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Samuels, F; Amaya, AB; Balabanova, D; (2017) Drivers of health system strengthening: learning from implementation of maternal and child health programmes in Mozambique, Nepal and Rwanda. *Health policy and planning*, 32 (7). pp. 1015-1031. ISSN 0268-1080 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapol/czx037>

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Drivers of health system strengthening: learning from implementation of maternal and child health programmes in Mozambique, Nepal and Rwanda

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Keywords: Health System, Health Care Delivery, maternal health, child health, Nepal, Rwanda, Mozambique

Abbreviated title: Drivers of health system strengthening

Key points:

- Health systems are complex and there is little consensus on what health systems strengthening entails, what the drivers of successful health systems strengthening initiatives are and how they can be measured. Given the multiple and interrelated factors influencing progress in health, recognising the viable pathways and a range of policy options, is a challenge to policy makers and implementers.
- At the macro level, it is critical to support national-level evidence-based policies and transparent planning and policy-making processes. This will involve enhancing implementation capacity at sub-national level, particularly given the influence of this level on how policies are translated and how programmes are experienced on the ground.
- At the level of service delivery, drawing on community resources, including the widespread use of community health workers, has been a recurring theme in explaining the success of maternal and child health interventions in the study countries.
- This paper suggests a pragmatic approach to conceptualising health system strengthening involving: 1) a focus on understanding the pathways to access and better health taking into account context and history, 2) identifying sets of multiple enabling and obstructive drivers at each level of the health system, and 3) identifying the required actions without losing sight of the 'whole-system' functioning and the contexts that shape implementation.

Acknowledgements

This article is based on findings from an ODI-wide project exploring progress in development and funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. We would like to thank the whole Development Progress team at the ODI for their support; in particular we would like to thank Jakob Engel and Romina Rodriguez Pose for their work on the country case studies and Emma Samman for her support in the quantitative analysis. We would also like to thank all respondents in the study countries for giving us their time and sharing their views with us.

Word count of the full article: 6193