



**FOCUS ON:**

# Health System Strengthening

Improving Service Delivery and Health Outcomes



# OUR EXPERIENCE

For more than 25 years, Abt Associates has been a global thought leader and implementer of health system strengthening (HSS), sharing its approach widely through publications that define HSS and how to measure health system performance<sup>1</sup>. Abt's breadth of experience in implementing and measuring the impact of HSS interventions worldwide enables us to provide comprehensive technical assistance in a manner that builds health systems that are more resilient and responsive to health threats and to pursue universal health coverage goals. Abt's HSS assistance spans planning to implementation to evaluation—across all aspects of HSS, including but not limited to financing, governance, quality improvement, decentralization, community-based interventions, and private sector partnerships.

## ABT'S CORE PRINCIPLES OF HSS:

- Use a systems approach to identify the root causes of poor performance and implement targeted interventions at each level of the health system and across health program areas.
- Ensure that HSS interventions are consistent with the country government's health sector strategies.
- Leverage the private health sector, communities, households, and individual behaviors to improve health outcomes.
- Collaborate with development partners to ensure harmonized and efficient progress.
- Ensure interventions have cross-cutting benefits beyond fighting a single disease.
- Conduct all activities with and through local institutions to produce permanent systemic impact beyond the term of the project.
- Deliberately sequence HSS interventions to take advantage of readiness for change and unique opportunities.
- Strengthen the voice of underserved populations to hold the health sector accountable.

## System Strengthening for Long-Term Impact

Abt has more than 25 years of experience implementing global HSS projects for USAID, beginning with the Health Financing and Sustainability project in 1989, to the current Health Finance and Governance Project. Additionally, Abt currently leads 15 bilateral health projects that integrate health systems and service delivery strengthening. Listed below are a few highlights from our vast portfolio of HSS assistance.

### REDUCING CATASTROPHIC HEALTH EXPENDITURE AND IMPROVING SERVICE QUALITY IN SENEGAL

In Senegal, two Abt-led United States Agency for International Development (USAID) projects—the Senegal Health System Strengthening project and the Health Systems 20/20 project—worked together with the Government of Senegal to introduce national policies to increase government financing of community-based health insurance (CBHI) and other health financing schemes. CBHI coverage has expanded through 267 CBHI schemes, covering more than 300,000 people with risk-pooling to reduce catastrophic health expenditures. The projects also supported the launch and implementation of results-based financing to improve coverage of high impact maternal and child health, malaria and HIV and AIDS interventions in seven districts. Results have shown more than 50% improvement in the quality of services in select pilot districts. Both of these health systems initiatives are currently being scaled-up by the Government of Senegal.



<sup>1</sup> Publications of note include Chee et al. 2012. Why differentiating between health system support and health system strengthening is needed. *Int J Health Plann Manage*. 2013 Jan-Mar;28(1):85-94 and Hatt et al. June 2015. *Impact of Health Systems Strengthening on Health*. Bethesda, MD: Health Finance & Governance Project, Abt Associates.

## IMPROVING FACILITY GOVERNANCE AND QUALITY IN ETHIOPIA

Since 2000, Abt has been instrumental in the design and national scale up of major health financing reforms in Ethiopia. Under the USAID Health Sector Financing Reform project (2008-2013), Abt assisted the government to expand a system for public health facilities to retain and use fee revenue to support quality improvement. In 2014, almost all health centers (2,283) and hospitals (124) in nearly all regions and city administrations were successfully implementing the reform. Now patients and health workers are enjoying visible improvements in quality and productivity, such as new infrastructure, reduction of drug stock-outs, and improved health worker retention.

## USING A GRADUATION PATH TO INSTITUTIONALIZE IMPROVEMENTS IN SERVICE QUALITY AND MANAGEMENT IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC AND MOZAMBIQUE

An Abt-led, USAID-funded project in the Dominican Republic helped the government cut maternal deaths by half in the 10 hospitals that attend to 22% of the country's live births, contributing to a nationwide reduction of 16%. From 2010 to 2011, the 10 hospitals measured their progress against standards and benchmarks for management capacity and quality improvement in order to "graduate" from the need for intensive assistance. The Ministry of Health continues to use this approach without project assistance, using government resources. In Mozambique, Abt used a similar graduation path in three provinces to measure improved management capacity in the District Health Directorates. The Directorates increased compliance with Ministry of Health norms from 43% to 70% in one year.

## IMPROVING MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH IN CENTRAL ASIA

Through four successive USAID-funded HSS and service delivery strengthening projects in Central Asia, Abt has assisted governments to restructure and rationalize health systems to save money and lives. In Kazakhstan, Abt contributed to the de-medicalization of prenatal care by changing the way providers were paid and institutionalizing evidence-based medicine. As a result, Kazakhstan shifted prenatal care to the primary level between 2005 and 2015. The shift decreased the average number of prenatal visits from 12 to 6, and encouraged declines in the prescription of inappropriate, non-evidence-based drugs during the prenatal period. Due to these improvements in prenatal care, along with skills-based training on safe delivery in hospitals, the maternal mortality rate has decreased by 65% (since 2004), and the early neonatal mortality rate has decreased by 60% (since 2008).

## USING EVIDENCE TO SHAPE HEALTH FINANCING IN MALAWI

Abt has led the wide spread use of National Health Accounts (NHAs) in developing countries. In Malawi, the USAID-funded Support for Service Delivery Integration-Systems project supported the country's 2009/10–2011/12 NHA. The Malawi Ministry of Health used the NHA and other data to formulate the 2014/2015 health budget, and successfully advocate to the Ministry of Finance for an 18% increase of the 2013/14 health budget, and a 14% increase of the 2014/15 health budget. Also—armed with health finance data—the Ministry of Health developed the country's first National Health Finance Strategy to more effectively mobilize, allocate and utilize new and existing health resources.

## IMPROVING HEALTH SYSTEM STRUCTURES TO STRENGTHEN SERVICE DELIVERY AND HEALTH OUTCOMES IN NIGERIA

Through the United Kingdom Department for International Development's Partnership for Transforming Health Systems Phase Two (PATHS2) programme, Abt assisted Nigeria's Jigawa State government to introduce strategic health purchasing to better target health budget funding towards priority maternal, newborn and child health service and poor populations. Between 2009 and 2014 the proportion of births attended by skilled birth attendants increased in Jigawa State, from 5% (10,149) to 18% (41,094). PATHS2 also helped several state governments develop Drug Revolving Funds (DRFs) resulting in a 90% improvement in drug availability in DRF sites, and has reduced drug prices in DRF sites by 50% in Kano and 48% in Jigawa.

## STRENGTHENING SKILLS AND SYSTEMS TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY AND AVAILABILITY OF HEALTH SERVICES IN ZAMBIA

Under the USAID Zambia Integrated Systems Strengthening Project (ZISSP), Abt worked closely with the Ministry at the national, provincial, district, and community levels to strengthen skills and systems for planning, management, and delivery of health services. Over 50 multidisciplinary Clinical Care Teams were established and 1,028 Quality Improvement Committee Members were trained at the provincial and district levels. These teams conducted 7,700 clinical mentorship sessions at the facility level to support front-line health workers to identify, analyze, and solve systematic challenges encountered in delivering high-quality health care.

## USING ACCREDITATION TO STRENGTHEN HEALTH CARE QUALITY IN JORDAN

Abt has worked in Jordan for more than 10 years to improve health services delivery at various levels and to design interventions addressing weaknesses in the current system. The Abt-led USAID Health Systems Strengthening II (HSS II) project team helped the Ministry of Health to implement a nationwide referral system, to ensure timely referrals to specialists for patients who need them, and to avoid unnecessary or self-referrals. The team also systematically introduced, supported and implemented a Primary Health Care/Family Planning Quality Improvement Collaborative methodology that successfully prepared 86 primary health care centers for accreditation by an external accreditation body. Through its continuous collaboration with the Ministry of Health, HSS II ensured that the Ministry of Health was prepared to assume responsibility for the quality improvement process after the end of the project.



## USING TECHNOLOGY TO EXPAND HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE IN GEORGIA

In Georgia the Abt-led, USAID-funded Health System Strengthening Project developed a unified Health Management Information System (HMIS) for the Government of Georgia. The system has enabled the government to expand health insurance coverage from 50% to 100% of the population, make decisions based on accurate and real-time data, reduce costs by identifying duplicate entries for patients, and empower patients to make informed decisions about health care options through a client-facing module with information about insurance coverage and choice of providers. The user-friendly HMIS serves 2,000 primary health care providers, including 1,400 rural doctors, and 11 insurance companies.

## About Abt Associates

Abt Associates is a mission-driven, global leader in research, evaluation and implementing programs in the fields of health, social and environmental policy, and international development. Known for its rigorous approach to solving complex challenges, Abt Associates is regularly ranked as one of the top 20 global research firms and one of the top 40 international development innovators. The company has multiple offices in the U.S. and program offices in more than 40 countries.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION ON ABT ASSOCIATES WORK IN HEALTH SYSTEM STRENGTHENING CONTACT:

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