

## Technical Profile: Health Systems Strengthening

There is growing international recognition that effective health systems are crucial for achieving a number of the Millennium Development Goals. Safe Motherhood depends on readily available skilled care, backed up by effective primary and hospital care. Likewise, widespread immunization requires well-organised primary care services. Effective systems are also essential for tackling HIV/AIDS, malaria, TB, and throughout the health sector.

However, getting health systems to work well takes more than a quick-fix solution. The experience of Health Partners International suggests some of the key requirements are:

- Stakeholder engagement – commitment and full involvement, right from the start
- Strong systems analysis – to understand the institutions, players, resources and context
- Identification of practical solutions – by combining good local understanding with strong technical skills in health management experience and ‘best practices’ from similar countries
- Building locally-appropriate systems of management – for patient care, health finance, staff, physical assets, information and other core aspects of effective health services. The ability to replicate systems and apply them broadly are essential requirements for sustainable systems
- Moving from a know-what and know-how approach to one of know-why and care-why – from addressing individual knowledge and skills to targeting organisational understanding and attitudes
- Emphasis on learning-by-doing – capacity-building that stresses workplace learning, hands-on practice, personal mentoring and ongoing support
- A focus on outcomes – systems-strengthening that also targets tangible improvements in health care
- Institutionalising the process of change – establishing procedures, local structures and capacity to strengthen health systems – so stakeholders can do it on their own.

### **Health Partners International’s experience in strengthening health systems**

Strengthening health systems is at the heart of the work and mission of Health Partners International (HPI). Most of HPI’s team are health sector professionals with a strong background in managing health services, and many are from low-income countries. They bring deep insight and wide experience in all the issues – from the nuts and bolts of organising front-line services or complex health systems to sector-wide strategies for allocating, accessing and managing resources – as well as a full commitment to partnership and local engagement in the management of change. HPI has the advantage of combining strong capacity in strategic analysis with full technical capability in health systems strengthening.

HPI has specialised capacity in vital aspects of health systems development, in particular:

- Integrated processes of health systems strengthening and management of change
- Health sector financial management – in collaboration with our partners GRID Consulting Services
- Human resource planning and management – a specialty of Health Partners Southern Africa
- Quality assurance, assessment and appraisal in collaboration with Health Partners Ghana
- Health care technology and physical asset management, including equipment, infrastructure and medical supplies, involving our partners HEART and Health Partners Denmark
- The organisation, management and reform of hospital services
- Health Management Information Systems in collaboration with HISP in Southern Africa
- Sustainable drug supplies in collaboration with GRID Consulting Services Structuring and organisation of health services at district, regional/provincial, state and national level.

### Case study 1: Design of the Health and Social Sector Support Programme Phase II, Namibia

Much of our work at HPI has focused on developing or introducing district health services, which are an essential requirement for organising effective, accessible health care in most low-income countries. We also have expertise in helping with the reorganisation of high-level structures. Working at this level requires a high degree of political sensitivity, strategic thinking and stakeholder engagement, but is often a critical component of embedding health sector reform.

HPI provided support to the Ministry of Health and Social Services in Namibia to design a complex six component, four-year programme to improve the efficiency of core health and social welfare programmes in seven regions.

The programme contributed to improvements in:

- Health and social services management at regional and district levels
- Training networks (with improved management systems to support pre and in-service training)
- Management and delivery of priority social welfare services
- Policy, planning and management capacity at national level (facilitated by a functional management information system)
- Mental health programme management systems and case management of mental health at all levels
- Use of health care technology and physical facilities.

Our consultants provided specialised technical assistance in:

- Regional and district management
- Public health services
- Human resources management and capacity-building; social welfare assessment and planning
- Health facilities assessment and planning
- Equipment management.

### Case study 2: Support to the KANDO Project, Zambia

Health services use and depend on a wide range of equipment, facilities and technologies. Health Partners International provides specialised technical support and capacity building for managing all aspects in the extensive field of health care technology - from needs assessment to procurement; facility planning to rehabilitation; construction and upkeep; and from equipment specification to installation, commissioning, user training and maintenance. We have considerable experience in:

- Assessing equipment and assisting in specification and procurement
- Establishing effective equipment management and maintenance systems
- Health facility appraisal, planning and design for rehabilitation and new development
- Detailed needs analysis, planning and costing for health care technology.

Our partnership with HEART consultancy provides access to the PLAMAHS software planning tool which is designed to assist with the planning and implementation of the physical assets component of health reform processes, such as building, utilities and equipment.

The KANDO (Kitwe and Ndola Hospital Reform) project, funded by the UK Department for International Development, was established to support Zambia's Ministry of Health hospital reform efforts. We worked with three central referral hospitals to strengthen their management capabilities in order to run their own affairs as semi-autonomous boards. The project contained many management components for different aspects of health care provision, with one major component being health care technology management.

Over five years, various consultants from Ziken and Health Partners International worked with managers, maintainers, equipment users, procurement and stores personnel to develop their skills in managing the life-cycle of equipment.

The work involved developing systems and management 'tools', such as:

- Inventories
- Equipment development plans and budgets
- Equipment specifications
- A maintenance record system
- Planned preventative maintenance schedules.

The work also included assistance with procurement, installation, commissioning, operation and maintenance training, workshop development, and spare parts management.