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FAST FACTS

Health Systems

Key Facts

- **Human Resources for Health:** According to the World Health Organization (WHO), there is a global shortage of 4.3 million doctors, nurses, midwives, and support workers. Sub-Saharan Africa's share of this shortage of skilled health workers is 35 percent.
- **Health Information Systems:** In the last 20 years, USAID has supported more than 200 Demographic and Health Surveys in nearly 70 countries. The surveys provide policymakers with national data on population and health issues.
- **Service Delivery:** The "improvement collaboratives" are a methodology for enhancing the skills of health care workers that is faster and more effective than traditional training. Between 2002 and 2007, USAID supported 29 collaboratives in 13 countries in areas ranging from obstetrics and pediatrics to HIV/AIDS and malaria.
- **Medicines and Commodities:** As estimated by WHO, one-third of the global population lacks regular access to essential medicines. USAID supports the use of drug and therapeutic committees by hospitals to improve their selection, management, and use of drugs. USAID has supported training for nearly 775 members of 80 committees in 68 countries.
- **Financing:** A National Health Account is a tool for tracking the flow of funds through the health sector. USAID has helped more than 100 countries implement these accounts.
- **Governance:** According to the Transparency International Global Corruption Report, all health systems are vulnerable to corruption, which in the pharmaceutical system can result in limited access to high-quality medicines and improper usage. USAID supports efforts to increase transparency and accountability in the health sector in nearly all countries where it works.

Global Importance of Investing in Health Systems

- **Relieves suffering and saves lives.** Without health systems in place, people would have nowhere to go to receive treatment and care.
- **Engages national governments in long-term, sustainable development.** By improving their ability to manage sustainable health systems and optimizing their use of resources for health, host countries make an investment not just for immediate health care needs, but for the needs of many generations to come.
- **Provides equitable and effective high-quality treatment and care.** Health systems can ensure that services are accessible and affordable to all groups, including rural and lower-income populations.
- **Integrates health services so they are more efficient and do not stand alone.** Disease-specific programs are not designed to function independently; for practical reasons, many health system functions are shared by all types of health services. As a result, patients may receive treatment for different health needs (family planning, maternal and child health, tuberculosis, malaria, and avian influenza) simultaneously.
- **Results in better health outcomes.** Better health is directly linked to higher productivity and economic growth. Countries with lower infant mortality experience higher economic growth. High malaria prevalence has been shown to be associated with a reduction of economic growth of 1 percent or more per year.

USAID's Strategy for Improving Health Systems

In an era when women continue to die in childbirth, infants and children still succumb to infectious diseases, and HIV/AIDS continues to traverse a globe plagued by state fragility, improving health systems is essential. As USAID solves challenges related to health systems, it continues to fulfill its mission of saving lives and contributing to development and security. USAID strengthens health systems so that services in reproductive health – such as maternal, neonatal, and child health and nutrition; infectious diseases; and environmental health – can be more widely accessible. USAID-supported programs ensure that governments steer health systems to save lives, that countries invest their resources to accomplish this goal, and that operating systems enable implementers to effectively carry out lifesaving activities. Programs focus on the following areas:

- **Effective service delivery.** USAID supports service delivery improvements to ensure safe, quality, preventive, promotive, curative, and rehabilitative health interventions to those who need them, when and where needed, with minimum waste of resources. Effective health services are based on science and reliably follow evidence-based guidelines. They include an organized program for measuring and improving quality.
- **Effective health governance.** Effective health governance means rationalizing the health system roles, so that the Ministry of Health in a country operates as the steward of the health system, providing oversight and accountability, while citizens, civil society, and the private sector are empowered to provide input and to assume new health sector roles and responsibilities. Improving health governance is particularly critical in fragile states because it means increasing the ability of these states to ensure basic health services for their citizens and greater accountability for the inputs and results of the system.
- **Health care financing.** This helps mobilize adequate resources to pay for health needs from sources that are reliable over time, pools resources efficiently and equitably, and allocates resources in ways that optimize health impact, promote efficiency, and enhance equity. Strategic areas include expanding community-based health insurance plans (to increase the use of health services) and national health accounts, which provide governments with an analysis of where health-related funds come from and how they are spent, and allow countries to make policies based on facts rather than guesswork.
- **Pharmaceutical management.** Effective commodities management is necessary to ensure equitable, timely access to essential medical products, vaccines, and technologies of assured quality, safety, efficacy, and cost effectiveness. It also ensures they're scientifically sound and cost-effective in use. It includes maintaining stocks of drugs and supplies, selecting the most appropriate drugs at competitive prices, and ensuring their quality.
- **Human resources for health.** Developing countries often experience difficulty managing recruitment processes to attract the types and numbers of workers they need. USAID helps health institutions effectively manage human resource recruitment, compensation, and assignments to ensure that sufficient numbers of staff are fairly distributed and prepared to achieve the best health outcomes possible.
- **Improving information for decisionmaking.** This includes the Demographic and Health Surveys, which USAID supports so countries can manage more efficient health programs that meet people's needs and better determine where to invest health funding. USAID also supports monitoring and evaluation to provide countries with empirical evidence to guide their health system reforms. Additionally, the Agency provides support for expansion of information management capacity and technology to allow decisionmakers to determine, collect, and process relevant data to assess how the system is performing and how health care reforms are progressing.

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