

# CAPACITY FOR POLICY, ADVOCACY, GOVERNANCE, AND FINANCE

THE HEALTH POLICY PROJECT'S APPROACH

*Brief*

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In recent years, capacity development for individuals and institutions has taken on higher priority as lower-income countries focus on strengthening their health systems. An effective health system requires the capacity to lead, implement, and finance health programs. Capacity is also needed for decisionmakers to effectively set priorities with the full participation of citizens, and for stakeholders to hold each other accountable for improving health.

Common challenges for health systems include using evidence to guide decision making, allocating resources efficiently and equitably, and enforcing health policies and standards. Often, citizens also need stronger capacity and more opportunities to influence the decisions that affect their health.

This brief summarizes the capacity-strengthening approach of the USAID-funded Health Policy Project (HPP) in policy, advocacy, finance, and governance. It describes HPP's perspective on systems change, the expertise needed for effective engagement in the policy process, implementation steps for capacity initiatives, and evaluation.

## Capacity Strengthening and the Policy Process

Capacity-strengthening efforts have played a major role in bolstering policy, governance, finance, and social participation throughout the developing world. In numerous countries, HPP has helped partners strengthen:

- Knowledge of family planning policies and guidelines among government staff
- Data use to advocate for progress toward goals in family planning, HIV, and maternal health
- Development of action plans for monitoring policy implementation in decentralized health systems
- Use of costing and other methodologies to evaluate policy options and inform resource allocation decisions
- Advocacy to promote better-quality services for key populations at greatest risk of HIV
- Governance systems to allow local organizations to become direct recipients of donor funding
- Multisectoral coordination to promote greater awareness and enforcement of laws and policies

## Strengthening Capacity for Systems-level Change in India

In Jharkhand State, HPP helped a governmental partner, the Family Planning (FP) Cell, strengthen its leadership in policy, programming, and monitoring. In 2011, HPP designed and facilitated a capacity needs assessment that provided the foundation for a capacity-strengthening plan. The plan addressed multiple levels of capacity needs: at the individual level, staff competencies for improved planning, implementation, and monitoring of FP programs; at the institutional level, capacity for data-driven decision making and communication; and at the systems level, capacity for fostering linkages between the FP Cell and other stakeholders with a role in implementing the FP strategy and program.

Following the assessment, HPP and state-level NGOs supported the FP Cell to implement the plan with a focus on three districts. One key activity to foster sustainability involved forming a State Resource Group of trainers, which included members from the FP Cell. These trainers built the capacities of health functionaries in the focus districts to identify key areas of action for improving the FP program. The FP Cell also took the initiative to strengthen other aspects of the FP program, including supportive supervision at community health facilities. By 2013, a qualitative end-line assessment of these activities demonstrated that the quality of services had improved in the focus districts and there was a more open environment for collective problem solving.

## Approach for Systems-level Change

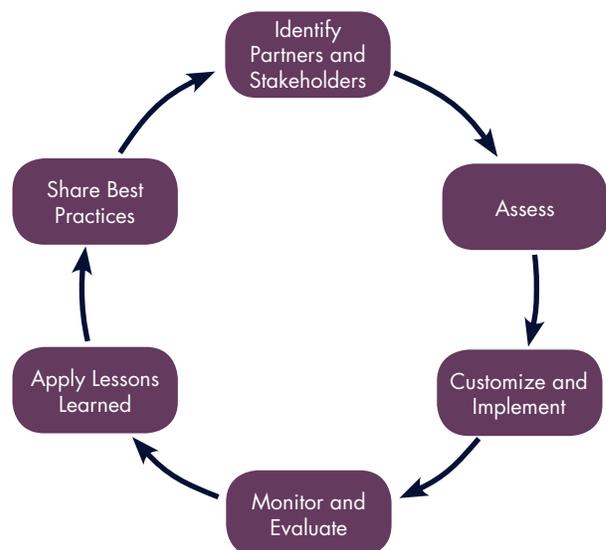
HPP’s support to in-country partners is guided by a vision of improved health fostered by country-led ownership and stewardship of the policy process. To realize this vision, HPP encourages its partners to take a systems orientation to capacity-strengthening efforts. This orientation recognizes capacity needs at interrelated levels: the individual, organizational, and systems levels. Promoting strong policies, governance, financing, and social participation requires individuals with the necessary knowledge and skills, capable organizations, and stakeholders’ capacity to interact productively to foster better systems.

Multiple strategies exist to strengthen capacity at different levels. Among individuals, knowledge transfer strategies such as training courses, graduate studies, and direct technical assistance build competencies, while mentoring and secondment help to institutionalize capacity. Organizational capacity-strengthening strategies include activities such as study tours, organizational development, systems review, and twinning organizations with partners that have more advanced systems. At the systems level, capacity involves the relationships and dynamics among organizations, individuals, and health and governance structures. The ability to facilitate processes such as consensus building and strategy development are key for capacity at the systems level.

## Implementation Steps

In HPP’s view, capacity-strengthening interventions must be tailored to each context and designed collaboratively with local partners to ensure ownership, practicality, and relevance. This means following a demand-driven process of identifying partners, jointly assessing and planning for capacity strengthening, employing context-appropriate methodologies, monitoring and evaluating progress, learning lessons, and sharing what works (see Figure 1). The scope of each step will vary depending on resources, timeframes, and mandate.

Figure 1. Implementation Steps



**IDENTIFY PARTNERS AND STAKEHOLDERS**

A participatory scan of the policy landscape entails a review of the enabling environment, key policy issues, and the primary stakeholders. The scan typically examines stakeholders' existing strengths, capacity-strengthening priorities, the nature of interactions among stakeholders, and investments from other projects and partners. A range of stakeholders are involved in the policy process, and HPP has strengthened capacity development among national and local policymaking bodies, government agencies, public health authorities and implementers, multisectoral bodies, civil society organizations, learning institutions, the private sector, and donors and international organizations.

**ASSESS CAPACITY**

An early step involves assessment, which could be a formal participatory assessment or a more informal process. HPP assists partners to conduct self-assessments and provides tools to support these processes.

**CUSTOMIZE AND IMPLEMENT A CAPACITY-STRENGTHENING PLAN**

Tailored capacity-strengthening plans contain objectives and strategies for strengthening capacity at the individual and organizational levels and for fostering collaboration with other key stakeholders.

**MONITOR AND EVALUATE CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT**

Ongoing monitoring and end-line assessment are strategies to measure capacity. These efforts should consider change at different levels. For example: How do individuals apply new knowledge and skills as they engage in the policy process? Do organizations have the capacity to influence the policy process? Do organizations institutionalize capacity development through funding and other supportive measures?

**APPLY LESSONS LEARNED AND SHARE WHAT WORKS**

These steps focus on internal learning and external sharing.

**Expertise Needed**

The areas of expertise needed for policy, advocacy, finance, and governance include both technical and relational capabilities. In the technical domain are the analytic and methodological skills needed to support policy decisions, strategies, resource allocation plans, and monitoring and evaluation. The relational domain includes the ability to interact within the political environment and to navigate the power dynamics that affect decision making.

Capacity in three specific areas is particularly important for the policy process and good governance: evidence-informed decision making, broad-based participation, and monitoring for accountability and learning. The strategic use of costing, financing, and other data in decision making and advocacy helps strengthen health systems by promoting the efficient, equitable, and effective allocation of resources. Participatory policy processes help ensure that many voices are heard and considered in health decision making. The capacity to monitor policies and commitments is essential for effective accountability and learning, and for responding to human rights violations in the health context.

**Advocacy Training to Help Boost Funding for Family Planning in Uganda**

In 2012 and 2013, the Health Policy Project and the Partners in Population and Development Africa Regional Office conducted advocacy training for women parliamentarians from four African countries, including Uganda. The training helped parliamentarians advocate successfully for accountability to commitments their governments made at the 2012 London Summit on Family Planning (FP2020). Using skills acquired during the training, the Ugandan parliamentarians persuaded officials in the ministries of health and finance to increase funding for family planning. In 2012, Uganda's president committed to increasing funding for family planning from US\$3.2 million in FY2012/13 to US\$5 million in FY2013/14. The actual allocation for FY2013/14 was US\$6.9 million, exceeding the country's FP2020 commitment by more than 38 percent.

## Evaluating Capacity

Three guiding questions may prove useful in efforts to evaluate changes in capacity:

- Are individuals equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes?
- Are there organizational (or inter-organizational) capabilities to undertake activities to influence policy and governance?
- Does the system have the collective capacity to sustain a dynamic policy process that fosters good governance and meaningful social participation?

At the individual level, measurement often involves pre-intervention needs assessments and tracking how the individual applies his or her newly acquired skills and knowledge. At the organizational level, measurement may consider how the organization ranks on the core competencies needed to fulfill its role and maximize its contributions within the policy process. In the short-term, this is generally captured through participatory capacity assessments that examine operational structures, management systems, and technical and relational capabilities. In the longer term, measurement would examine whether the organization has institutionalized capabilities, how it applies these to adjust to internal and external changes, a decreased need for technical assistance, the effectiveness of the organization in fulfilling its mission and goals, and, ultimately, whether the organization's competencies translate into outcomes within the policy process.

At the systems level, one assessment approach involves measuring patterns of networking and collaboration. This may entail examining the quality, frequency, and depth of interaction among stakeholders. Another approach is to look at the ability of an organization to engage, collaborate and network with, and influence other stakeholders to bring about change. Additionally, in assessing systems-level change it is important to consider conditions within the environment that influence the policy process.

Ultimately, HPP's vision of success for capacity-strengthening efforts is that

- Cadres of individual leaders act as change agents and mentors to new generations of leaders.
- Partners use and adapt tools and make them their own.
- Organizations carry out activities increasingly independent of outside support and engage their in-country peers.
- Local institutions lead the capacity-development process.
- South-to-South learning and networking increasingly replace donor agency roles.
- Capacity development resources are shared with other organizations and improved based on implementation experience.

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