approved this approach in August 2010, and has given permission for work to go ahead. All three funding agencies have now harmonized their performance indicators with those of the government, thus reducing transaction costs for monitoring and evaluation, and have agreed to strengthen the country's health information system.

3. Ethiopia

Ethiopia is in the early stages of implementing the Platform, having carried out a JANS, which culminated in a July 2010 workshop. The assessment was led by the Ministry of Health over several months and brought together international and local development partners, including civil society representatives. The JANS built on existing mechanisms for sector coordination and dialogue and was viewed by the government as a key part of the process to develop and strengthen its fourth national health strategic plan,.

Following the JANS, all Platform partners continue to discuss how to build on this process to achieve better harmonization and alignment of health sector support in Ethiopia. A particular focus is on harmonization of financial management, reporting and monitoring. The GAVI Alliance, for example, is working with the government on the next steps for progressing from the JANS to a funding decision, and then to scheduled releases of funding tranches. Meanwhile, the World Bank is developing new financing in support of the National Health Strategy. Again, the overall focus is on creating an equitable and integrated service delivery model, and extending it throughout the country.

¹ <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

² <http://www.internationalhealthpartnership.net/>

³ http://www.internationalhealthpartnership.net/en/about/j_1253621551

⁴ <http://go.worldbank.org/OD4C6GPQU0>