Health Systems Strengthening in Nigeria: lessons learned and the way ahead

Ruth Lawson
Sept 2015
What is a health system?

- all organizations, people and actions whose main aim is to promote, restore or maintain health (WHO)
  - includes efforts to influence broader determinants of health (such as water and sanitation, education and human rights)
  - includes the non-state sector (for profit and not for profit) as well as public sector organisations.
A well functioning health system has several broad functions:

• To improve the health status of individuals, families and communities, especially those otherwise left behind.
• To protect the population against threats to its health and is resilient to unforeseen shocks.
• To protect people against the financial consequences of ill-health.
• To provide equitable access to people-centred care.
• To allow people to participate in decisions affecting their health and health system as part of the social contract between state and citizens.
The system is comprised of interconnected links

- strengthening individual building blocks is not sufficient to strengthen the system.

- it is the multiple complex relationships and interactions among the blocks – how one affects and influences the others, and is in turn affected by them – that convert these blocks into a system.
Where does Nigeria stand now?

Population health outcomes:
Nigeria has made progress towards improving health and reducing mortality from preventable diseases

BUT

• Mortality rates remain unacceptably high
• Socio-economic and geographical inequalities in health outcomes and access to health care are stark and increasing

Drivers of mortality:
• low coverage of health promotive/disease preventive interventions
• poor access to basic health care services

Future direction:
• equity considerations must be central to health sector policy and planning
• focus on primary health care
• not to the exclusion of secondary and tertiary care, where large efficiency gains can be made
Performance against the building blocks

Information
• NHMIS established, population based surveys conducted
BUT
• Health data are inadequate, inconsistently published and are rarely used to inform planning

Medicines and technologies
• Improvements to supply chain seen, eg vaccines, HIV drugs, CMS, revolving drug funds, innovative approaches
BUT
• better integration needed, stock outs still occur
Human resources

• absolute numbers of HWs favourable compared to SSA
• community based service delivery models tested
• task shifting policy
• significant investment to improve competence of HWs

BUT

• maldistribution
• capacity building often siloed, not well integrated
• quality of care provided is poor
• unclear role/vision for the lower cadres/community level workers, links to PHC
Service delivery
• coverage of basic services is increasing
• improved referral systems, including ETS

BUT

• Quality of care is low
• Barriers to access remain, particularly for the poor and rural populations
Performance against the building blocks

Financing
• Significant resources (although actual amount uncertain), mainly domestic plus some international

BUT
• a significant share of funding for the health sector is out-of-pocket payment, estimated to account for about two thirds of total health expenditure
• financing not always getting to the right levels
• inefficiencies and wastage in resource use
• weak budgeting and budget execution
Performance against the building blocks

Governance

• Policy, plans and M&E frameworks in place
  – NSHDP, RI SP & M&E framework, FP blueprint, PHCUOR scorecards

• Improved long-term planning, eg MTSS

BUT

• Institutional arrangements for health care, particularly primary health care are complex

• LGAs have lowest capacity

• Weak accountability mechanisms and poor oversight of perform

• Multiplicity of technical groups, committees and coordination platforms with overlapping mandates and weak strategic oversight to rationalize and ensure coherence
Lessons learned from DFID programming

Almost 20 years of investment in the health sector in Nigeria
• Vertical and health systems

Addressing the ‘inputs’ and achieving direct results is relatively easy

**BUT** achieving scale, and sustainability is an intractable problem

Political will, leadership and accountability are critical
Learning from success

**Interruption of polio transmission**
- streamlining systems through the national emergency operations center
- by engaging states, local governments, and communities
- establishing and using accountability measures
- flexible local responses

**The secret of success?**
Leadership, accountability, ownership (at all levels)
- Adequate funding (domestic, international)
- HR – the right people in place with the right skills
- Commodity distribution, supply chain
- Information systems and use of data
- Equity – reaching all

**Rapid containment of ebola virus**
How Nigeria can move forward

Focus on governance, leadership and accountability

• Shift the focus towards results rather than availability of inputs
• Streamline reporting mechanisms
• Strengthen the analysis and use of data
• Build capacity of health care managers
• Strengthen citizen engagement
How Nigeria can move forward

Opportune time – policy foundation is in place

National Health Act
  – Basic Services Fund
  – National Health Insurance Scheme
  – SPHCDAs, PCHUOR

• NSHDP II development
• Zero Based Budgeting
How Nigeria can move forward

• develop supporting policy and guidelines for institutionalization of NHA, including at State level
• focus on primary health care
• set clear vision and trajectory for health workforce
• exploit private sector contribution
  – removal of barriers to private sector expansion; strengthened regulation
• remove financial barriers to health care
  – NHIS
  – free MNCH services
• increase demand
  – behavior change communication strategies
  – engage religions, traditional, community leaders
• strengthen cross-sectoral working
Under strong leadership, with accountability embedded at all levels, Nigeria can achieve a stronger, resilient and responsive health system to accelerate progress towards the global goal of ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages, ensuring that no-one is left behind.