

How Do Health Policies Affect Health Systems and Health Outcomes?

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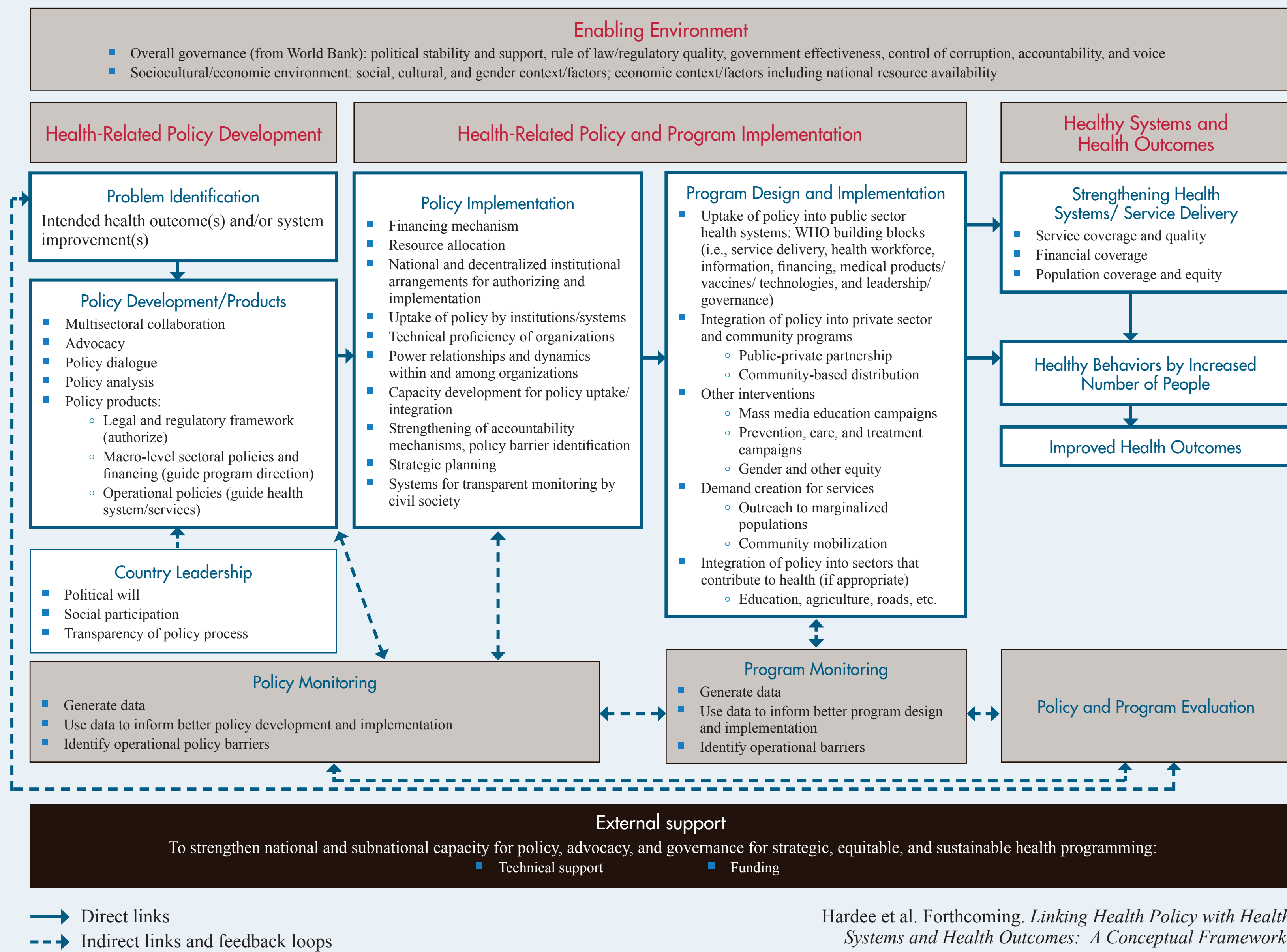
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Background

- Determining the link between health policies and health systems and outcomes is complex. An extensive literature review was conducted to study this link.
- Most of the literature focuses on policy development and program implementation. We define the stage between policy development and program implementation as policy implementation.
- The USAID-funded Health Policy Project (HPP) has developed a conceptual framework to show the links among health policy, health systems, and health outcomes, based on an extensive literature review and decades of experience conducting health policy work in various countries.
- The conceptual framework has the following characteristics:
 - ✓ It is not intended to identify causal pathways.
 - ✓ It is presented linearly for ease of display and parsimony.
 - ✓ It is meant to guide governments, organizations, and communities.

Conceptual Framework: Linking Health-Related Policy to Health Systems and Health Outcomes



Policy and Program Monitoring and Evaluation

- Policy and program monitoring and evaluation are closely related.
- Monitoring involves identifying indicators that measure key policy- and program-related activities. It also includes collecting, analyzing, and disseminating data with policymakers.
- Monitoring identifies potential gaps in the policy process and outlines areas for improvement.
- Monitoring makes key implementing institutions accountable for their activities.

Policy and Program Evaluation

- An outcome evaluation determines the availability, quality, and equitability of program services. It also describes the impact of programs on health systems, service utilization, and service delivery.
- An impact evaluation determines whether a change in policy or program design resulted in the adoption of healthy behaviors by the intended population.
- Evaluation results should be shared with all stakeholders and policymakers.

Enabling Environment

- An enabling environment comprises the following components:
 - ✓ Overall governance, including six dimensions outlined by the World Bank (i.e., accountability and voice, political stability and support, rule of law/regulatory quality, and government).
 - ✓ Social, cultural, and economic factors, including the views of government representatives and civil society on the proposed policy.

Policy Development

Problem Identification

- The purpose of identifying a problem is to address it by developing a new policy or altering an existing one.
- Problems include system malfunctions, healthcare delivery problems, and health inequities.
- Problems are identified through studies, assessments, surveys, and newspaper articles.

Policy Development and Products

- Policy development addresses multisectoral collaboration, advocacy, policy dialogue, and policy analysis.
- Policymakers propose and advocate for different ideas and principles.
- Policy products include the following:
 - ✓ Laws and regulations
 - ✓ Macro-level sectoral policies and financing mechanisms
 - ✓ Operational policies
- Country leadership is the political will that exists to address the identified problem through a law or policy. It is required to develop, draft, and vote on a policy.

Policy Implementation

- Policy implementation involves the rearrangement and restructuring of institutions at the national and subnational levels to implement the policy.
- Implementation requires determining the power structure and inter-institutional dynamics.
- Some operational policies may pertain to subnational levels, thus resulting in a more decentralized system.
- Implementing institutions should efficiently access, allocate, and utilize finances and other resources such as manpower and infrastructure.
- Institutional capacities are developed to ensure the appropriate uptake and integration of policies into existing activities.
- Mechanisms for reporting the steps and actors involved are clearly outlined, helping to eliminate redundancy, increase accountability, and identify potential barriers.
- Transparent systems should exist so that civil society can monitor the implementation process.



Program Design and Implementation

- Implemented policies affect various components of the health system, known as the World Health Organization's health systems building blocks:
 - ✓ Service delivery
 - ✓ Health workforce
 - ✓ Information
 - ✓ Financing
 - ✓ Medical products, vaccines, technologies
 - ✓ Leadership and governance
- Policies can also support other program activities:
 - ✓ Elimination of health inequities through increased mobilization and distribution of services, such as modern contraceptives by community health workers
 - ✓ Conducting of media campaigns
 - ✓ Improvement of public education



Women's health clinic, Lesotho

Conclusion

- Policy research is complex.
- There are several challenges to conducting policy research:
 - ✓ Competing health priorities on the political or policy agenda
 - ✓ Evidence sometimes not translated to indicate programmatic and policy relevance
 - ✓ Lag time between policy research and policy change
 - ✓ Inability to control the pace and location of policy development and implementation
 - ✓ Lack of transparency and collaboration between researchers and policy agencies
 - ✓ Problems in measuring attribution to specific policy changes in the presence of unobserved factors
- More studies are needed to help outline the role of policy implementation as well as link policy development and implementation to improvements in health systems and outcomes.