



# Systems Strengthening

Strengthening sectoral systems to achieve SBC objectives

## What is Sectoral Systems Strengthening, and why is it important?

Imagine if Apple developed a new product without understanding the capacity of hardware manufacturers, the technological capabilities and limitations facing its target clientele, the needs of software developers, the necessary supply chains and logistics to ship the product efficiently, and the timing of their retail launch. Even if Apple were to develop a game-changing product, it would not be successful if the broader *system* did not support its delivery and uptake.

Similarly, we cannot achieve SBC objectives without equipping the health, education, and child protection systems. We must strengthen these systems to support achievable and sustainable Social and Behavioural Change.

Strong sectoral systems have appropriately selected, trained and engaged human resources, functioning financial systems, transparent and accountable information systems, supportive public policies, and empowered, sustainable community structures to work with. A strong sectoral system offers high-quality services, and strong leadership and governance. They enable programs to reach underserved and high-priority groups, working toward greater equity, dignity, participation and protection from stigma.

## Sectoral Systems Strengthening 101

The table below outlines example actions you can take to strengthen for sectoral systems at the policy, service, and community levels.

View the [Sectoral Systems Strengthening tool](#) for an overview of how to apply a Systems Strengthening approach to the health sector.

System component	Example actions		
	Policy	Service	Community
<b>Build the capacity of human resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve, implement and maintain HR competency frameworks and capacity development mechanisms</li> <li>Develop performance monitoring systems for core SBC skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Update recruitment practices, such as job TORs, to include core SBC skills</li> <li>Develop training plans, manuals and tools to build SBC capacity in HR</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Build a social service workforce and hire community workers who reflect community diversity and culture</li> <li>Provide supervision and incentives to empower community workers, such as opportunities for recognition</li> <li>Tailor capacity-building programmes for civil society partners</li> </ul>
<b>Ensure high-quality, people-centred service delivery</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthen or build partnerships that can mobilize a broad range of civil society stakeholders</li> <li>Develop public policies that work to engage people and communities in service design, management and improvement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create <u>feedback and social accountability mechanisms</u> for sub-regional, district, community, and village services</li> <li>Increase community participation in decision-making</li> <li>Develop coordination mechanisms across and between sectors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve the skills of frontline workers to support better supply of social services, increasing the demand for such services</li> <li>Empower Individuals, families and communities to engage with service design and delivery mechanisms</li> </ul>
<b>Build or maintain transparent information systems and technologies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop and maintain publicly accessible and transparent information systems to hold decision-makers accountable</li> <li>Develop motivations and incentives for transparent Monitoring and Evaluation (M&amp;E)</li> <li>Ensure information flows are interoperable</li> <li>Advocate for the collection and use of social and behavioural data in information systems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve capacity of HR to collect and use social and behavioural data</li> <li>Ensure human resource capacity for evidence-based planning, budgeting, supervision and monitoring of priority interventions</li> <li>Integrate data collection, analysis and utilization approaches / systems into project design, planning and implementation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop community monitoring mechanisms</li> <li>Ensure that feedback loops benefit communities</li> </ul>
<b>Strengthen supportive institutions, governance and leadership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hire SBC specialists to join central-level teams</li> <li>Implement 'Leadership for SBC' into regular training for policy-makers and programme managers</li> <li>Develop budget lines for SBC</li> <li>Create behavioural insights units to support and guide the government</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hire SBC specialists (sociologists, anthropologists) to join sub-regional-level teams</li> <li>Create multidisciplinary teams</li> <li>Establish alliances of SBC professionals to serve as advisory bodies, to support the core team</li> </ul>	

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<b>Support system financing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhance operational guidance for planning, costing and expenditure tracking in public sector systems</li> <li>Increase public and private domestic resources towards humanitarian and development goals</li> <li>Catalyse and incentivize investment in sectors through shared value creation / public-private partnerships</li> <li>Promote equity-based financing instead of using a blanket approach (e.g., focusing on districts or provinces with poor child survival indicators)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide, where relevant, financial incentives for appropriate behaviours</li> <li>Issue timely, clear and practical operational guidelines with budget allocations</li> </ul>	
<b><u>Strengthen community structures</u></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Align community engagement approaches with government frameworks, policies, strategies and operational guidance</li> <li>Advocate for the development of strategies that enforce community-level voices in government decision-making</li> <li>Support the development of a partners coordination platform to optimize community engagement interventions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement processes that ensure meaningful participation and representation of community diversity in design, implementation and tracking of progress</li> <li>Map and engage local partner organizations, traditional leaders and influencers during the planning and preparation of interventions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure that marginalized groups are identified and mechanisms for inclusion are implemented, such as two-way communication and broader feedback</li> <li>Foster new leadership and diverse voices in decision-making to reduce community power inequalities</li> <li>Help communities know and claim their rights</li> <li>Foster integration of siloed engagement projects</li> </ul>
<b><u>Enhance public policies</u></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advocate for political commitment, resource allocation, laws, regulations and systems to achieve SBC objectives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure local government budgets are equitable and allocate funds to benefit the children and communities most in need</li> <li>Enhance service delivery and coordination by partnering with the private sector and civil society</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop capacity, knowledge and platforms for underserved communities to influence public policy design</li> </ul>

View the [Health Systems Strengthening tool](#) for an overview of how to apply a Systems Strengthening approach to the health sector.

## Objectives

- **Improving sectoral capacity to diagnose problems and make effective decisions:** by strengthening information systems to collect, analyse and interpret social and behavioural data from community to central levels.
- **Increasing uptake of protective/preventive services and practices:** by implementing high-quality services that incentivizes good behavioural practices (such as healthy lifestyles, positive discipline, handwashing) and motivates people to visit and return (in schools and health clinics, for example).
- **Strengthening accountability and governance:** by encouraging transparent information systems and community feedback processes, and involving the media and influential networks or coalitions to hold decision-makers accountable.
- **Focusing on equity:** through pro-poor service provision, identifying underserved communities, and monitoring and evaluating programmes for equitable practices.
- **Building resilient and sustainable communities:** by strengthening traditional community systems to play crucial roles in the prevention and detection of threats, the design and implementation of effective response strategies and sustainable recovery.
- **Strengthening the interactions between duty-bearers and rights-holders:** by improving the quality at the point of service, the capacity of frontline workers and how we empower community committees to be effective partners. After all, the sector is only as strong as the link between the community and wider system. Learn more about Community Systems Strengthening below.

## Community Systems Strengthening

Sectoral Systems Strengthening will always be critical to ensuring effective Social and Behaviour Change. This includes Community Systems Strengthening, which can either be part of the overall system or a separate system that interacts with and supports it. For example, increasing social accountability of sectoral systems can improve when community-based organizations and leaders are empowered to represent the most deprived. Community Systems can also be strengthened by facilitating community participation in policy formation, allocating budgets and implementing programmes. Strengthening community systems through investments in community resilience and preparedness, and the capacity of community health workers can greatly improve service quality and emergency response. When

sectoral systems improve, so does the likelihood of Social and Behaviour Change.

Community systems are often wrongly excluded from Sectoral Systems Strengthening. Therefore, it's important that your approach facilitates change from within communities.

## Case studies and examples

Just as Apple would be unable to develop a product without the support of the broader system, development and humanitarian programmes cannot achieve SBC objectives without bolstering human resources, people-centred services, technology infrastructure, governance, leadership and financial systems for change. Below are some examples of how this has been done around the world.

- **Building the capacity of human resources and institutions**
  - **INDIA** Health system strengthening interventions resulted in a pool of 3,500 master trainers building the IPC capacity of 400,000 frontline workers for the Measles Rubella (MR) campaign, including routine immunization and an \$18 million budget.
  - **INDIA** Systems strengthening activities have built institutional capacity to support Social and Behaviour Change, enabling the most deprived to access and use WASH services in selected states
  - **EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA:** UNICEF and partners developed a training package to incorporate country-specific recommendations regarding social service workforce competencies
  - **UZBEKISTAN:** The USWEEP Project systematically explored the strengths, challenges, and way forward for the social service workforce
  - **CANADA:** Implementing the Tools of the Mind curriculum, which emphasises play and hands-on learning improved both student executive function and reduced teacher burnout.
- **Community Systems Strengthening**
  - **SRI LANKA** The country's community health system, which uses public health midwives to bring health and health education to people's front doors, has enabled 99.1% of children to receive their vaccinations in a timely, people-centred manner, with high quality standards.
  - **UGANDA** Strengthening vocational training programmes increased empowerment of adolescent girls.

## ▪ Building/maintaining transparent information systems and technologies

- **BANGLADESH** Strengthening the routine health information system has connected central, divisional and district levels with sub-district health facilities with over 13,000 community clinics, enabling timely and responsive evidence-based decision-making.

## ▪ Other practical examples

- **INDIA:** Political commitment, redesigned cash transfer programmes, access to education, and engagement with communities and adolescent girls and boys as change agents led to momentum towards ending child marriage
- **UZBEKISTAN:** UNICEF and Columbia School of Social Work's Social Intervention Group (CSSW) partnered to create the Uzbekistan Social Work Education for Excellence Project (USWEEP) to improve the well-being of vulnerable children and families served by trained social workers and social service professionals conducting social work functions.



### Key principles

- Sustainable Social and Behavioural Change is possible when we build the capacity of sectoral systems – such as education, health, child protection and emergency response – to support its achievement.
- Prioritizing the needs of community members strengthens sectoral systems. A strong system either interacts with robust community structures and systems for engagement, or is well integrated with these structures.
- Beyond community structures, other key components to consider for Strengthening Sectoral Systems include financing, institutions and governance, quality service delivery, human resources, information and technology, and supportive public policies.
- Effective SBC interventions must consider the needs and capacity of the people it seeks to serve as well as other actors in the system, including governments, institutions, non-governmental organizations and other entities within the sector.
- Measures to prepare and mitigate risk should be instituted across all social sector systems. This encourages community resilience, continuity of services and early recovery in the most vulnerable, at-risk and affected populations.

## More information

- [HC3's THE SBCC CAPACITY ECOSYSTEM: A Model for Social and Behaviour Change Communication Capacity Strengthening](#)
- [Breakthrough ACTION's Eight Principles for Strengthening Public Sector Social and Behaviour Change Capacity](#)
- [ESARO C4D/SBCC Capacity Development Framework](#)
- [The World Bank's Improving Public Sector Performance: Through Innovation and Inter-Agency Coordination](#)
- [USAID's Health Systems Strengthening](#)
- [OECD's Public Sector Governance and Institutions](#)
- [UNICEF's Child Protection Systems Strengthening](#)